

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.
ECCLESIASTES.

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BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR:

OR,

ANECDOTES, SIMILES, EMBLEMS, ILLUSTRATIONS, EXPOSITORY,
SCIENTIFIC, GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL, AND HOMILETIC,
GATHERED FROM A WIDE RANGE OF HOME AND
FOREIGN LITERATURE, ON THE VERSES
OF THE BIBLE

BY

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ECCLESIASTES.

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INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES.

THE TITLE AND DATE OF THE BOOK.—The title of this book is derived from the Greek Septuagint, where it appears as the representative of the Hebrew "Koheleth," which has been variously rendered preacher or debater. "Koheleth" is used throughout the work as a synonym of "the son of David, king in Jerusalem," i. e. Solomon; but there can be little doubt that Solomon was not the real author, and that his name was only assumed by a well-known and legitimate device for a literary purpose. The first to discern the truth was Luther, who assigned the work to the time of the Maccabees (*circa* 150 B.C.). The late date rests mainly on the evidence of the language, which is not that of the ancient Hebrew, but of a decadent time, when many Aramaic words crept into the Jewish vocabulary. (A. M. Mackay, B.A.) We may mention three grounds for questioning the belief that Solomon was the author. 1. The language shows traces of Hebrew words and forms later than his time, and occurring only in such Old Testament books as Malachi, Daniel, Ezra. 2. Certain expressions and utterances cannot be attributed to Solomon: (1) "I, Koheleth, was king" (i. 12), as though he had now ceased to be such; (2) "all they that have been before me in Jerusalem" (i. 16), as if there had been a series of monarchs preceding; (3) expressions relating to the oppression of the poor, and the perverting of judgment, such as occur from time to time in the book (iv. 1; v. 8; viii. 9; x. 5), and in reference to which the real Solomon, so far from posing as a critic, would have considered himself responsible. 3. The tone of the book and the character of its teaching not only suggest the period when the Persian empire had been overthrown, and Alexander the Great's successors had established Greek culture throughout the civilized world, but also bear distinct traces of Stoic and Epicurean philosophy. For the former, see chap. i. 5-7, 9-11, 17; ii. 12; iii. 14, 15; vii. 25; viii. 8; ix. 11; x. 13; and for the latter, chap. ii. 24; iii. 22; v. 18; vii. 7; viii. 9, 14; ix. 7, 16; x. 16-18. We may observe that the claim, such as it is, to personate the great king, is more conspicuous in the earlier part of the book. Like Solomon, Koheleth had made trial of wisdom, of wealth, and of the pleasures of art. But, whatever may have been his thoughts, with respect to the darker side of Solomon's closing years, the great king evidently fades gradually from his mental vision, and he proceeds in the remainder of this treatise to give us undisguisedly his own attitude towards life and its problems. Here we plainly have before us in no sense the Solomon of Jewish history, but a philosophical Jew of the later centuries before Christ. (A. W. Streane, D.D.) There is general agreement among the abler modern critics that the book was written somewhere between the later period of Persian rule (*circa* 340 B.C.) and some date before the Macedonian supremacy came to an end (say *circa* 200 B.C.). Within these limits it is impossible to fix any date with certainty, but there is much probability in the theory originated by Mr. Tyler that the author was a wealthy Jew who lived at Alexandria, and there in luxury and philosophical culture sought compensation for the loss of national and religious hopes which had left his nature impoverished; and who in old age recorded how vain his quest had been. (A. M. Mackay, B.A.) To me, it seems impossible to read verse after verse without feeling that they have little or no meaning unless we look on them as the outcome of a time of suffering and oppression. They seem to point steadily to an age when national freedom was gone, national life extinguished for a time; the spirit of freedom dead; the high memories of the past forgotten; the Messianic hopes not yet rekindled; when the God of Hosts

seemed far removed; when all around was dark and gloomy; in days, it may be, when Persian, or Syrian, or Egyptian kings ruled over the land of David as a province of their kingdom, and the hopes of Israel seemed dead and gone—buried and out of sight. Then, it might well come to pass that the spirit of some son of Israel was stirred within him to try to reach his people's heart, not by spoken word or the stirring address of a Jewish prophet—the day of prophecy was over; not by the music of a psalm—the psalmist's harp was silent; not by a great poem like the Book of Job—such poetry had died out of the nation's heart; but by putting forth in this half-articulate and ambiguous form a soliloquy or discourse, call it which you will, breathing the very spirit of that later age—its sadness, its languor, its passive and oriental acquiescence, almost lethargy, under suffering. It bears the stamp, from first to last, of dejection, if not of despair. Yet its still unrelinquished, pervading sense of the fear of God as the end of life; its firm hold of the inherent distinction between right and wrong; its refusal, in spite of all that seems to cloud the hope, to part with the conviction of a judgment, a righteous judgment, yet to come; its counsels of activity, patience, cheerfulness, prudence, calmness, sympathy with suffering, stand out amidst the wreck and decay of all around. (*Dean Bradley.*) Ewald has advanced a twofold argument against assigning the composition of this book to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and in favour of "the last century of the Persian dominion." The first is, that the writer complains, "in an entirely new and unheard-of manner, of an excess of bookmaking and reading." It cannot, however, be shown that a difference in this respect existed between the last century and the last but one of the Persian rule; and to a time subsequent to this it is by no means allowable to look. The second reason urged is, that "such harrowing pain and desperate cries of agony did not characterize the earlier period of the Persian rule." It must have become, Ewald thinks, in its last years, more oppressive and violent. On this matter, however, history furnishes no authentic information. (*E. W. Hengstenberg, D.D.*) Professor Cheyne, in agreement with Ewald and Delitzsch, assigns the book to the Persian period, though rightly and fairly admitting that "the evidence of the Hebrew favours a later date than that of Ewald,—favours, but does not actually require it." For he views with a well-founded scepticism the attempts that have been made to trace in it the definite presence of Greek philosophical ideas, and even to discover Græcisms in the language. The style of Ecclesiastes is indeed almost that of the Mishnah (2nd cent. A.D.), and it must be a product of the time when that style was in process of formation; but the alleged Græcisms do not appear to involve more than a normal and intelligible extension of native Hebrew usage. (*Professor S. R. Driver.*)

THE PLAN AND PURPOSE OF THE BOOK.—"Theologians," says Herder, "have taken great pains to ascertain the plan of the book; but the best course is to make as free a use of it as one can, and for such a purpose the individual parts will serve." A connected and orderly argument, an elaborate arrangement of parts, is as little to be looked for here as in the special portion of Proverbs which begins with chap. x., or as in the alphabetical psalms. It is a part of the peculiarity of the book to have no such plan; and this characteristic greatly conduces to the breadth of its views and the variety of its modes of representation. The thread which connects all the parts together is simply the pervading reference to the circumstances and moods, the necessities and grievances of the time. This it is that gives it unity; and its author sets a good example to all those who are called to address the men of our own generation, in that he never soars away into the clouds, nor wastes his time in general reflections and commonplaces, but keeps constantly in view the very Jews who were then groaning under Persian tyranny, to whose sick souls it was his first duty to administer the wholesome medicine with which God had entrusted him: by ever fresh strokes and features he depicts their condition to them, little by little he communicates the wisdom that is from above, and in the varying turns of his discourse sets before them constantly the most important and essentially saving truths. To further the fear of God and life in Him is the great purpose of the writer in all that he advances; hence his assertion of the vanity of all earthly things, for he alone can fully appreciate what a precious treasure man has in God, who has learnt by living experience the truth, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (*E. W. Hengstenberg, D.D.*) What, taken as a whole, are we to consider its moral? What was the main lesson it was designed to teach? Was the preacher whose experiences are set forth meant

to serve as a model to imitate or as a warning to avoid? For such a variety of character as appears in the utterances of the writer is almost without a precedent in so short a compass. Of course it is always more or less a truth that by isolating the utterances of a writer, by extracting single passages and detaching them from their context, we may make them appear to teach very different truths, sometimes even contrary ones. But it is not merely so here. In the Book of Ecclesiastes we pass rapidly through different strata of thought and feeling. We pass from one temperature to another, from something all but of the earth, earthy, to something almost heavenly in its sense of beauty and goodness. At one moment we are listening to the confessions of one who had tried pleasure and knew it was vanity, and at another we are at the standpoint of the Stoic. Again, we seem very perilously near the scorn of the cynic. At one moment we seem to be listening to the hopeless resignation of the fatalist, and then again to the more hopeful resignation of the Christian. There is what the artists call a want of keeping about the confessions and conclusions of this writer. It is difficult to imagine a man passing so rapidly from one to another, or, stranger still, being in all these moods at once, combining so many different men in one single personality. But this should not surprise us if we thought more, still less he a stumbling-block to us in implying inconsistency in the character represented. It may be that the very inconsistency of the teaching is meant to read us most salutary lessons. The phrase used by an eminent teacher, "the criticism of life," is very applicable to this Book of Ecclesiastes. It is from end to end a criticism of life, conducted by a critic who, having watched life's experiences, sums up and pronounces a verdict on it from the end of the life or from a period approaching the end. As to the verdict itself there is no difference between this critic and all those other critics of life whose writings constitute Holy Scripture. He holds his place among those companions by virtue of having arrived at the same conclusion as they, though by different paths of experience. That of course makes the value, the incalculable value, of such a book. It represents the testimony of those who have discovered the truth of the greatest acts of life, though they have arrived at it through failures and humiliations, and not through success and triumph. It is one of the many eternal blessings that we owe to the Bible that it records in so many different ways and affirms the testimony of the world to the things that are not of the world. We should thank God for having taught us once more that there is no rest or satisfaction for man in the things of sense. But it is quite another question whether the process by which this truth is arrived at is either safe or sound for the spirit of man to go through. The criticism of life is a wholly different thing from the true use of life. It is no justification of a man's existence when at the end, when a balance has to be struck and a conclusion arrived at, that conclusion is that most of the life has been a mistake and therefore a failure. To have learned the facts about life, however true and however important, cannot make the life a beautiful, a sound, or a profitable thing. There is no retrospective virtue in being able to draw a sound moral. The Preacher's final conclusion of the whole matter is a beacon light for other men if they are wise enough to profit by it. (*Canon Ainger.*)

THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.—The absence of a clear literary plan makes it difficult to arrange the contents of the book systematically. Facts are looked at from different sides and in various relations; the same subject recurs at different points; and the conclusions drawn are not always formally consistent with one another. Hence some have regarded the book as the work of a sceptic, or the expression of varying moods and fancies. Yet a closer examination shows that this is not the case: the conclusions the writer comes to at various stages are virtually the same, and when he returns to his subject, it is to consider it on a different plane, or from another side. He begins by stating his theme: All is vanity, there is nothing new under the sun (i. 1-11), i. e. human life has no substantial result. He then gives proof from practical experience. He had tried, and found that vain is the quest for knowledge (i. 12-18), vain the pursuit of pleasure (ii. 1-10), vain the profit of labour and activity (ii. 11-23). The conclusion is that there is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and enjoy the fruit of his labour (ii. 24); for all depends upon God, and man can only submit (ii. 24—iii. 22). He then takes a wider survey of human life and society (iv.—vi.), interspersing various maxims of conduct to be followed in the prevailing "vanity"; and the question, "Who knoweth what is good for man in his life?"

suggests the praise of true wisdom, and calls forth maxims on the way to attain it (vii., viii.), leading on to a consideration of political wisdom (ix., x.). The dark background is always the vanity or unprofitableness of life; yet the Preacher's position is not a pessimism nor a creed of despair. Life is good, though neither the best nor the last good; benevolence is to be practised (xi. 1-8); and the young especially are exhorted to live joyfully, yet with a regard to a coming judgment (xi. 9-xii. 8). (*James Robertson, D.D.*)

THE CANONICITY OF THE BOOK.—The collection of sacred writings which was held in reverence by the Jews of Palestine in the days of our Lord and His apostles, consisted of twenty-two books, and these included the Book of Ecclesiastes. The first preachers of Christianity appear to have been in complete agreement with their unconverted brethren as to the authority of their sacred books; and in point of fact, all the books of the Jewish canon have always enjoyed unquestioned authority in the Christian Church. It is no disparagement to the authority of the Book of Ecclesiastes that no direct quotation from it is to be found in the New Testament. A few coincidences of thought or expression have been pointed out (*e. g.* Eccles. xi. 5 with John iii. 8; Eccles. ix. 10 with John ix. 4); but none of them is decisive enough to warrant our asserting with any confidence that the Old Testament passage was present to the mind of the New Testament writer. But there is no reason to imagine that any of the apostles would have hesitated to appeal to the authority of any book of the Jewish canon, if his subject had required such a reference. In the Jewish schools there was controversy, about the end of the first century of our era, whether the Book of Ecclesiastes was one of those which "defile the hands"; that is to say, whether it was affected by certain ceremonial ordinances, devised in order to guard the sacred books from irreverent usage. We need not inquire what exact amount of authority might be conceded to the book by those who then placed it on a lower level than the rest; for the view which ultimately prevailed recognized it as entitled to all the prerogatives of canonical Scripture. (*G. Salmon, D.D.*)

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BOOK.—The inspiration of Ecclesiastes is of an indirect kind. We are not to read it as we should a prophet or a gospel. The conclusions at which the writer arrives are often not Christian truths; the sentiments he expresses are not Christian sentiments—indeed, they are frequently the very opposite. Not, indeed, that his book is quite without value on the positive side. "His aphorisms," says Driver, "are often pregnant and just; they are prompted by a keen sense of right; and in his satire upon society he lays his finger upon many a real blot," and to this extent his teaching may have direct religious value. Then, further, he has permanently voiced a mood of constant recurrence in human history; his work, as Dean Plumptre says, "meets the necessity of a state of mind from which, perhaps, no period of the world's history has been quite exempt, and to which periods, like our own, of increasing luxury and advancing knowledge are especially liable," and there is positive advantage in that. But, after all, to teach direct religious truth was not in the commission which the Holy Ghost gave to "Koheleth." His work was written to state all the difficulties of life rather than to solve them. It is inspired, not merely in spite of, but because of, the fact that it often rouses our whole nature to protest against the conclusion at which it arrives. The value of Ecclesiastes consists in this: that it shows how little the world can satisfy the soul of man apart from God; that one can drink deep of every earthly pleasure and yet be left hungering and thirsting; that the highest culture and the most varied experience can do nothing to solve the problem of existence by their own unaided efforts; in a word, its mission is to render us dissatisfied with the merely sensuous pleasures of earth, to sharpen our longing for the unseen things of the spiritual life, and to teach the soul there is no rest for it but in God. It is the thoroughness with which it performs this function which proves it a divinely inspired book—a book without which the Bible would be incomplete, lacking one of its most essential elements. (*A. M. Mackay, B.A.*)

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ECCLESIASTES.

CHAPTER I.

VER. 1. *The words of the Preacher.*—*The great debate*:—This book has been called the sphinx of the Bible, a not unapt name, for the book is grave, majestic, mysterious. Whatever its meaning be, it contradicts itself in the most flagrant way, looked at from every standpoint but one. The book is clearly the record of a debate either between two men—one of them smitten with unbelief and despair, the other filled with conviction and hope; or more probably between two men in some one man—two parts of the same soul. In this great debate three things are discussed. I. **THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES.** The first speaker, in order that he may illustrate this to the full, takes “Solomon in all his glory” as a chief instance. “Vanity of vanities, saith the debater; all is vanity!” What are the sources that feed this pessimism? The speaker tells us—1. His experience of life. He was king in Jerusalem, and he resolved to give life a fair trial, to see what it was good for the sons of men to do under the heavens all the days of their life. (1) First he tried wisdom. He set himself to seek and to find the truth that lies at the heart of things—to read the riddle of the world and discover the meaning of God. He studied men and women, all sorts and conditions of men, yet he found nothing. (2) Foiled in that direction he went to the other extreme. He said in his heart, “Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure.” A truce to thought! Shut out the mystery, forget all the problems of the world, let us eat and drink and be merry! But alas! he found that somehow he was spoilt for a life of brutal sensualism. He soon sickened of it. “This also was vanity.” (3) Next he tried a combination of wisdom and pleasure—a scholarly, philosophic, refined voluptuousness. He called in the aid of the various arts, architecture, painting, music, horticulture. He gratified every desire, yet wisely, daintily, carefully avoiding all the vulgarities and grossness that breed loathing and disgust. Yet it was all in vain. 2. But perhaps, we say, your experience was exceptionally unhappy. No, he answers, I have looked over the whole of life and find it everywhere the same. There is, for instance, he goes on, a season, a marked fixed time for everything and to every purpose under the heavens, and he enumerates some twenty-eight of these seasons, and the activities for which they are propitious. Looked at from one point of view it is very beautiful, no doubt, but under such a fatalism, in a world where everything is arranged beforehand, what room is there for man to will or act? Fate! Fate! everywhere fate and vanity. 3. Or come again, says this terrible Debater; we may differ as to philosophy, but let us look at the facts of everyday life! In Nature I see a terrible grim order, I see forces that go on their way full of silent contempt for man and his schemes and dreams. I hear a voice that says to him, “Don’t fuss and fret, little sir! eat and drink and die—for you can do nothing else.” In the world of human nature, on the contrary, I see disorder of a very terrible kind. Here men find thorns on vines and thistles on fig-trees. As I looked I said to myself, he continues (chap. iii. 16): God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there—that is in the eternal world, for every purpose and for every work. But alas! is there such a place as there? Who knows? Looking then, he says, at the oppression that men endure under the sun, and

seeing no hope of any comfort, seeing no prospect of deliverance anywhere, I praised the dead, they who are out of it all—after life's fever they sleep well—more than the living; yea, better than both did I esteem him who hath not yet lived at all. 4. But surely, some one will say, this man generalizes too much. He paints with too black a brush. All are not oppressed and do not fail. There is such a thing as prosperity in the world, but this dyspeptic debater never seems to have heard of it. Yes, he has heard of it, and taken the measure of it too, and if one thing more than another serves to bring out the littleness and the vanity of his life it is, in his mind, that which men call its prosperity. Let us look, he says, at the successful man. Idleness is of course folly, but is not success also embittered by hatred and envy? Does it not separate a man from his fellows? He gains something, but does he gain anything so good as what he loses—brotherhood and love? Look again at the isolation of the man who loves money. "He hath neither son nor brother, yet there is no end to his labours, neither are his eyes satisfied with riches." There he is alone with his money! Nothing in all the world is so precious, so essential to man as the love and confidence of another man. Success without comradeship is a poor thing—it is vanity; there is nothing in it, and the richest miser is literally miserable for want of that which he might have had for the asking—love. Look for the last time, he says, at the strange vicissitudes that befall even the highest of men. A king on the throne has many flatterers, but no friend. Plots are hatched, disaffection grows to a head, and he is deposed. His young kinsman whom he in his jealousy has kept in prison, is brought out with tumult of applause. All follow the new king! Yes, says this terrible pessimist, but only for a while. They will tire of him also,—“They that come after shall not rejoice in him.” He too will be deposed in favour of some other popular idol of the moment. Surely all is vanity and a striving after wind. So far the spokesman of despair. II. But now in the fifth chapter another speaker—either without or within the man—takes up his parable and champions THE CAUSE OF FAITH AND HOPE. He does not, cannot indeed, solve all the difficulties, or meet all the objections that the other has propounded. Rather he gives utterance to the calm precepts of old experience; he re-affirms with conviction what the good have said in every age. Granting that life is full of mystery and has much that is sad in it, he lays emphasis on the clearness and the urgency of duty. In doing right alone each man shall find refuge from despair; he shall find God and be able to take refuge in God from all the pursuing, harassing mysteries of God's government. 1. “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.” It may be the temple, or it may be the little rustic synagogue, but it is ever Beth-el, the house of God. Go to it reverently, prayerfully, expectantly, dutifully. 2. Again, study to be quiet. Until God vouchsafe thee a revelation, be thou patient and obedient, for to draw nigh to hear (that is to hear His orders—to obey) is better than to offer the sacrifice. 3. Finally, be sober-minded. Try to see life steadily, and see it whole. One swallow does not make a summer, nor one dead leaf a winter; nor do acts of oppression prove that the whole of human society is rotten. No doubt bad men exist and bad things are done. It is hard to catch a rogue—especially if he be a big rogue, but everywhere there is some sort of government, an organized justice, one official above another right up to the highest, and the highest of all on earth exists for the sake of protecting the lowest. “The king is servant to the field.” No doubt it is often very imperfectly administered, nevertheless law exists on earth, and in the main justice is done; and all earthly law and earthly justice are but dim troubled reflections of an eternal heavenly law and a divine justice that rule over all things, and by which in time every oppressed one will be righted, and every oppressor receive his reward. (J. M. Gibbon.) *The words of the Preacher*:—It is not often in the Bible that we are challenged to hear the words of a great man, viewed from an earthly standpoint. He is represented as “king in Jerusalem”—a man of the highest social position. We cannot but wonder what he will say, seeing that he has only seen the upper side of life, and can have known nothing of what the poor understand by want, homelessness, and all the degradation of penury and an outcast condition. “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (ver. 2). “Vanity,”—a light wind, a puff, a breath that passes away instantly. Here we have a judgment in brief. We long to enter into some detail, if not of argument yet of illustration, especially as this is one of the short sentences which a man might speak hastily rather than critically and experimentally. We must ask the

Preacher, therefore, to go somewhat into detail, that we may see upon what premises he has constructed so large a conclusion. He says that life is unprofitable in the sense of being unsatisfying. It comes to nothing. The eye and the ear want more and more. The eye takes in the whole sky at once, and could take in another and another hour by hour,—at least so it seems; and the ear is like an open highway,—all voices pass, no music lingers so as to exclude the next appeal. In addition to all this, whatever we have in the hand melts. Gold and silver dissolve, and nought of our proud wealth remains. Much wants more, and more brings with it care and pain; so the wheel swings endlessly, always going to bring something next time, but never bringing it. Coheleth says that there is no continuance in life: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." You no sooner know a man than he dies. You make your election in the human crowd, saying, My heart shall rest here; and whilst the flush of joy is on your cheek, the loved one is caught away, like the dew of the morning. People enough, and more than enough,—crowds, throngs, whole generations, passing on as shadows pass, until death is greater than life upon the earth. Coheleth says that even nature itself became monotonous through its always being the same thing in the same way, as if incapable of originality and enterprise. The wind was veering, veering, veering,—spending itself in running round and round, but never getting beyond a small circuit; if it was not in the north it was in the south, or wherever it was it could be found in a moment, for it "whirleth about continually." So with the rivers. They could make no impression upon the sea: they galloped, and surged, and foamed, being swollen by a thousand streams from the hills; and yet the sea swallowed them up in its thirst, and waited for them day by day, with room enough and to spare for all their waters. The eye, the ear, the sea, there was no possibility of satisfying,—prodigals and spendthrifts! And the sun was only a repetition, rising and going down evermore. Coheleth further says that there is no real variety in life. "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be," etc. Man longs for variety, and cannot secure it. The same things are done over and over again. Changes are merely accidental, not organic. All things are getting to be regarded as stale and slow. New colours are only new mixtures. New fashions are only old ones modified. In short, there is nothing new under the sun. "Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us." New things are promised in the apocalyptic day (Rev. xxi. 1). It will be found in the long run that the only possible newness is in character, in the motive of life and its supreme purpose (2 Cor. v. 17). (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity.—The vanity of the world:—Certainly, he, who had riches as plentiful as the stones of the street (1 Kings x. 27), and wisdom as large as the sand of the sea (1 Kings iv. 29), could want no advantages, either to try experiments, or draw conclusions from them (Eccles. i. 16, 17). Now this reflection of the same word upon itself is always used to signify the height and greatness of the thing expressed, as King of kings and Lord of lords denotes the highest King and the most absolute Lord. But, though this be expressed in most general and comprehensive terms, yet it must not be taken in the utmost latitude, as if there were nothing at all of solid and real good extant. It is enough, if we understand the words in a sense restrained to the subject matter whereof he here treats. For the wise man himself exempts the fear and service of God (Eccles. xii. 13) from that vanity under which he had concluded all other things. When, therefore, he pronounceth all to be vanity, it must be meant of all worldly and earthly things; for he speaks only of these. For these things, though they make a fair and gaudy show, yet it is all but show and appearance. It sparkles with ten thousand glories: not that they are so in themselves; but only they seem so to us through the false light, by which we look upon them. If we come to grasp it, like a thin film, it breaks, and leaves nothing but wind and disappointment in our hands. The subject which I have propounded to discourse of is this vanity of the world, and of all things here below. Whence is it that we are become so degenerate, that we, who have immortal and heaven-born souls, should stake them down to these perishing enjoyments? I. I shall premise these two or three things:—1. There is nothing in the world vain in respect of its natural being. Whatsoever God hath made is, in its kind, good (Gen. i. 31). And therefore Solomon must not be here so interpreted, as if he disparaged the works of God in pronouncing them all vanity.

If we regard the wonderful artifice and wisdom that shines forth in the frame of nature, we cannot have so unworthy a thought, either of the world itself, or of God who made it. 2. There is nothing vain in respect of God the Creator. He makes His ends out of all; for they all glorify Him according to their several ranks and orders; and to rational and considerate men are most evident demonstrations of His infinite Being, wisdom, and power. 8. All the vanity that is in worldly things is only in respect of the sin and folly of man. For those things are said to be vain which neither do nor can perform what we expect from them. Our great expectation is happiness; and our great folly is, that we think to obtain it by the enjoyments of this world. They are all of them leaky and broken cisterns, and cannot hold this living water. This is it which makes them charged with vanity. There are some things, as St. Austin and the schools from him do well distinguish, which must be only enjoyed, other things that must be only used. To enjoy, is to cleave to an object by love, for its own sake; and this belongs only to God. What we use, we refer to the obtaining of what we desire to enjoy; and this belongs to the creatures. So that we ought to use the creatures that we may arrive at the Creator. We may serve ourselves of them, but we must alone enjoy Him. Now that which makes the whole world become vanity is when we break this order of use and fruition; when we set up any particular created good as our end and happiness, which ought only to be used as a means to attain it. II. It remains, therefore, to DISPLAY before you this vanity of the world in some more remarkable particulars. 1. The vanity of the world appears in this, that all its glory and splendour depends merely upon opinion and fancy. What were gold and silver, had not men's fancy stamped upon them an excellency far beyond their natural usefulness? This great idol of the world was of no value among those barbarous nations, where abundance made it vile. They preferred glass and beads before it; and made that their treasure which we make our scorn. Should the whole world conspire together to depose gold and silver from that sovereignty they have usurped over us, they might for ever lie hid in the bowels of the earth ere their true usefulness would entice any to the pains and hazard of digging them out into the light. Indeed, the whole use of what we so much dote upon is merely fantastical; and, to make ourselves needy, we have invented an artificial kind of riches; which are no more necessary to the service of sober nature than jewels and bracelets were to that plane-tree which Xerxes so ridiculously adorned. These precious trifles, when they are hung about us, make no more either to the warmth or defence of the body than, if they were hung upon a tree, they could make its leaves more verdant, or its shade more refreshing. Doth any man lie the softer because his bed-posts are gilt? Doth his meat and drink relish the better, because served up in gold? Is his house more convenient, because better carved or painted? It is nothing but conceit that makes the difference between the richest and the meanest, if both enjoy necessities: for what are all their superfluous riches, but a load that men's covetousness lays upon them? Thy lands, thy houses, and fair estate are but pictures of things. What are gold and silver but diversified earth, hard and shining clay? Think, O worldling! when thou castest thy greedy eyes upon thy riches, think, "Here are bags that only fancy hath filled with treasure, which else were filled with dirt. Here are trifles that only fancy hath called jewels, which else were no better than common pebbles. And shall I lay the foundation of my content and happiness upon a fancy; a thing more light and wavering than the very air?" Nay, consider, that a distempered fancy can easily alter a man's condition, and put what shape it pleaseth upon it. If a black and sullen melancholy seizeth the spirits, it will make him complain of poverty in the midst of his abundance; of pain and sickness in the midst of his health and strength. Again, if the fancy be more merrily perverted, straight they are nothing less than kings or emperors in their own conceit. A straw is as majestic as a sceptre. If then there be so great a power in fancy, how vain must all those things be which you pursue with eagerness and impatience! since a vain fancy, without them, can give you as much satisfaction as if you enjoyed them all; and a vain fancy can, on the other hand, in the greatest abundance of them, make your lives as wearisome and vexatious as if you enjoyed nothing. 2. The vanity of the world appears in its deceitfulness and treachery. It is not only vanity, but a lying vanity; and betrays both our hopes and our souls. (1) It betrays our hopes, and leaves us nothing but disappointment, when it promiseth satisfaction and happiness. (2) It betrays the soul to guilt and eternal condemnation: for, usually, the world

outangles it in strong, though secret and insensible snares; and insinuates into the heart that love of itself which is inconsistent with the love of God. The world is the devil's factor, and drives on the designs of hell. And, because of the subserviency of worldly enjoyments to men's lusts, it is almost as impossible a thing to moderate our affections towards them, or to bound our appetites and desires, as it is to assuage the thirst of a dropsy by drinking, or to keep that fire from increasing into which we are still casting new fuel. 3. As all things in the world are lying vanities, so are they all vexatious—"uncertain comforts, but most certain crosses." (1) There is a great deal of turmoil and trouble in getting them. Nothing can be acquired without it. (2) Whether they get them or no, yet still they are disappointed in their hopes. The truth is, the world is much better in show than substance; and those very things we admire before we enjoy them, yet afterward we find much less in them than we expected. (3) They are all vexation while we enjoy them. (4) They are all vexatious, as in their enjoyment, so especially in their loss. 4. The vanity of the world appears in this, that a little cross will embitter great comforts. One dead fly is enough to corrupt a whole box of the world's most fragrant ointment. The least cross accident is enough to discompose all our delights. And, besides, we are apt to slide off from the smoother part of our lives, as flies from glass, and to stick only on the rougher passages. 5. The longer we enjoy any worldly thing, the more flat and insipid doth it grow. We are soon at the bottom, and find nothing but dregs there. 6. All the pleasure of the world is nothing else but a tedious repetition of the same things. Our life consists in a round of actions; and what can be duller than still to be doing the same things over and over again? 7. The vanity of the world appears in this, that it can stand us in no stead then when we have the greatest need of support and comfort. Now in each of these the world shows itself to be exceeding vain and useless. (1) The world appears to be vain when we are under trouble of conscience. (2) The world is a vain and useless thing at the hour of death. 8. All things in the world are vain, because they are unsuitable. True, indeed, they are suited to the necessities of the body, and serve to feed and clothe that; but he is a beast, or worse, that reckons himself provided for, when only his bodily wants are supplied. Have we not all of us precious and immortal souls capable and desirous of happiness? Do not these crave to be satisfied? There is a threefold unsuitableness between worldly things and the soul. (1) The soul is spiritual: these are drossy and material. And what then hath a spiritual soul to do with clods of earth or acres of land; with barns full of corn, or bags full of gold? These are too thick and gross to correspond with its refined nature. (2) The soul is immortal; but all worldly things are perishing, and wear out in the using. (3) The necessities of the soul are altogether of another kind than those which worldly things are able to supply: and therefore they are wholly unsuitable. Natural things may well serve for natural wants: food will satisfy hunger, and raiment fence off the injuries of the weather, and riches will procure both; but the soul's necessities are spiritual, and these no natural thing can reach. It wants a price to redeem it: nothing can do this but the precious blood of Christ. It wants pardon and forgiveness: nothing can grant it but the free and abundant mercy of God. It wants sanctification and holiness, comfort and assurance: nothing can effect these but the Holy Ghost. Here all worldly things fall short. 9. The vanity of the world appears in its inconstancy and fickleness. God's providence administers all things here below in perpetual vicissitudes. It is in vain, therefore, to expect happiness from what is so uncertain. All the comforts of it are but like fading flowers, that, while we are looking on them and smelling to them, die and wither in our hands. Is it pleasures we seek? These must vary; for where there is not an intermission, it is not pleasure, but a glut and surfeit. And hence it is that they who are used to hardships taste more sweetness in some ordinary pleasures than those, who are accustomed to a voluptuous life, do in all their exquisite and invented delights. Do you pursue honour and applause in the world? This hangs upon the wavering tongues of the multitude. Is it riches you desire? These, too, are uncertain (1 Tim. vi. 17). Uncertain they are in getting; and uncertain in keeping, when got. All our treasures are like quicksilver, which strangely slips between our fingers when we think we hold it fastest. 10. The vanity of the world appears in this, that it is altogether unsatisfactory. That must needs be vain which, when we enjoy it in its greatest abundance, can give us no real nor solid content. Such an empty thing is the whole world. Now, the unsatisfactoriness of the world

may be clearly evinced by these two things. (1) In that the highest condition we can attain unto cannot free us from cares and crosses. (2) The world appears to be unsatisfactory, in that, be our condition what it will, yet still we desire change. And the reason of this unsatisfactoriness in worldly things is, because none of them are so good as the soul is. The soul, next to angels, is the very top and cream of the whole creation: other things are but dregs and lees compared to it. Now that which is our happiness must be better than ourselves; for it must perfect us. But these things being far worse and inferior, the soul, in cleaving to them, is secretly conscious that it abaseth and disparageth itself; and therefore cannot find true satisfaction. Nothing can fill the soul but that which eminently contains in it all good. III. But, whatever our observations are, the *USES* we may make of them are these. 1. It should teach us to admire and adore the good providence of God to His children in so ordering it, that the world should be thus vain, and deal so ill with those who serve it. For, if it were not so infamous and deceitful as it is; if it did not frustrate and disappoint our hopes, and pay us with vexation when it promiseth fruition and content, what thinkest thou, O Christian, would be the end of this? would any one think of God, or remember heaven and the life to come? 2. If the vanity of the world be such, and so great; if it be only an empty bubble; if it be thus unsuitable, uncertain, and unsatisfactory, as I have demonstrated to you, what gross folly then are most men guilty of in setting so high a price upon that which is of no worth nor substance? More particularly—(1) Is it not extreme folly to lavish our precious affections upon vile and vain objects? (2) If the world be thus vain, what folly is it to lay out our most serious cares and contrivances upon it! (3) If the world be thus vain, what extreme and prodigious folly is it to take as much pains to secure the poor and perishing concerns of it as would suffice to secure heaven and eternal glory, were they laid out that way! (4) If the things of this world be so vain, what inexcusable folly is it to part with the peace or the purity of our consciences for them! (5) What desperate folly is it to purchase a vain world with the loss of our precious souls! 3. If the world be thus vain and empty, why then should we pride ourselves in or prize ourselves by any poor enjoyments of it? 4. If the world and all the enjoyments of it be thus vain, this should fortify us against the fear of death; which can deprive us of nothing but what is both vain and vexatious. 5. If the world be so vain and empty, we may learn to be well contented with our present state and condition, whatsoever it be. (*E. Hopkins, D.D.*) *Vanity of vanities*:—This is the key-note of the book. The word “vanity” means a breath of wind, and thus it comes to mean something airy, fictitious, and unsubstantial. As the expression, “holy of holies” conveys the meaning of that which is holy beyond every other thing, so this word in the sense of emptiness beyond comparison is applied by the writer to the course of nature and to the work of man. Again and again he takes excursions into the natural world, and again and again he returns to the old refrain, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” The writer of these words felt that the order of the world was out of joint. But language like this has been more often used by those who have had bitter experience of life. Human nature is wont to turn round upon itself, and when it has drunk out the cup of indulgence will express disgust of gratifications which have ceased to please. “Vanity of vanities” was the speech of the great English cardinal as he lay dying and reflected that he had given the best years of his life for the present without care for the future. This was the temper of the language ascribed to Prince Louis XIV. of France when death was near at hand, and his life of pleasantries was closing. Vanity of vanities! And something like this may be heard in more than one London household at this time of the year at the close of the season. Three or four months of fatigue have been prepared for and submitted to as a military campaign would be prepared for. Time, peace of mind, health, regular hours of prayer, have been sacrificed to the pursuits of some social will-o'-the-wisp. To marry this daughter, to secure this introduction, to achieve more distinction than others, have been the objects before the minds of many. And now, when time and money, health and temper have been sacrificed and nothing achieved, we hear in modern language the words of the text from numbers rushing away by express train to bury their disappointment in country villages. “Vanity of vanities!” This earthly life cannot possibly satisfy a being like man if it be lived apart from God. Apart from God, wisdom leads to disappointment and lands us at death in the sublime despair of philosophy. Apart from God, wealth and all that it can command yields much less satisfaction

than intellectual achievement, since it is further removed from the higher and imperishable nature of man. Apart from God, Nature, regarded as matter interpenetrated by force, presents nothing on which man's inmost being can rest. Here we have only cycles of laws repeating themselves through the ages with a momentum which mocks our intellects. Vanity, emptiness, and disappointment are traced on Nature, on wealth and thought. As a matter of fact man does not find in either real satisfaction. He finds only a wasting fever of the heart, nothing which makes him strong for life, or in the hour of approaching death. The reason is plain. All that belongs to earth has failure in it, and man's life has come under this failure as well as Nature. All we may see is not as it should be. The best of men are conscious of this. The telling of circumstance against him, the tendency downwards of which he is conscious, the precautions which he takes against himself in the shape of rule and law—all these things tell, and tell truly, of some big catastrophe from which human life has suffered in its deepest recesses. Nature, too, with its weird mysteries speaks to the same effect. And here the apostle comes to our aid when he tells us that "the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope." He also says, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now." Nature has on it this certificate of failure. Besides this, wealth and Nature are finite, so that they must fail to satisfy a being like man. The human soul, itself finite, is made for the Infinite. The soul cannot comprehend the Infinite, but it can apprehend the Infinite. In the inmost source and heart of man God has placed a vast, unfathomable capacity for understanding Himself. Man can think of a Being who has "neither beginning of days nor end of years," who "inhabits eternity," and is Himself eternal. And as man struggles more and more perfectly to apprehend this Being, to reach Him, to enjoy Him, to possess Him, he feels that the counterpart of all that is deepest and most mysterious in himself is the eternal world, and that he can only really be satisfied with that, and with nothing else or less. "Thou hast made us for Thyself," says Augustine, "and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." Man is like those captives of whom we read who, once having believed a throne to be within their grasp, have never settled down as contented subjects. He is predestined for an unseen magnificence; and therefore when he turns to survey the grandest objects that woo his heart in this earthly life he can exclaim, not indeed in scorn, but in a spirit of religious and strictest accuracy, "Vanity of vanities!" Once more; all that belongs to created life passes quickly away. All around is vanishing. "One generation passeth away and another cometh," so says the Preacher. "Man fades away like the grass," so sings the psalmist. "The earthly house of our tabernacle shall be dissolved," so adds one apostle. "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat," so proclaims another apostle. Yes, all is passing, even the choice furniture of the human mind itself, all but the imperishable. Personality with its moral history in the past survives; all else goes, and is forgotten. And therefore it is because Nature and the outer husks of life do not satisfy that they cannot afford a stay for the imperishable soul of man. "Vanity of vanities!" he exclaims as he discovers their real character. But to this way of regarding the matter there is an objection. Is it a healthy one? Is it calculated to make man do his duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call him? Will it help him to do his duty enthusiastically and thoroughly? Is he not likely to fail, and to make life responsible for the failure? To this I say that human effort is only vanity when it is pursued without reference to God. Man's capacities are given to lead him to God, and all that leads to Him, so far from being vanity, is lasting and substantial. The man who is living for another world is not less alive to his duties here. His heart has followed his treasure; his citizenship is already in heaven; he looks at "the things which are not seen"; he lives as "a stranger and pilgrim"; he is but a soldier on campaign duty. All that comes in his way is precious, as enabling him to conquer the enemy and to reach his home. (*Canon Liddon.*) *The vanity of earthly things.*—These are the words of a wise and a bold preacher. He was wise in seeing that which men in general did not see; and he was bold in speaking so plainly that which was contrary to the general opinion. I. THE VANITY OF EARTHLY THINGS. "All is vanity;" that is, all things are so in themselves, when not used aright, when not employed to God's glory, or to the benefit of those around us, or in reference to our future and everlasting welfare. We may proceed to a practical illustration and use of

this declaration. 1. Let us suppose the case of riches, as being the main object of a man's desire, and the acquirement of them the great business of his life. Nay, let us suppose him to succeed—to acquire great wealth—to establish his house. But if this man be without religion, what is it all more than vanity? It is possible that all this time he may never have thought about his soul; his soul which is more valuable than all the world. To what purpose will it be when his end shall come? What will his wealth do for him in the day of account? “Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days,” and what is it? It is vanity, a vapour, emptiness! And what is to become of his wealth? He must “leave it unto the man that shall be after him; and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?” 2. As to human learning. It is true that learning, and ingenuity, and wit may be made very subservient to many important purposes; but if it be apart from true religion, what doth it profit? Let us suppose a man to be stored with all science, and philosophy, with the knowledge of all history, and of every art. But if he have not the knowledge of Christ; if, withal, he is “sensual not having the spirit,” what matters it? We have seen men endowed with extraordinary talents, great in research, quick in understanding, penetrating in intellect, rich in all the stores of recondite wisdom, versed in history, and as far as we can judge, possessing all knowledge; but where is the meekness of the Christian? where is docility, gentleness, and love? 3. As to the pleasures of life. Let a man have all the pleasure arising from intercourse with polished society, from rational conversation, from good and instructive books, from travelling at home and abroad, from various domestic recreations, according to his own peculiar turn of mind; yet, what does all this profit if he be destitute of true religion; if he be living to himself rather than to God? But we say, what will all this avail, if its votary or possessor be destitute of true religion here, and miserable and undone in another world! 4. We might go on to consider eminence of station, and elevated rank, and reputation, and extensive power, and commanding influence, and all beside that men are accustomed to seek after, and which they make so many sacrifices to obtain; and what are they all apart from true religion? “Vanity of vanities.” Suppose a man to have gained all the reputation and dignity in the world, what will it avail if he be destitute of the “one thing needful,” if he have not sought the honour that cometh from God? II. WHAT IS OUR CHIEF GOOD? 1. I would direct your attention to those true riches, the unsearchable riches of Christ. 2. I would recommend to you that heavenly wisdom by which you will be made wise unto salvation, which will teach you to discharge your social duties aright, and which will conduct you in safety through all the difficulties of life. 3. I would allure you to those pleasures which are for evermore. 4. I would lead you to that honour and praise which cometh from God, and which fadeth not away. (*J. Maude.*) *The trial of vanity*:—This book begins with, “All is vanity,” and ends with, “Fear God, and keep His commandments.” From that to this should be every man's pilgrimage in this world; we begin at vanity, and never know perfectly that we are vain, until we repent with Solomon. “Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” As though he were exceeding glad, that after so many dangers through the route of vanity, yet God let him see the haven of rest. The whole narration doth show that Solomon wrote this book after his fall. When he had the experience of vanities, and seen the folly of the world, what evil comes of pleasure, and what fruit groweth of sin, he was bold to say, “Vanity of vanities,” etc.; which he avoucheth with such a protestation, as though he would justify it against many adversaries; for all the world is in love with that which he calls vanity. To testify his hearty conversion unto God, he calls himself a preacher, in the witness of his unfeigned repentance; as if God had said unto him, “Thou being converted, convert thy brethren,” and be a preacher, as thou art a king. So when we are converted, we should become preachers unto others, and show some fruits of our calling, as Solomon left this book for a monument to all ages of his conversion. Thus having found as it were the mine, now let us dig for the treasure, “Vanity of vanities,” etc. This is Solomon's conclusion: when he had gone through the whole world, and tried all things, like a spy sent into a strange country, as if he were now come home from his pilgrimage, they gather about him to inquire what he hath heard and seen abroad, and what he thinks of the world, and these things which are so loved among men, like a man in admiration of that which he had seen, and not able to express particularly one after another, he contracts his news into a word. You ask me what I have seen, and

what I have heard, "Vanity," saith Solomon. And what else? "Vanity of vanities." And what else? "All is vanity." This is the history of my voyage: I have seen nothing but vanity over the world. So the further he did go, the more vanity he did see, and the nearer he looked the greater it seemed, till at last he could see nothing but vanity. So his drift is to show that man's happiness is not in these things which we count of, but in those which we defer. His reason is, they are all vanity; his proof is because there is no stability in them, nor contentation of mind; his conclusion is therefore, Contemn the world, and look up to heaven from whence ye came, and whither ye shall go. This is the scope which Solomon aims at, as though we did all seek happiness, but we go a wrong way unto it; therefore he sounds a retreat, showing that if we hold on our course, and go forwards as we have begun, we shall not find happiness, but great misery, because we go by vanity. Now Solomon, full of wisdom, and schooled with experience, is licensed to give his sentence of the whole world. This is no reproach to the things, but shame to him which so abused them, that all things should be called vanity for him. If he did not things vainly, nothing should be vain in the world; whereas now, by abuse, we may see sometimes as great vanity in the best things as in the worst. For are not many vain in their knowledge, vain in their policies, vain in their learning, as others are vain in their ignorance? A spiritual eye doth see some vanity or other in everything, as appeareth betwixt Christ and His disciples at Jerusalem (Luke xxi. 5; Matt. xxiv. 1). They gazed upon the building of the temple as a brave thing, and would have Christ to behold it with them; but He did see that it was but vanity, and therefore said, "Are these the things that ye look upon?" As if He should say, How vain are you to gaze upon this! If Christ thought the beauty of His temple a vain thing, and not worth the sight, which yet was beautified and built by His own prescription, how should Solomon express all the vanity of the world, to which all men have added more and more since the beginning! Therefore when Solomon beheld such a plurality, and *tot quot* of vanities, like surges coming one upon another in plaits and folds, he spake as though he would show us vanity hatching vanities: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The first saying doth pass without let; but the last rubs and sinks not into the hearts of men so easily as it is spoken. Methinks I hear some men dispute for Baal, and bid Solomon stay before he comes to "all is vanity." It may be that sin is vanity, and pleasure is vanity; but shall we condemn all for sin and pleasure? What say you to beauty, which is nature's dowry, and cheereth the eye, as sweet meat doth the taste? Beauty is like a fair picture; take away the colour, and there is nothing left. Beauty indeed is both a colour and a temptation, the colour fadeth and the temptation snareth. But what say you to riches, which make men lords over the rest, and allow them to go brave, and lie soft, and fare daintily, and have what they list? Riches are like painted grapes, which look as though they would satisfy a man, but do not slake his hunger, nor quench his thirst. Riches indeed do make a man covet more, and get envy, and keep the mind in care. You shall hear them say oftentimes, It is a vain world, a wicked world, a naughty world, yet they will not forsake it, to die; like dastard soldiers, who rail against the enemy, but dare not fight against him. "All is vanity;" but this is "vanity of vanities," that men will follow that which they condemn. Oh that here were a full end or conclusion of vanities; but, behold a greater vanity is behind; for our religion is vanity, like the Scribes and Pharisees, having a bare show of holiness, and scarce that. What then? "Turn away mine eyes," and my ears and my heart too, "from vanity." Try and prove thou no longer, for Solomon hath proved for thee; it is better to believe him than try with him. (*H. Smith.*) *The folly of Solomon*:—This is the substance of this great man's last estimate of life. You read it, and, as you read, you watch the writer trying to fight down the black shadows as they rise. Here and there too, all through his sermon, he will say a noble thing on the right side; as if the old power of piety was strong enough yet to burn through, and force its way to the parchment. But, when the best is said and done, the result is a belief in a God who exacts more than He gives, and punishes more readily than He blesses. And so it is that this woful estimate of life has made this book by far the most difficult to understand in the whole range of the Scriptures. The statements in it are as positive as any other. Solomon is as clear when he says, "Man has no pre-eminence over a beast," as John is when he says, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." So it comes to pass, that, if you take this book as it stands, and undertake to believe it, the result is very sad. It chills all piety,

paralyzes all effort, hushes all prayer. If there is grief in wisdom, had I not better be a fool? It cannot be denied, again, that the book is but the vocal utterance of many a silent sermon in many a lonely heart. It was this, no doubt, that made it the text-book of Voltaire and the bosom friend of Frederick the Great. Its monotonous despair are echoed out of a thousand experiences. When a friend wished a great English statesman a happy new year, "Happy!" he said; "it had need be happier than the last, for in that I never knew one happy day." When an English lawyer, whose life had seemed to be one long range of success, mounted the last step in his profession, he wrote, "I in a few weeks shall retire to dear Encombe, as a short resting-place between vexation and the grave." When one said to the great Rothschild, "You must be a happy man," he replied, "I sleep with pistols under my pillow." The most brilliant man of the world in the eighteenth century said, "I have enjoyed all the pleasures of life, and I do not regret their loss; I have been behind the scenes, and seen the coarse pulleys and ropes and tallow-candles." And the most brilliant poet of the last generation said, "The lapse of ages changes all but man, who ever has been, and will be, an unlucky rascal." Now, then, for all this, I have but one answer. I cannot believe it. In the deepest meaning of the truth and the life, this assertion that all is vanity is utterly untrue. God never meant life to be vanity; and life is not vanity. And that we are right and all such men wrong can be proven, I think, outside our own experience, on several different counts. 1. For, first of all, this Solomon is not the right man to testify. When he said this of life, he was in no condition to tell the truth about it, and he did not tell the truth. Universal testimony makes this sermon the fruit of his old age. If his book was the work of Solomon's old age, the fact of itself supplies the first reason why we have such a sermon; for the man who wrote this sermon, and the youth who offered that noble prayer at the dedication of the temple, are not the same man. The young king knelt down in the bloom of his youth, when the fountains of life were pure and clean; when through and through his soul great floods of power and grace rose to springtide every day; when the processions of nature and providence, the numbers of the poet, the wisdom of the sage, the labours of the reformer, and the sacrifices of the patriot, were steeped for him in their rarest beauty, endowed with their loftiest meaning, and filled with their uttermost power. But that old king in the palace, writing his sermon, is weary and worn; and, worst of all, the clear fountains of his nature are changed to puddles; the fresh, strong life has been squandered away; the delicate, divine perception blunted, clogged, and at last smothered to death. Can we wonder that such a man should write "all is vanity," when he had come to be the vanity he wrote? Believe me, we cannot form the true estimate when the life is ruined. What he said when he was his best self, before his ruin, was true; and the estimate he made, when he was a lower man, was as much out of true as the man was. 2. Then there was an error in this man's method of testing life, that I suspect to be at the root of much of the weariness that is still felt; and that is, the man does not seem to have tried to be happy, in making others happy, in bringing one gleam more of gladness, or one pulse more of life, into any soul save his own. In the sad days recorded here, nature, books, men, women, were worth to him just what they could do for him. He gave up the present sense of God in the soul; the high uses of worship; the inspiration hidden in great books; the deep blessedness of being father, husband, friend, teacher, patriot, and reformer; buried himself in his harem; turned a deaf ear to all the pleadings of his better angel; and, when he had come to this, who can wonder that all was vanity? 3. But now I must state the reason, that to me is greatest of all, why I know all is not vanity. A thousand years after this sad sermon was written, there was born of the same great line another little Child. He had no royal training, no waiting sceptre, no kingly palace, but the tender nurture of a noble mother, and, from the first, a wonderful nearness to God,—and that was all. He grew up in a country town that had become a proverb of worthlessness. The good He knew, and the bad He knew, as I suppose it was never known before. The human heart was laid bare before Him down to its deepest recesses. None ever felt, as He did, the curse of sin, or had such a perfect loyalty and love for holiness. Nature, Providence, Heaven, and Hell were actual presences, solid certainties to His deep, true sight. Listen while I try the ring of a few sentences from each of them. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," cries the first preacher. "Blessed are the poor, blessed are the mourners, blessed are the quiet, blessed

are the hungry for the right, blessed are the giving and forgiving, blessed are the pure-hearted, blessed are the peace-makers, and blessed are the sufferers for the right," cries the second. "Be not righteous overmuch," cries the first. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect," cries the second. "That which befallerth a beast, befallerth a man," cries the first. "The very hairs of your head are numbered," cries the second. "There is no knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device in the grave," cries the first. "I go to prepare a place for you; and I will come again, and take you to Myself, that where I am there ye may be also," cries the second. This last preacher tested life also. Whatever can be done to prove all is vanity, was done to Him. Giving out blessing, getting back cursing. Surely, if ever man would write "Vanity of vanities" over life, this was the man to do it. God was to Him the Father. The future life was more of a reality than the present. He saw *resurgam* written over every grave, and could see past sorrow and pain, the perfect end, and say, "Of all that My Father has given Me, I have lost nothing: He will raise it up at the last day." Then, if I cannot see heaven of myself, let me look at it through His eyes. If earth grows empty and worthless to me, let me believe in what it was to Him, and be sure that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; so, holding fast by faith in Him, I may come at last to a faith in carth, and heaven, and life, and the life to come, and all that is most indispensable to the soul. If I cannot pray because I see no reason, then that bended figure on Olivet is my reason. If I cannot distinguish between fate and providence, let me rejoice that He can, and that my blindness can make no difference to His blessing. (*R. Collyer.*) *All is vanity.*—I. IN WHAT SENSE WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND THAT ALL IS VANITY. The Preacher is not speaking of religious practices, or of any actions immediately commanded of God, or directly referred to Him; but of such employments as we pursue by choice, and such works as we perform in hopes of a recompense in the present life; such as flatter the imagination with pleasing scenes, and probable increase of temporal felicity; of this he determines that all is vanity, and every hour confirms his determination. The event of all human endeavours is uncertain. He that plants may gather no fruit; he that sows may reap no harvest. Even the most simple operations are liable to miscarriage, from causes which we cannot foresee; and if we could foresee them, cannot prevent. The rain and the wind he cannot command; the caterpillar he cannot destroy, and the locust he cannot drive away. But these effects, which require only the concurrence of natural causes, though they depend little upon human power, are yet made by Providence regular and certain, in comparison with those extensive and complicated undertakings, which must be brought to pass by the agency of man, and which require the union of many understandings, and the co-operations of many hands. The history of mankind is little else than a narrative of designs which have failed, and hopes that have been disappointed. To find examples of disappointment and uncertainty, we need not raise our thoughts to the interests of nations, nor follow the warrior to the field, or the statesman to the council. The little transactions of private families are entangled with perplexities; and the hourly occurrences of common life are filling the world with discontent and complaint. The labours of man are not only uncertain, but imperfect. If we perform what we designed, we yet do not obtain what we expected. II. HOW FAR THE CONVICTION THAT ALL IS VANITY OUGHT TO INFLUENCE THE CONDUCT OF LIFE. Human actions may be distinguished into various classes. Some are actions of duty, which can never be vain, because God will reward them. Yet these actions, considered as terminating in this world, will often produce vexation. There are likewise actions of necessity; these are often vain and vexatious; but such is the order of the world, that they cannot be omitted. He that will eat bread must plough and sow. What then is the influence which the conviction of this unwelcome truth ought to have upon our conduct? It ought to teach us humility, patience, and diffidence. The consideration of the vanity of all human purposes and projects, deeply impressed upon the mind, necessarily produces that diffidence in all worldly good, which is necessary to the regulation of our passions, and the security of our innocence. He does not rashly treat another with contempt who doubts the duration of his own superiority: he will not refuse assistance to the distressed who supposes that he may quickly need it himself. He will not fix his fond hopes upon things which he knows to be vanity, but will enjoy this world as one who knows that he does not possess it. III. WHAT CONSEQUENCES THE SERIOUS AND RELIGIOUS MIND MAY DRAW FROM THE POSITION, THAT ALL IS VANITY. When

the present state of man is considered, when an estimate is made of his hopes, his pleasures, and his possessions; when his hopes appear to be deceitful, his labours ineffectual, his pleasures unsatisfactory, and his possessions fugitive, it is natural to wish for an abiding city, for a state more constant and permanent, of which the objects may be more proportioned to our wishes, and the enjoyments to our capacities; and from this wish it is reasonable to infer that such a state is designed for us by that Infinite Wisdom, which, as it does nothing in vain, has not created minds with comprehensions never to be filled. (*John Taylor, LL.D.*) *Is all vanity?*—How are we to regard this utterance as to the "vanity" of all things, the "profitless" character of human labour, the wearisome monotony of the world? Must we indorse it, because we find it here in the Bible? Or, must we, on the other hand, condemn it and denounce it, as if it contained no truth whatever? I submit that we need do neither. We may believe that Ecclesiastes had been taught by his own experience some valuable lessons as to the practical conduct of life, and that he was able to give some very wise counsel to those younger than himself; and yet we may also believe that this wisdom was dearly bought, and that his outlook on the world, when he became "a sadder and a wiser man," was largely coloured by his own past conduct. A man who outgrows his sins and follies may not always outgrow, in this world, all their consequences. A penitent profligate may be able to give us very sound advice; but it does not follow that his estimate of human affairs is altogether accurate and healthful. We are not bound to indorse the view which regards all things "under the sun" as simply presenting the aspect of a vain and wearisome monotony; but we may learn wisdom from the fact that even the outlook of a religious man may be coloured by a long course of previous irreligion and worldliness. Whilst, however, we are not bound to indorse this melancholy estimate of Ecclesiastes, and whilst we may regard it as coloured and exaggerated by the weariness begotten of his former life, we need not denounce or condemn it as if it were simply the utterance of a morose pessimism or a sated worldliness. There is an element of profound truth in this estimate of the things "seen and temporal." A Christian apostle tells us that "the creature was made subject to vanity," and to "the bondage of corruption." Another Christian apostle reminds us that "the world passeth away and the lust thereof"—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Thomas à Kempis, in his "Imitation of Christ," tells us that "all is vanity, except to love God and to serve Him only." One of our own novelists, in his "Vanity Fair," has torn aside the mask which hides from view the hollowness of that glitter and show which are so apt to fascinate the inexperienced. Few thoughtful men reach even middle life—not to speak of old age—without being at times oppressed by the thought of life's sameness, or without being at times impressed with a sense of the unsubstantial and unsatisfying nature of earthly things. Human life may vary from age to age in some of its details; but, in its great broad features, it is unchanging. Birth, death, work, rest, health, sickness, pain, pleasure, hope, fear, loss, gain, friendship, love, marriage, parenthood, bereavement, virtue, vice, temptation, remorse—these things were all familiar to the generations that have gone before us; they are familiar to us; they will be familiar to those who are coming after us. And, as to the transient, uncertain, perishable, and unsatisfying nature of mere earthly happiness—of happiness due to mere earthly pleasures, pursuits, and consideration—this has been the trite theme of all the ages. Looking at human life apart from God and immortality—looking at the things "seen and temporal" apart from the things "unseen and eternal"—we perceive that there is a profound element of truth in the utterance, "All is vanity." Lastly here, we must not forget that this book was written at least two thousand years ago. Since Ecclesiastes meditated on the problems of human life, one really "new thing" has been seen. The "Sun of Righteousness" has risen upon the world "with healing in His wings." (*T. C. Finlayson.*)

Vers. 4-10. **One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.—***The law of circularity, or retrogression, an essential element of progress:—*The circle is the archetype of all forms, physically as well as mathematically. It is the most complete figure, the most stable under violence, the most economical of material; its proportions are the most perfect and harmonious; and therefore it admits of the utmost variety consistent with unity of effect. The universe has apparently been framed according to this type. Nature attains her

ends, not in a series of straight lines, but in a series of circles; not in the most direct, but in the most roundabout way. All her objects, organic and inorganic, have a tendency to assume the circular form, and in the attainment of this form consists their highest perfection. The lowly lichen on the wall spreads itself out in a circle; the mushroom in the meadow, with its round cap and stem, grows in fairy rings; the moss-tuft on the tree—the clump of fern in the shady bank—the plot of wild-flowers in the wood—the trees in the forest, alike in their individual and social state, exhibit this form in endless and graceful diversity. The cell, which is the ultimate germ of all life, is round, and every increase which it makes by growth or reproduction, preserves the same shape. The leaf, with all its varied modifications in the different parts of the plant—the stem, the flower, the fruit, the seed—are all more or less circular. So also are the different parts and organs of animals, from the simple primary cell of the animalcule, barely visible under the microscope, up through increasingly complex structures, to the highly-organized and wonderfully-formed head of man—the apex of creation; and though dead, inert minerals may seem to offer an exception to the law, crystallizing, or, in other words, attaining the highest perfection of which they are capable, not in circles but in straight lines, yet, when exposed to the influence of natural agencies, they speedily assume the circular form. The various forces of nature, and the properties of the matter upon which they act, are so arranged and balanced, that they invariably bring out curved lines in the surface of the earth. The winds and the waters produce undulating surfaces wherever they operate. The sea and the lake flow in curving waves and ripples to the shore; the rivers and streams meander in silvery links through the landscape; the clouds float in ever-varying curves of magical loveliness along the sky; the very winds—emblems of fickleness and change—obey fixed laws, and blow over the earth in cyclones and rotatory currents. The same law of circularity may be observed in the alternations of day and night, and in the vicissitudes of the seasons. Each bright blue day of sunshine, with all its work and enjoyment, is folded and shrouded up in its grave of darkness. Night comes, as it were, to undo the work of the day—to reverse the processes and functions of life—to restore the molecules of matter which the sunlight had kept in incessant motion and change to their previous condition, and by this recoil and rest to qualify for greater exertions and further advancement on the morrow; and thus, with alternations of darkness and light, the year progresses to its close. Spring clothes the earth with verdure; summer develops this verdure into its highest beauty and luxuriance, and autumn crowns it with ripeness and fruitfulness; but winter comes with its storms and frosts to mar and destroy the fair fabric which it had taken so many months to perfect. And yet this apparently wanton destruction, this retrograde movement, tends more to advance the progress of nature than if summer were perpetual. The exhausted soil is permitted to rest, in order that it may acquire new elements for increased production, and the forces of vitality are suspended that they may burst forth again with more exuberant energy. Flowers die down to their roots, yet it is no grave into which they have retired, but the hiding-place of power, from whence they shall start into greater beauty and luxuriance when stimulated by the showers and the sunbeams of spring. Life is a ceaseless vortex, a perpetual whirlpool, from the beginning to the ending, and from the ending to the beginning. Every death is a new birth, every grave a cradle. Ascending beyond our earth, to the regions of the astronomer, we find the same law in operation there also. We know nothing of the forms and attributes of extra-terrestrial existence; but we know at least that all the heavenly bodies are more or less circular, and move in more or less circular orbits. The sun, the moon, the planets have this shape: and we know that our earth revolves on its own axis, and moves round the sun; that the solar system advances in space, not in a straight line, but in a series of mighty revolutions round a central sun. Passing from the physical world to the domain of man, we find there also innumerable traces of the law of circularity. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." The circulation of blood in the veins, the circulation of matter in the body, the circulation of impressions in the nerves and impulses in the muscles, are all helps and means of physical growth; while the vicissitudes of circumstances, the opposite conditions of prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, joy and sorrow, tend to develop the mental and moral character. Action and reaction is the law of man's life. A season of misfortune is usually followed by a season

of success; and when circumstances are most prosperous, a time of reverses is not far off. Nowhere, either in science or in morals, has a straight line ever been drawn. There is no distinct, definite line of demarcation between pain and pleasure, between joy and sorrow, between relative evil and good. "Thus far and no further," is said to all moral operative causes, as well as to the waters of the ocean; but the line along the coast is not uniformly straight and unbending; on the contrary, it winds in and out, in gulfs and promontories, in capes and bays, in the most charming and picturesque irregularity. It is a fact of the deepest significance in the philosophy of human progress, that no great step can be taken in the intellectual or moral advancement of our race except by the sacrifice of at least one generation. There is not a single great truth that has influenced mankind but has passed through a process of contempt and injustice before it was established upon a firm and lasting foundation of popular favour; the invention or discovery that one generation despised is turned to profitable account by the next; the scientific creed that is persecuted in one age forms an undoubted and essential part of the faith of the succeeding age. The general progress of the human race has been marked by strange fluctuations. Civilization after civilization advances from the dim horizon, reaches the zenith of its prosperity, blazes for a while with unexampled splendour, then sets in darkest midnight. Such facts as these show us how hopeless is the boasted gospel of natural progress; how vain it is to expect that humanity can develop itself by its own unaided powers; that any race or country is capable of carrying on the process of improvement uninterruptedly and continuously, by the simple motherhood of nature. Man is, indeed, naturally progressive to the fullest extent of his capacities; and whatever he is capable of becoming, the aspirations of his soul are in themselves proofs and pledges, that he will ultimately become. In the progress and revolutions of time he has steadily advanced to a nobler dignity. Each civilization that appeared on the stage of history borrowed from its predecessors materials for a higher range of advancement. The Roman civilization was a propagation of the Greek, and the Greek of the Egyptian and the Hebrew. But this progressive elevation was not attained by a natural process of development, carried on in a uniform, undeviating, straight line. On the contrary, wherever humanity was left to its own unaided powers, unassisted by supernatural means and influences, it has everywhere in the end degenerated and declined, however long and glorious may have been its heroic age. And analogy would lead us to conclude, that as it has been in the past, so it may be in the future, that again and again may be exhibited the solemn spectacle of civilizations "advancing in charmed circles," races passing from hardihood to courage, from courage to conquest, from conquest to power, from power to wealth, from wealth to luxury and effeminacy, and from thence to the last stages in the melancholy drama—corruption, decline, and extinction. History is given to repeating itself. The persistency with which forms of faith and aspects of society appear age after age is truly marvellous. Fashions of dress, schools of art and philosophy, theories and speculations of science and theology, seem to have the same kind of periodicity which marks the phenomena of nature. As regularly as the same primroses bloom on the woodland bank spring after spring, and the same roses blush by the wayside summer after summer, so regularly and uniformly do the same modes of thought, and the same types of manners, appear and reappear. Phases of human error and folly are found occurring again and again, after long intervals. In every department of human affairs such instances are easy to find, proving the truth of the trite aphorism, that "there is nothing new under the sun"; that the moral world, as well as the physical, revolves in a circle, and thus necessarily often comes back to the point from which it started. These examples of retrogression appear melancholy and disheartening to those who believe in the uninterrupted development of mankind in straight lines; but, rightly considered, they are far from being perplexing and unintelligible. The law of circularity is also a law of *conservation*; and every instance of retrogression may be regarded as a brake upon the wheels of the car of progress, absolutely necessary for its safe and steady motion. The Bible affords so many illustrations of this doctrine, that it is somewhat difficult to make a selection. Almost the first event in the spiritual history of the human race was an act of degradation, a retrograde movement. "God created man upright, but he has sought out many inventions." And yet, by a wonderful interposition of Divine love, this retrograde step, which issued in so much disaster, has raised man to a higher position than he could have

attained, even had he continued pure and sinless as at the first. He is not merely brought forward to the point from which he retrograded: he is advanced greatly beyond it. Schiller boldly says, "the Fall was a giant stride in the history of the human race." The Deluge affords another illustration of the law we are considering. It was a terrible remedy for a terrible disease. Another retrograde movement, of scarcely less importance, occurred very speedily after this event. The confusion of languages, and the consequent dispersion of mankind, and their separation into distinct nations and races, seems at first sight an unaccountable procedure—hostile to the best interests and wisest processes of civilization; and yet, on the contrary, it has proved eminently helpful in forwarding the progress of the human race by the formation of national feeling, or patriotism, and the full, harmonious development of the "many-sidedness" of human nature. Descending the stream of Scripture narrative, we find that Joseph was sold into slavery as the path to the highest honours of Egypt; and that the latter end of Job, after he had been stripped of everything, was more prosperous than the beginning. When the children of Israel had reached the borders of Canaan, after their long and toilsome wanderings in the wilderness, and the enterprise which had been attended with so much trouble and hardship, and from which they had hoped to reap the richest result, was on the eve of being accomplished, the Divine command was given them to return to the very point in the wilderness from which they started. The immediate cause of this ignominious failure and retreat was, no doubt, their own obstinacy and unbelief. A wise and benevolent purpose lay hid under the apparently harsh and severe judgment, which subsequent events unfolded and explained. The children of Israel, as their conduct too plainly proved, were not as yet in a fit state to occupy the land, and carry out God's intention of supplanting its wicked and idolatrous tribes by "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." In the New Testament we also find several striking examples of this law. The salvation of the world is accomplished through treachery, false witness, and a cross. We are told by the evangelists that the disciples, after the resurrection, went back by the express command of Christ to Galilee, to the scenes and pursuits in which they were engaged when first called to follow Him. The same circumstances were repeated, the same miracles performed, as on the first occasion. This retrogression seems to have been wisely ordered as a preparatory discipline for reinstating them in that office from which, by their shameful desertion and denial of Christ, they had fallen at His death. By bringing them back to the old life, to the beginning of their course, He not only gave them a significant symbol of His willingness to overlook and forget all that had occurred during the interval, but also placed them in more favourable circumstances for the fulfilment of their noble mission as Christ's witnesses and apostles to the world. The careful reader will observe a close similarity between the closing chapters of Revelation and the commencement of Genesis. The first and most prominent doctrine which Christianity teaches is the doctrine of retrogression as an essential element of progress. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," was its watchword when it first raised its voice amid the deserts and mountains of Judea. Repentance is the germinal bud of living Christianity. "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." And the beautiful profound truth hidden under this paradox is that not only are the spirit of childhood and the spirit of manhood not inconsistent with each other, but their union is essential to the highest spiritual culture. The afflictions and trials that bring the Christian low contribute in the end to raise him to a higher condition of heavenly-mindedness. They may be regarded as a complication of inverse aids and assistances, by a right use of which the force of spiritual character may be more successfully displayed. And just as the earthquake that fills a wide tract of country with ruins, and the storm that strews our coast with wrecks, or tears down our forests, or destroys life, are links in the chain of the weather which purifies our atmosphere, and supplies the materials of health and vigour to all animated nature, so are suffering and trials the iron links in that golden chain which connects earth with heaven. It is not suffering then glory, but suffering therefore glory. Our light affliction worketh out an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. Death seems to the eye of sense the saddest and most mysterious of all retrogressions. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," is the beginning and end, the source and destiny of the material part of our being. Death despoils us of all with which we were invested, terminates all the functions and feelings

of life, resolves the body into its original particles, and scatters them over the face of the earth. But though to the eye of sense appearing a great loss, an unaccountable retrogression, it appears to the eye of faith, gifted with a keener and farther-reaching vision, a great, an immeasurable gain. The day of death is better than the day of birth, because death is a higher and nobler birth. Nay, the continuity of the path will not be broken. It is no strange and unknown scene upon which the just are ushered at death. The sacred employments of life will continue without pause or interruption amid circumstances the most favourable and congenial. The river that hides itself for a time in the earth, and breaks forth at a distance with a greater volume and a wider channel, does not sever its connection with the former part of its course. One more vision of retrogression, the sublimest and the most awful, reveals itself in dim outlines to our gaze from the pages of Revelation. When the earth shall have served the purpose for which it was created, as a scene of circumstances and temptations for the education of the immortal spirit, it will be reduced, we are told, to the state of chaos from which it sprung. "The elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth, and all the works therein, shall be burnt up." And yet this sublime retrogression will be necessary to bring in a better world, where sin and sorrow shall be unknown. The scene of probation passing through this terrible ordeal will become the scene of enjoyment; and earth, purified by the baptism of fire, shall be transformed into heaven. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) *The passing of humanity*:—It is profitable, as well as sometimes pleasant, for a traveller, as he advances, by different stages of his journey, to look back on the scenes through which he has passed. It is pleasant to him to call to his recollection scenes which he formerly enjoyed; there is a pleasure also in remembering the rough and stormy passages of his journey, when he considers how he was helped through them, how he has been delivered out of danger, and brought thus far on his journey. We are all pilgrims. Some of you have lately set out on your journey; some of you have advanced many stages towards the last. We shall, after a few more stages, all of us arrive at the end of our journey: how near we are to our end is uncertain.

I. CONSIDER THE REPRESENTATION THE TEXT GIVES US OF THE GENERATIONS OF MEN. For what is here spoken is not concerning one man, or one family of the human race, or one city, or a particular nation, or a certain age. It is true of all nations, of all generations, from the time of Adam and Noah to the present.

1. "One generation passeth away." (1) Look back to the past. Many generations that once existed in this world are gone. Men, famous for their various exploits, are now no more. In the past generations, some rose from mean and low stations to the highest rank; while others fell from posts of dignity to a state of poverty and depression. All of them—high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, kings and their people—all are swept away. In former ages, immense armies of men; one army is said to have consisted of a million; but they have all passed away, and nothing is known of any one of them, except their commander. Nations once great and flourishing are now almost forgotten: even Babylon can scarce be found. "One generation passeth away." (2) This is true also of the present. The generation to which we belong is moving off the world. There is no continuance, no abiding here. Our old friends and acquaintances are gone, and we all feel that we live in a dying generation. Yes, great and useful men are taken away; parents are taken from children. There is no standing still, even if you live. "One generation passeth away." (3) This is true of all future generations. They all will pass away, and all in the same manner.

2. As one generation passeth away, another cometh. This implies that it is the design of the great Author of our being that, though death has entered the world by sin, the world shall not be depopulated. What a wonderful idea does this give us of the almighty power and infinite wisdom of God! Of His almighty power.—We admire the wisdom and power of God in the creation. But is the power of the Preserver less than that of the Creator? Think of the creatures that swarm on the face of the earth, going away one generation after another, yet all preserved from the time of Noah until now—millions consumed, yet continually replenished. The wisdom of God, too, is apparent in this. For is it not observable that race has so succeeded race, that the world has never been depopulated. Labourers have never been wanting to till the ground; men endowed with talents of various descriptions have sprung up from time to time to carry on the various purposes of society. So in the Church of Christ. The designs of God have been compared to those of a great builder. One man comes and fells a tree, and retires; another

goes to a pit, and collects a few stones, and he is gone; a third rears some pillars, and you see no more of him; a fourth lays rafters and beams, and goes his way; these men retire one after another; still the building goes on. Is it not evident that some one is at the head of all this, who has formed a plan, and who has skill to contrive? II. DEDUCE SOME INFERENCES FROM THIS SUBJECT—TO PROMOTE A PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT OF THE WHOLE. 1. Are all that have been before passed away? and are all that are now present, and all that will be in future, passing? What will be your state if you were to die now? 2. Then let us be concerned to do with diligence the work which God requires of us while in the present world. Now, the first thing which God requires of us is that we believe on the name of the Son of God: without this, nothing else will avail. 3. Then we who are pious, and active, and useful, in the present generation, should be concerned to do what we can that the succeeding generation which is to follow us may be wiser, holier, and better able to do good than we are. It should be our aim as parents in our families, as teachers in Sabbath and other schools, to train children up in the fear of the Lord, that the generation to come may be a seed to serve Him. We have great reason to rejoice that we were born in such a generation as this. We might have lived at the time when our ancestors bowed down to stocks and stones, and practised the most horrid abominations. 4. Has the grave been filling for thousands of years, and will the present and future generations of men descend thither also? What an awful and sublime idea does this give us of the last day! 5. Let us rejoice that there is another state of society in which there will be no such changes and passing away. In passing through this world, let us fix our eyes of faith on that "inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." (S. Hillyard.) *What passes and what abides* (with 1 John ii. 17):—The antithesis is not really so complete as it sounds at first hearing, because what the Preacher means by "the earth" that "abideth for ever" is not quite the same as what the apostle means by the "world" that "passes," and the "generations" that come and go are not the same exactly as the men that "abide for ever." But still the antithesis is real and impressive. The bitter melancholy of the Preacher saw but the surface; the joyous faith of the apostle went a great deal deeper, and putting the two sets of thoughts and ways of looking at man and his dwelling-place together, we get lessons that may well shape our individual lives. I. THE SAD AND SUPERFICIAL TEACHING OF THE PREACHER. The Preacher says "All is vanity." That conviction had been set vibrating in his heart, as it is set vibrating in the heart of every man who does as he did, viz. seeks for solid good away from God. That is his starting-point. It is not true. All is not vanity, except to some *blasé* cynic, made cynical by the failure of his voluptuousness, and to whom all things here are out of joint, and everything looks yellow because his own biliary system is out of order. He looks out upon humanity, and sees that in one aspect the world is full of births, and in another full of deaths. Coffins and cradles seem the main furniture, and he hears the tramp! tramp! tramp! of the generations passing over a soil honeycombed with tombs, and, therefore, ringing hollow to their tread. All depends on the point of view. This strange history of humanity is like a piece of shot silk: hold it at one angle, and you see the dark purple; hold at another, and you see the bright golden tints. Look from one point of view, and it seems a long history of vanishing generations. Look to the rear of the procession, and it seems a buoyant spectacle of eager young faces pressing forwards on the march, and of strong feet treading the new road. But yet the total effect of that endless procession is to impress on the observer the transiency of humanity. Man is the lord of earth, and can mould it to his purpose, but it remains and he passes. He is but a lodger in an old house that has had generations of tenants, each of whom has said for a while, "It is mine," and then they all have drifted away, and the house stands. "One generation cometh and another goeth," and the tragedy is made more tragical because the stage stands unaltered, and the earth abides for ever. That is what sense has to say—"the foolish senses"—and that is all that sense has to say. Is it all that can be said? If it is, then the Preacher's bitter conclusion is true, and "all is vanity," and chasing after wind. He immediately proceeds to draw from this undeniable, but, as I maintain, partial fact, the broad conclusion which cannot be rebutted, if you accept what he has said in my text as being the sufficient and complete account of man and his dwelling-place. There is immense activity, and

there is no progress; it is all rotatory motion round and round and round, and the same objects come round duly and punctually, as the wheel revolves, and life is futile. Yes; so it is unless there is something more to be said. If all that you have to say of him is, "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," then life is futile, and God is not vindicated for having produced it. And there is another consequence that follows, if this is all that we have got to say. If the cynical wisdom of Ecclesiastes is the ultimate word, then I do not assert that you destroy morality, because right and wrong are not dependent either upon the belief in a God or the belief in immortality. But I do say that to declare that the fleeting, transient life of earth is all is to strike a staggering blow at all noble ethics. The man whose creed is only "to-morrow we die" will very speedily draw the conclusion "let us eat and drink," and sensuous delights and the lower side of his nature will become dominant. There is more to be said; the sad, superficial teaching of the Preacher needs to be supplemented. II. THE JOYOUS AND PROFOUNDER TEACHING OF THE APOSTLE. The cynic never sees the depths; that is reserved for the mystical eye of the lover, so John says: "No, no; that is not all. Here is the true state of affairs: 'The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'" And what of the man whose life has been devoted to the things seen and temporal, when he finds himself in a condition of being where none of these have accompanied him? Nothing to slake his lusts, if he be a sensualist! No money-bags, ledgers, or cheque-books, if he be a plutocrat or a capitalist or a miser! No books or dictionaries if he be a mere student. Nothing of his vocations if he lived for "the world"! And yet the appetite is abiding; will that not be a thirst that cannot be slaked? The world is passing, and the lust thereof, and all that is antagonism to God, or separated from Him, is essentially as "a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanishes away," whereas the man who does the will of God abideth for ever in that he is steadfast in the midst of change. He shall "abide for ever," in the sense that his work is perpetual. In one very deep and solemn sense, nothing human ever dies, but in another all that is not running in the same direction as, and borne along by the impulse of, the will of God, is destined to be neutralized and brought to nothing at last. There may be a row of figures as long as to reach from here to the fixed stars, but if there is not in front of them the significant digit, which comes from obedience to the will of God, all is but a string of cyphers, and their net result is nothing. And he "abideth for ever," in the most blessed and profound sense in that through his faith, which has kindled his love, and his love which has set in motion his practical obedience, he becomes participant of the very eternity of the living God. "This is eternal life," not merely "to know," but to do the will of our Father. Nothing else will last, and nothing else will prosper any more than a bit of drift-wood can stem Niagara. Unite yourself with the will of God, and you abide. III. THE PLAIN PRACTICAL LESSONS THAT COME FROM BOTH THESE TEXTS. May I say, without seeming to be morbid or unpractical, one lesson is that we should cultivate a sense of the transiency of this outward life? One of our old authors says somewhere, that it is wholesome to smell at a piece of turf from a churchyard. The remembrance of death present in our lives will often lay a cool hand upon a throbbing brow; and, like a bit of ice used by a skilful physician, will bring down the temperature, and stay the too tumultuous beating of the heart. Let me say again, a very plain, practical lesson is to dig deep down for our foundations below the rubbish that has accumulated. If a man wishes to build a house in Rome or in Jerusalem he has to go fifty or sixty feet down, through potsherds and broken tiles and triturated marbles, and the dust of ancient palaces and temples. We have to drive a shaft clear down through all the superficial strata, and to lay the first stones on the Rock of Ages. Do not build on that which quivers and shakes beneath you. Build on God. And the last lesson is, let us see to it that our wills are in harmony with His, and the work of our hands His work. We can do that will in all the secularities of our daily life. The difference between the work that shrivels up and disappears and the work that abides is not so much in its external character or in the materials on which it is expended, as in the motive from which it comes. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) But the earth abideth for ever.—*The abiding earth*.—We may look at the durability of the earth—I. As a CONTRAST. It abides in contrast with very much whose only constancy is the constancy of change. 1. The earth abideth in contrast with its own ever-varying appearances. Every year tells of the change of the seasons in which earth

changes her raiment, and what does not geology tell of cycles in which the earth has changed her countenance and form beyond all that we can describe. 2. The earth abideth in contrast with human structures. Houses, villages, cities, citadels, where are they? Some utterly swept away: some in ruins: all destined to decay. 3. The earth abideth in contrast with the lives of individual men. 4. The earth abideth in contrast with the existence of nations. II. AS A TYPE. It is a type of much that will outlast itself. 1. Of man. His animal nature may pass; his mental and spiritual being shall continue. 2. Of truth. Here, again, like man's body, like the moods of the seasons, the forms of truth may change. But truth is eternal. 3. Of God. "They shall perish, but Thou remainest." (U. R. Thomas.) *The earth permanent, man transitory*:—Permanence, then, characterizes the material world, while man, viewing him apart from his immortal hopes, lives a mere transitory life. There is, indeed, a sense in which even the material world suffers change. Of all outward things none are so associated with our conceptions of durability as "the everlasting hills." And yet we know that the hills, in scientific strictness, are not everlasting: that rain and sun and storm are leaving their traces upon the scarred and seamed precipices, and that what the globe is at the present moment is the result of agencies irresistible and unceasing, though carried on through periods of time quite inconceivable. But the writer of Ecclesiastes is not viewing the world from a scientific, but from a practical point of view. Everlasting indeed is the material world in relation to the sixty, seventy, or eighty years allotted to human beings. And what makes the permanence of the material world as compared with the briefness of human life so oppressive is this: that man, thus hemmed in by outward limitations, compelled to do all which his hand finds to do within quite a moment of time, is yet conscious of views, feelings, longings, immeasurably too large for a creature whose life here is evanescent. There is no imputation upon the lovingkindness of the Creator in the fact that He has created, let us say, a may-fly to be born in the morning and to die in the afternoon. It has no anticipation of a future. There is nothing startling in the fact that to a fly is assigned only the life of a fly. Am I putting contempt on the present life? Far from it. It is good, but yet as connected with another and higher life. It is bright with a light thrown back upon it from immortality. But view it without reference to that life. Withdraw the radiance which everlasting hopes throw around it; think of it as the kindling of ideas which are merely to be quenched; of cravings which are never to be satisfied; of high anticipations which never, never are to be fulfilled; and then must you not allow that this being, so strangely constituted, walking in a vain shadow and disquieting himself in vain, is really worse off than the may-fly, and that his existence is absolutely irreconcilable with faith in a wise and good Creator? I know not what amount of evidence would satisfy me, if I saw a bird of newly-discovered species with powerful wings, that it never was intended to fly and never in fact did fly. That it was capable of flying would be to me conclusive proof that it was intended to do so; and by analogy the existence of faculties and capacities unnecessary for a brief life here, out of proportion with such a life, and demanding eternity for their exercise, would convince me that man was made for immortality, and that his troubled and sin-stained life here was but the prelude to an endless existence, untroubled and unstained, under the eye of Him who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. I own that I could see no reasonableness in urging the truth contained in my text, if I were unable to supplement it with this latter truth. What call would there be to meditate on the brevity of my life here, if it was not to be followed by another with which it is connected in a very momentous way? The creed of the Epicurean is odious and degrading; but the question is, Is it not the legitimate inference from a denial of man's immortality? If man's death is but as the death of an animal, how can his life be anything more than an animal life? But once accept the thought that his existence here is but a brief introduction to a diviner existence, and, while you ennoble this life, you make it a reasonable thing to dwell on its transiency, not to suggest merely lugubrious thoughts, nor to inspire an impractical dejection of feeling, but because, short as it is, it is the seedtime of immortality, and because into this little space assigned us here below are crowded duties, responsibilities, opportunities, having the most intimate relation to our undying life beyond the grave. "One generation passeth away and another cometh." There is something within us which makes it difficult to conceive this in its simple truth. Only by thought and training do we lay hold of the fact

that the men of the past were not shadows. I am aware that those who have no trust that we shall live hereafter speak nevertheless of a continuity which belongs to the human race, and remind us truly enough that though the individual passes away, the race continues, and moves forward to a better destiny; and that even if we as individuals are to be blotted out from God's universe, we ought to work with energy in the faith that posterity will be blessed by our efforts, when we are ourselves forgotten. There is doubtless an element of truth in this, and also an element of disinterestedness which is valuable; but after all we shrink from the thought of being forgotten. Still more, there is surely something unspeakably dreary in the prospect, when we have striven hard for others, of passing into nothingness, and missing the result of our strivings. It is not in human nature to rouse itself to energy under such an absence or feebleness of motive. It is not alone the thought of being forgotten. An unselfish man, though he might be better pleased to be remembered, will bear even being forgotten if he may have some assurance that his labour is not in vain in the Lord; but to work without this assurance were dismal indeed—we may well say impossible. To work and wait is the lot of the Christian. It is small consolation to us that the material earth abideth for ever, if the things we care for most are daily passing away, and we and they are hurrying to annihilation. Take away the immortality of man, and the continuity of the race is practically an unreality. It is not this poor negation which has done such mighty things in the world. I would dwell on the transiency of this life, not to depress, but to awake you to a profounder conviction of the value of the present moment, of the greatness of the issues which must be determined within this short life, by vast numbers so grievously misemployed, by vast numbers so utterly frittered away. We are to "number our days," not so as to embitter life by the thought how few they are, but so as to "apply our hearts unto wisdom." Much indeed that is said about the shortness of life is sadly unpractical. Perhaps it is best to think much more of life than of death, much more of living unto God without a moment's delay, than of conjuring up anticipations of our last moments. There is comparatively little in the New Testament about death. Life, the new life in Christ, so glorious as to make the dissolution of the body comparatively unimportant—this was the thought which filled the foreground of the Christian prospect. Dwell, then, on the thought of death mainly as a motive to newness of life. The commencement of a year is a memento to us that one generation is passing away and another coming. There are other mementoes which God often sends. He sends the failing health, the waning strength, the disappointment of life's most cherished hopes, the gathering of clouds round the eventide of life. Thus God often painfully reminds us how time is passing. True religion is not the putting ourselves right by some clever expedient which enables us to combine a worthless life with a Christian's death. It is the making the life right. It is the regarding our existence here as an anticipation of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. The one condition of a Christian death is a Christian life. (*J. A. Jacob, M.A.*) *The durability of the earth contrasted with human mortality:*—This place of our sojourn, this earth, has many things tending to beguile us out of reflection, to lull us into unconcern. But it has some things fitted to awaken us to thought and apprehension. This should, in all reason, be the effect of such circumstances, and facts, as force on our attention the contrast between the duration of the earth itself and that of our abode on it. There are many things to illustrate this comparison, and force our thoughts upon it. History itself;—why is history, but because the generations of men are gone? We want to know something of them, and to converse with them, as a former world of men. And history tells us of one generation, and of another, that has passed away, leaving not a living "rack behind." It is obviously suggested here, that we have another illustration of the text in places of interment, that have been such for ages. The earliest of the generations that have terminated their earthly existence, are gone beyond memory or tradition. In greater number there are dates of a later generation, still far gone in the past. And so you come down, at last, to the recent grave and tomb. But not only the abodes of the dead,—those of the living also, may yield illustration of the contrast, those of them which were built in a former age; or, take them collectively, in a village, town, or city. How many successions of the inhabitants, since it became a populous city! Would it be an extravagant conjecture that seven or eight times as many persons have died in it, as are at this hour living in it? But think, now, of the whole population having been so many

times changed! It requires thought; because the change, being gradual, is at no one time presented in its full magnitude. Were it in the nature of things that there should be, at one grand sweep, the removal of so vast a number, repeated at the average period of an age of man, the event, and the succession of such events, would have an overwhelming awfulness. But what is in effect equal to this takes place, and but feebly excites attention. There may be many things incidentally suggesting themselves to reflecting minds that will strongly enforce the consideration of the brevity of life as contrasted with the permanence of the scene in which it is passed. Reflections of this character may occur under occasional and transient states of feeling,—excited at one time by objects that would not excite them at another. But we should think it must have happened to many, or to most men, to have this reflection excited at the view of some object or other,—“How much longer this has been—or shall be—than I—or any now living man.” There are, as we said, occasional states of feeling in which the reflection, so suggested, comes with vivid impression. And it were well to cultivate that reflective habitude through which the mind should be susceptible of instructive and solemn suggestions and impressions from any and all objects. To a mind so habituated, the transiency of life, the “passing away of the generations,” will be forcibly suggested by the view of such things as mountains, massive rocks, ancient trees, the never-tiring, never-ending, action of the sea, and the solid structures of human labour. Well may such objects make an impression of contrast with man, when we find them in Scripture taken as emblems to represent the unchangeableness and eternity of God. And we may observe, it is the manifest intention of the Divine Spirit, as shown in the sacred writings, that we should be taught to find emblems, in the world we are placed in, to enforce solemn instructions upon us. The reflection may include the ideas of all the various personal qualities—states of mind and character,—and condition altogether, of this unknown long succession. “Depravity has been here, in how many forms! Misery, of how many kinds and degrees! Visions of anticipation—deeply pondered schemes—fluctuations of hope and fear—thoughtlessness and consideration—practical atheism and devout sentiment! All this has passed away—and here is the object still, to which all this was, once, present!” And then to think there is yet to come more of all this, to be present to it—after we shall see it no more. What a train of sinners yet, but also, we trust, of saints, are to reside, or pass and repass, within sight of that pile of rocks. In a solitary and contemplative state of the mind, the permanent objects give the impression as if they rejected and scorned all connection with our transitory existence—as if we were accounted but as shadows passing over them. They strike the thoughtful beholder with a character of gloomy and sublime dissociation and estrangement from him. It is true that the altering effect of time is visible on many of the objects thus contrasted with us by their permanence. But the extreme slowness of that alteration serves to display again that contrast, and to enforce the instruction. For example, the gradual decay of some mighty, ancient structure,—or of some magnificent cedar or oak,—the working away of the very rocks on the seacoast. The effect has been wrought, but so slowly and imperceptibly that no man can say that he has seen its progress. The man that has looked on the objects in his childhood can hardly, in his most advanced age, say that he perceives any difference. But then let him turn and look at his fellow-mortals, such of them as remain alive! He can recall the image of the childhood of even the oldest of them. The great general instruction from all this is,—how little hold—how little absolute occupancy we have of this world. When all the scene is evidently fixed to remain, we are under the compulsion to go. We have nothing to do with it, but as passing from it. The generation “comes” but to “pass away,” seeing another following it closely under the same destination. Men may strive to cling—to seize a firm possession—to make good their establishment—resolve and vow that the world shall be theirs. But it disowns them,—stands aloof;—it will stay, but they must go. It signifies to us, that equally to all it will yield one matter of permanence—just one, and no more, and that is—a grave. If that enduring possession of the earth will content us, that is secure. In all other senses of possession it will eject us. Men, in their earnest adhesion to it, may raise mighty works of enduring stability—towers, palaces, strongly built houses, as if they absolutely would connect themselves with the world’s own prolonged duration. Well! they may do so; and the earth will retain these, but will expel them. But should not the final lesson be, that the only essential good

that can be gained from the world is that which can be carried away from it? Alas! that mere sojourners doom themselves to depart in utter deprivation—when their inquisitive glance over the scene should be after any good that may go with them,—something that is not fixed in the soil, the rocks, or the walls. Let us look on the earth in the spirit of this inquiry, "What has the bounteous Creator placed here?—what has the glorious Redeemer left here, that I may, by His grace, seize and take with me, and find it invaluable in another world?" It will then be delightful to look back, with the reflection, "I could not stay on that earth. I saw but a little while its enduring objects,—its grand solidities,—I saw them but to be admonished that I should remove. I have left them maintaining their unchanging aspects; but in my passage I descried, by the aid of the Divine Spirit, something better than all that they signified to me was no possession for me—I seized the pearl of great price, and have brought it away." (*J. Foster.*)

The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down.—*Opposite ideas of life: the materialistic and the spiritual.*—There are at least two very opposite ideas of human life working in men; and these ideas make life to man virtuous and blessed, or vile and miserable. Materialism propounds the one, spiritual Christianity the other. Solomon speaks what material philosophers teach, and what all mere worldly men feel life to be; Christ and His apostles reveal the experience of all genuine disciples of spiritual Christianity. I. The one idea represents life as a TRANSIENT APPEARANCE, the other as a PERMANENT REALITY. Solomon says, speaking out the philosophy of Materialism, "One generation passeth away and another generation cometh." "All is vanity, all is vanity"—a mere pageant, an empty show. Men, what are they? They rise from the dust and to the dust they go. A whole generation is but a troop of pilgrims, pursuing their journey from dust to dust. They soon reach their destination and disappear, but the earth, the old road over which they trod their way, "abideth for ever." "Let us eat and drink, then, for to-morrow we die." Ephemeral as we are, let us sport in the sunbeam while we have it; the starless night of eternal extinction will soon spread over us. So say the Materialists; their philosophy has no higher idea of life. In sublime contrast with this is the idea propounded in the New Testament. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." "He that believeth in Me," says Christ, "shall never die." II. The one idea represents life as an ENDLESS ROUTINE, the other as CONSTANT PROGRESS. Solomon saw in nature what modern philosophers call the law of circularity everywhere. He saw the sun, the wind, the rivers, moving in an invariable circle, returning ever to the point whence they set out. He compares this to human life, a mere endless routine. The motion of all organic life is from dust to dust. This is, says the Materialist, but a figure of man's moral history; there is no progress,—it is an eternal round. Mankind, in all their efforts to improve themselves, are only like Sisyphus of ancient fable, rolling a heavy stone up a steep hill; the moment the hand is withdrawn it rushes to the valley again. This is a crushing idea of life; it comes over the soul like a black, rayless cloud of ice. There is some truth in it, but thank God it is not the whole truth. The true path of the soul is not a circle,—it is a ladder, like Jacob's ladder, reaching from earth to the throne of the Eternal. Every golden rundle it climbs, it pierces a new cloud, gets new light; it hears new voices, sees new heavens, and thus passes "from glory to glory." "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He does appear we shall see Him as He is." III. The one idea represents life as UNSATISFYING LABORIOUSNESS, the other as a BLESSED ACTIVITY. "All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing," etc. Voltaire, the brilliant wit, the literary idol of France, expressed his experience of life in one word, "*Ennui*." The man who has laboured most, and laboured in the highest departments of labour with a worldly spirit, must ever experience dissatisfaction of soul. Worldly labour can never satisfy the human soul. You may as well endeavour to empty the ocean with your bucket, or quench Etna with your tears, as to get happiness out of any amount or kind of labour wrought in a worldly spirit. The idea of labour, however, propounded by Christianity is the opposite of this. Labour need not be, and ought not to be unsatisfying. A good man is "blessed in his deed." This idea is the true one. All labour should be inspired with the spirit of love to God, and trust in His paternal care. Such labour will be ever satisfying, ever blessed. The labour of love is the melody of life. Every true deed beats heavenly music into the soul. IV. The one idea represents life as DOOMED TO OBLIVION—

the other as IMPERISHABLY REMEMBERABLE. The past is forgotten, the present will soon be in oblivion. Men and their doings are speedily lost in forgetfulness. Such is the gloomy idea of Materialism—an idea under whose dark and chilling shadow men may well weep and wail. But is it true? "The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance." The good man, "being dead, yet speaketh." Thank God! Christianity tells us that man will never be forgotten. He will live for ever in the memory of those who love him. The genuine disciple of Christ has his name written in an imperishable book—"the Lamb's Book of Life." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 7. **All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full.**—*The turn of the year:*—There is a truth underlying the old conceit which pictured the universe as moving in cycles. History repeats itself. Our individual experience—which is only history in its minutest detail—shows us how little of originality there is in any one of us, and how like to one another are the multifarious incidents of our daily life. I. **THE YEAR HAS REACHED ITS PRIME THROUGH STAGES DIFFERING LITTLE FROM THOSE OF FORMER YEARS.** Every now and then some meteorologist, careful day by day to register the markings of his rain-gauges, his thermometers, and such other apparatus as may enable him to compare the weather of to-day with that of yesterday, comes out of his observatory to tell us of extreme heat or cold, of excessive rains or drought, or of some other phenomena which mark the year as exceptional since—well, since some other year, not so very long ago, after all, when he or his predecessors had a like tale to tell, which even then was not new, but old as the hills. Now, how true all this is in relation to human life. Some historians never tire as they tell us of the changes wrought from one age to another. They point out, and very truly, how the age of Victoria differs from that of Elizabeth; and in eloquent periods they describe how the face of society has changed, say, from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth. But they forget that the face of society may have changed a very great deal, while the heart of it may have changed but slightly. Shakespeare's master hand has left us the widest range of human character ever sketched by one pen; and that we so quickly recognize the truthfulness of every picture in that vast gallery of portraits arises from the fact that, being true to nature then, they are true to nature now. II. **BUT THOUGH THE YEAR HAS REACHED ITS PRIME, IT HAS NOT ATTAINED ITS MATURITY.** It is not the midsummer, but the autumn that brings us the season of harvest. It is not when the days are longest, nor when the earth is covered with the brightest flowers, nor when the trees of the forest wear their richest green, that men thrust in the sickle and reap. It is rather when the prime, and, in some sense, the beauty of the year is past. Nor, happily, does human life attain maturity at its meridian. There is a sense, indeed, in which the earlier manhood possesses a freshness and a vigour in which the later years of life must necessarily be wanting, and those who have thrown away the glorious opportunities of youth have lost what can never be recalled. But they who have lived half the allotted span of life, have, humanly speaking, their richest and noblest days still before them. The promises of youth have now to be followed by the ripe performances of manhood. Each season has its appointed work. III. **THE TURN OF THE YEAR IS INDICATED BY APPEARANCES MOST FITTING TO THE TIME.** Year by year, in spite of human forebodings, the summer comes, and "the earth is satisfied with the fruit of God's works." With Him, stability is not dependent upon uniformity; nor is diversity of operation inimical to the unity of His plans. Hence it comes to pass that while the seasons of succeeding years afford us the never-ending variety which ministers to our pleasure at the same time that it excites our admiration, our delight and wonder are not less excited by the unvarying unity which marks all the operations of the Divine hand. So, too, in the still more complex workings of human life. Take, for example, that period of which we have already spoken as the "turn of life," the age when the last tie that bound us to the days of youth has been snapped, and when, standing on the broad plateau of middle age, we can look forward only to such changes as shall prepare the way slowly but surely for the end. It is at this time we begin to realize most clearly how distinct are the successive generations of mankind. In earlier life there were about us many upon whom, in various ways, we were more or less dependent. But one by one they have gone; and so far at least as the past is concerned, we begin to stand alone. In later life, too, those about us will be found to belong to another generation—a generation younger than we, and destined

to take our place when we have passed away. Some of us need, perhaps, to learn more thoroughly how little the world is dependent for its life upon us who dwell in it but for a little time. Creatures of a day, we are so apt to live as if assured of an eternal stay. It is thus we fail to regard the fitness of things, and forget that advancing age demands thoughts and words and deeds more becoming to it than would be those of our earlier life. IV. THE TURN OF THE YEAR REMINDS US HOW SLOW RIPENING IS SUCCEEDED BY A SWIFT HARVEST. For months the grain has been growing slowly, and though the midsummer is past, it will yet be long before the fields will be generally "white unto the harvest." "Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and the latter rain." Not less varied and protracted is the discipline by which our Father seeks to produce in us the fruits of His heavenly husbandry. The restraints of childhood, the education of youth, and the cares of manhood are but so many processes by which He would lead us onward towards that perfection which is His ultimate object concerning every one. As the steady warmth of July days will prepare for the harvest the corn-blades produced by the months just past, so may the discipline of a life that has outgrown the inexperience of youth be expected to bring into fuller and more perfect maturity those graces of which but the germs have yet been formed. Anyhow, let us never suppose that, having left behind us the days of youth which were so fittingly emblazoned by the changeable shine and shower of the early summer, we have lost our best opportunities for growth. It may be hard to form new habits now; but those we have formed may become more consolidated, and so our after lives, by stability of growth, may go somewhat to compensate for the shortcomings and waywardness of youth. V. THE TURN OF THE YEAR REMINDS US THAT NATURE PROVIDES FOR THE FRUITFULNESS OF EVEN SHORT-LIVED GROWTHS. Very early in the springtime there were buds and blossoms that were none the less beautiful because their stay with us was short. The snowdrop never drank in the glory of the summer sunshine; yet the world would not have been complete without it. There are other plants that have a lesson for us beside the corn that ripens slowly, and, so to speak, centres upon itself the labours of the year. There is but one standard by which we may infallibly judge of the products of the earth, a standard applicable alike to the plant that blossoms and fades in one summer day and to the aloe blooming but once in its century, and to the oak tree that outlives many generations of men. That standard is the testing question: Is its Maker's purpose served? To live to Him and grow like Him—here is the great end of our being, by the serving or failing which we shall be approved or stand condemned. (*F. Wagstaff.*) *Views of life; false and true:*—What outward things are to us, depends very much on what we are ourselves. Take a landscape for instance. What various thoughts it suggests to different people. To the farmer it suggests land for pasture, the sportsman looks at it from another point of view, the artist sees in it the varying lights and shadows. It suggests to the poet great thoughts or feelings, to the devout man the power and love of God, and so forth. The writer of this book from which our text is taken is in one of his bad moods; he is disheartened and weary of life; nature seems to reflect the sadness of his soul. Rivers running into the sea, and not accomplishing anything, all seem to proclaim the vanity of life, the emptiness of life. "All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full." As a statement of fact, it is correct. And what is the sea better for them? They make no visible change in it, they do not even make it less salt; as far as an unthinking person goes, it seems sheer loss. "But the sea is never full." And so we might think it is with man. Humanity, struggling and suffering, only to pass into the sea of nothingness. Egypt was a great nation at the time of Moses, what remains now? Some pyramids and a few mummies. In our sadder moments we are inclined to cry, "Wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain?" After all, this is not the true lesson of "All the rivers run into the sea." The joy of mere living is worth the labour and is reward enough. Every little brook expresses gladness, irrespective of the end it accomplishes. Life is worth living and full of joy. In moments of health and activity we feel like that, but this will not always satisfy. Here is where the true lesson of the "Rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full" comes in. Why is the sea not full? The remainder of the verse answers the question. "Unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again." Solomon accepted the explanation of the mystery given in his day. We know the true reason. It is because the water is continually evaporating, the sun drawing the water up into

the clouds, descending again, and giving beauty and fertility all around. Thus the rivers fulfil their true end. They lose life to find it again in new and more beautiful forms—not one drop is lost; every brooklet has its share in the beauty of the earth. Nothing is spent in vain in God's universe; He is a workman who never wastes a particle of force or matter. This thought is comforting and helpful. "Life is a brief span—trivial and vain," nay; no life is lost—its effect remains. No self-sacrifice, no deed of kindness is ever utterly lost. All goodness—every deed done, adds to the permanent stock on earth. It increases the heritage of truth and right which we hand on to remote ages. Thousands of years ago a man left his home and went to live among strangers, he gave up his country and his kindred. His life was not lost, he became Abraham, the Father of the Faithful. Yes; the rivers of life run into the sea, but they are not lost. No life lived faithfully is utterly lost. It must be so, for Christ is at once the great explanation and pledge of this truth. His Cross seemed the end of all hope; yet the Cross was the triumph of His life—the beginning of everything. Without it there would have been no Resurrection, no Ascension. God brings gain out of loss. Christ has given us the assurance we shall live for ever; living to-day we shall live on for ever. The little rivers of life run into the sea of eternity, but they are not lost. Towards what sea is the river of our life flowing on unceasingly? In every continent the rivers are flowing on. There is a watershed in life, down either side our life may run. In which direction does our life run? Towards God—or away from Him, into darkness. (*J. A. Campbell, M.A.*) *Pursuit of happiness*:—"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Now, this view of the monotony of things has a great deal of truth in it. If you look at the matter in one aspect, there is a striking lack of originality displayed in creation. Everything material goes through the same process of birth, maturity, decay and death, whether it be a star or a universe, or the humblest insect that crawls. Our own lives, too, what a sameness there is about them, looked at from this old writer's point of view, which is very often our own. What a monotony there is about it all—what a lack of originality. We all go through the same programme in the main. We are each of us, as it were, given the main outlines of our little drama, and we are at liberty to fill in the scanty details for ourselves, all the plots are on the same model, and we seldom strike out any original line in the details. But is there not something more to be said on the matter? It is true that all things go through the same process of birth, maturity, decay and death; that in some aspects there is a deadly sameness throughout all creation from top to bottom. But there is also infinite variety, endless difference, nothing is precisely like anything else in the world. Examine as many as you like of any species of plants or animals, and no one will be found to be precisely like any other. Every dawn is different, and no two sunsets are alike; and though day succeeds day in orderly procession, yet no two days are alike in their combination of cold and heat, sunshine and shower, hurricane or sultry calm. Nor are the events they witness ever exactly reduplicated. And so with our daily lives and experiences. It is true that the plots of our little dramas are much alike, that the main outline is sketched in for us, and that we may only fill in the details of our lives. But it is those very details that we are apt to contemptuously pass by, that make our lives what they are, for better or for worse. It is in the details that individuality is shown—not in the main outline. There is no such thing as "mere detail"—detail is everything in this world. No two lives are alike, every existence is different, there is infinite variety in these very things that make our lives what they are. And the assertion that all things are full of weariness, because of their eternal sameness, is without foundation in fact. If the world seems full of weariness, the fault is in you, not in a world of infinite variety. This miserable plaint of the weariness of all things, then, is nothing new, and it is a cry that is still repeated in our ears only too often in the present day. What was the reason of it in the case of this philosophic grumbler of old? What was the reason of this unhappiness, in one who had everything that is commonly supposed to make life worth living—is the moral of the book that riches, power of intellect, artistic taste, refinement, learning, are all without value, and are powerless to give any pleasure to their possessor? By no means. All these things are good in themselves, may confer vast pleasure on those who have them, so long as they are not the end and aim of existence. Happiness is not the one aim and end of existence—it is the result of a well-lived life. If you make the attainment of happiness and pleasure the one object of existence as the Preacher did, then it will always elude you even as it did

him. The Preacher was essentially an egoist, a selfish man. "How can I obtain happiness for myself?" was the cry of his soul, and although he tried every method, he never did obtain it. Just compare, for an instant, the life of this writer with its comfort, ease and luxury, to that of Jesus with its hardships, disappointments and sufferings. Both see the misery in the world, but while one sets to work to remedy it, the other sits and looks at it, and wrings his hands over it. Jesus saw the crookedness in life just as plainly as Ecclesiastes did, but instead of crooning a coronach over all human hopes and aspirations and endeavours, He set to work to make the crooked straight, bind up the broken-hearted, preach good tidings to the prisoners in the bonds of sin, and give a gospel of hope and encouragement to all; and in losing Himself in the service of others, He found a joy and peace that never left Him. It has ever been so, and it is so now. It is not from the toilers of earth that the cry of the weariness of all things goes up. It is not those who have to work from morning till night, and who are found day after day drudging away their lives at the same employment—it is not from these, as a rule, that the cry of the Preacher goes up. It is those who have nothing better to do with their time than to sit and brood over their little petty ailments or misfortunes, whose time hangs heavy on their hands, because of want of occupation, who have no conception of there being anything better in life than to pass through it as easily as possible—these are the people who are bored with existence. The men, however, who do the world's work, who try to right the wrong, straighten the crooked, raise the fallen, and improve the world, are not so; they have no time in which to indulge in the luxury of "the blues." They always find too much to do in the world, and in doing something for others they find a happiness that nothing else can bestow. (*E. S. Hicks, M.A.*)

Ver. 8. The eye is not satisfied with seeing.—*The unsatisfied eye*:—This fact is selected as an instance of man's profitless curiosity, as a symbol of the insatiableness of the human mind. My remarks will, I think, prove applicable to two cases,—to the dreary doctrine that man is virtually nothing, and all his efforts are unavailing; and also to the Christian's affirmation, that there is something better and more lasting than the objects of our sensuous vision. I. I direct your attention to **THE THING ITSELF WHICH IN THE TEXT IS SAID NOT TO BE SATISFIED WITH SEEING**. Consider what instances of skill we gaze at with admiration, and cross oceans to behold, and yet how imperfect and clumsy they are compared with this little compact organ set in its bony cup, with its lenses and regulators and pulleys and screws, its curtaining iris and its crystal deep, its inner chamber of imagery on which are flung the pictures of the universe,—the aspects of nature, the shapes of art, the symbols of knowledge, the faces of love; this magic glass, both telescope and microscope, filled with the splendours of an insect's wing, yet taking in the scenery of heaven; this sentinel of the passions; this signal of the conscious soul, kindled by a light within more glorious than the light without, and never satisfied with seeing. Such is the human eye. And from the lowest creatures, whose visual apparatus is a mere nervous speck, up to the most complex organisms, there is nothing that has the range of this organ. In certain specialties of vision man may not be equal to some animals or insects. The shark and the spider, the hawk and the cat, may see better on some particular plane of sight; but in that general power which far transcends any special capacity, in scope, in possibility, in educated faculty, in expressiveness, the human eye excels all others. If, then, superior qualifications are to be taken as proof of superior purpose, this fact of itself is significant as to the dignity and the destiny of man. But in this line of argument nothing seems more suggestive than the very statement of the text: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing." Now, so far as we can judge, the merely animal eye is satisfied with seeing. The brute does not shift about to get better views of nature. He does not search the landscape for objects of beauty and sublimity. It is man only who finds in the opportunities of vision the inspiration of action, and in all that lies under the sun secures employment for a restless curiosity. He ponders unfathomable problems in the pebble and the weed, and eagerly searches the secrets of the universe. How much of human enterprise is simply the result of a longing for vision,—the desire to see strange lands, and look upon memorable faces, to watch the evolution of facts, and detect hidden causes! No man is satisfied with that which he sees right around him. The child longs to know what lies beyond the hills that bound his familiar valley, into what strange country the sun goes down, and upon what marvellous region the

rainbow rests. The eye, however, is not satisfied with its own natural limits, but seeks the aid of instruments. As, in its aspects, it is the most striking of all the organs of sense, so does it transcend them all in its scope, both of space and time. This little orb of observation, turning on its minute axis, sweeps the splendid theatre of suns and systems, comprehending millions of miles in a glance, and visited by rays of light that have been travelling downwards for thousands of years. II. WHAT IS IT THAT IS NOT SATISFIED WITH SEEING? In no scale of created being,—not even the lowest,—is it the eye itself that sees. It is the instinct, or consciousness, back of the eye. Examine the dead organ in man or animal, and all its wondrous mechanism is there. Lift the fallen lid, and the light of the outward world flickers upon its surface. But the faculty of sight is not there. Whatever that faculty may be in the brute, we have seen that in man it is a peculiar and distinctive faculty. We have seen that to him belongs this desire for vision,—this pushing inquisitiveness that is never satisfied. Such, then, must be the inner and conscious nature of man. Such must be the mysterious power behind the eye,—the thing that really sees. Therefore the eye that is not satisfied with seeing is the spirit within us. The mind of man is the eye of man. And here opens an argument that rebukes materialistic disparagement and confirms Christian hope. It is because of the limitless nature of the human soul, that the eye of man never rests, but perpetually wanders over all the visible world, over all the regions of possible truth and beauty. Surely, if this were merely a mortal and limited nature, this would not be. Man would be satisfied with seeing. 1. In the first place, consider what it is that the physical eye itself implies. An examination of this mechanism alone,—these cups, these tissues, these muscles, these elastic veils,—shows at least that the eye is adjusted to the conditions of the external world, and that there are external things for it to behold. But, this being so, I ask, What is implied by that consciousness which acts behind the physical organ,—that faculty which really sees, and is never satisfied? What does that restless mind itself, with its capacities and instincts, imply? Surely it implies the existence of objects fitted to those capacities and instincts,—the existence of unlimited truth and beauty and goodness, and a field of deathless activity for that faculty which is never satisfied. Back of iris and retina there are other lenses. There is a lens of instinct, a lens of reason, a lens of faith, through which come reflections far beyond the visible veil of earth and heaven, images of ideal majesty and loveliness, and “a light that never was on land or sea.” Are these mere fantasies engendered from within? If so, I ask, What do these interior lenses imply? And why do they exist at all? What can we infer, but that in the wide realm of actual being there are spiritual objects which answer to its function? For the mind, and not the body, being the real eye, the faculty of looking out upon material forms is only one of its functions. This faith-vision, this perception of reason, is just as truly an original faculty, although now its objects may be seen only as “through a glass darkly.” You never really saw the most familiar object. Yet we do not distrust these transmitted images. We live in their light, and rejoice in their communion. Why, then, distrust these other conceptions, though they are but images also, and we may behold them only in that transparent world where the material lens shall be shattered, and we shall see as we never do here,—“face to face”? Why suppose these to be fantasies, any more than the mountains, the stars? This apprehension of God as an inscrutable Essence, yet also a veritable Presence; this impression on the retina of the soul of those who have vanished from our material sight,—are these but mists of fancy, or dreams of mortal sleep? I answer that they are as legitimate as any transcript of the outward world, only more indefinite, as all facts involved with the infinite and the immortal necessarily must be. There are diseased eyes, and there are defective eyes, by which the optic nerve brings false reports, upon which the outward world looks grim and obscure, to which all external things are a blank. So, too, there may be diseased and defective souls, whose images of spiritual things are fantastic and exaggerated, or whose vision is sealed altogether by sad, interior blindness. But these do not impeach the legitimate function of the eye, nor refute the general convictions of men. Moreover, as this faculty of vision that permits no limit to its material discoveries, and looks beyond these sensuous veils, is never satisfied with seeing, I ask, What does this fact itself imply? Surely it suggests boundless opportunities of action. The desire to see is never quenched: nevertheless the mere physical organ of sight grows weary, and gladly retreats under its drowsy lids. The dew of sleep is required for its refreshment, and the

periods of darkness indicate a necessary suspension of its work. Age draws over it a flimsy curtain. And so comes Death, shutting up the worn-out casements, and bringing on the final night when all this curious mechanism is resolved into its elements. But the actual eye is not yet satisfied with seeing, and the forces that shatter its material instruments do not quench its capacity or its yearning. But no capacity is without its sphere, no instinct is for ever balked. The unsatisfied eye demonstrates the deathless and ever-unfolding mind. III. Therefore in perfect consistency with what has been said, I also urge this truth,—**THAT THE EYE SEES MORE AND MORE, AND MORE AND MORE SHOWS ITS CAPACITY FOR SEEING, IN PROPORTION AS IT BECOMES ACQUUSTOMED TO WORTHY OBJECTS.** There may be diversities of spiritual, as there are diversities of physical faculty. Consider what some men will train their natural eyes to behold,—the sailor at the masthead, the Indian in the woods, the Esquimaux among the snows. And so there are diversities of spiritual sight, some of them perhaps resulting from original differences in power. But the spiritual vision of any man may be educated to still better results. One reason why men have not this spiritual discernment is because they will not see, because they neglect the faculty of seeing. It has been truly said that "the eye sees only that which it brings the power to see." It does not create the thing to be seen, any more than the microscope creates the pomp of an insect's wing, or Rosse's tube the splendours of Orion. But we see just what we exercise the power to see; and no external revelations, however urged upon us, will make up for the lack of spiritual refinement. Educate the physical eye if you would see more of the natural world. But, even then, the mind must be educated, if we would discern the glory and the beauty everywhere, and live in a world of perpetual delight, detecting a rarer loveliness in the daisy, and pictures of wondrous grandeur in the shadows that drift along the mountain. It is not merely far travelling that enlarges and enriches the vision. The observant philosopher discovers a world of wonders in "a tour around his garden." Let the eye of the soul be educated if you would see the world in new relations, if you would detect the true significance of life, if you would discern the real blessedness of every joy and the right look of every affliction, if you would stand consciously in the presence of God, and gaze upon spiritual things. What we really need is not more things but better eyesight. And is it not this eye of the soul that we must mainly rely upon? How far will physical sight guide us? How long will it last us? How much will it enable us to see? At best it gives us only appearances, and itself fades and grows dim ere long. Think, then, of the desolation of those who have no interior vision. How light, comparatively, has been the affliction of physical blindness to men like Niebuhr, who, when the veil had fallen upon present things, could cheer the darkness of his closing years by retracing in the luminous track of memory the scenes of early travel; or to Milton, who, "with that inner eye which no calamity could darken," saw "those ethereal virtues flinging down on the jasper pavement their crowns of amaranth and gold." (*E. H. Chapin.*)

Ver. 9. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be.—*Old things in new time:*—One of the things which strike an observer of human beings is the disposition they perpetually betray to imagine and expect something in the future, different from all that has been in the past. We not only anticipate futurity, but anticipate it as bearing a character, and doing a work, peculiar to itself. This habit is seen in all, and is revealed in nearly every way. Futurity is to do wonders. It is to cure all diseases, to correct all mistakes, to purge from all vices. To realize our conception, it must possess the mysterious powers of magic. The past is not permitted to afford any guidance in our mental wanderings into time to come. It will be affected by no such vulgar laws as have been used to operate. It will have a sphere and dominion of its own. It will present an improved series of life and providence. We speak of it as "doing," "bringing," "making" things, often forgetting that it is only the duration in which they are done, and brought, and made, by God and men. I. The first application we make of the sentiment is to **LIFE.** Who does not entertain a vague notion that some considerable variety will be introduced into his future life, some great change in the mode and manner of his outward existence? Yet this is a notion which a little reflection and a little memory may serve to rebuke. There is, perhaps, no solid ground on which to hope that in respect to circumstances this year will not be, to you, as the last. There is no reasonable probability, perhaps, that you will go into a different way of business, a different

sphere, a different station. And as to more directly personal matters, it is certain that the common processes and ways of life will continue the same. Eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, thinking and speaking, weeping and rejoicing, will continue to be the daily experiences and occupations of all. There is something appalling in all this, when considered alone. This monotony of life is very solemn, and very sad. And it is because men feel it to be so dismal and distressing, that they constantly do violence to all sense and fact in fancying that the future will afford, they know not how, a different kind of being and of occupation. Hope is the safety-valve of tribulation and satiety: but for it, verily there would be more suicides. What are we but, in a figure, drivers over the same ground of life, with little variety but that of a fine or a wet day, a summer or a winter season, good or bad roads? And what is the remedy? As to hoping, that is a poor and an insufficient one. It is rather an excuse than a reason for peace and contentment. When men take no interest in food, what is the cure? We seek to create an appetite, by rectifying the system, giving the powers health and tone. And this must be the cure here. Men are miserable; they complain of the world, of their fellows, of their lot; this dish is bad, that is badly dressed, and so on. The fault is in the men. They want an appetite for life. Let there be that, and however common and plain the provision, there will be no lack of relish. But while that is wanted, the costliest delicacies and nicest preparations will impart but a mean and meagre gratification. A fictitious taste will always be a fickle one. Men tire of that for which they have no strong and healthy craving. Even stimulants lose their power, and to sustain the effect you must increase the consumption. The greater part of men have no serious purpose in life. They are destitute of great and abiding purposes, towards which to direct their energies, and which may give importance and continuity to their existence. Their history is not one united whole, but is made up of scraps; it is not a stream flowing on to one specific point, but so many unconnected pools. They labour not in continuous service, but chance-work. They are not filled with a solemn and spiritual idea, not engrossed by a momentous truth, not moved by an all-absorbing passion. Be assured that nothing can give zest and vivacity to life but a deep interest in the soul, and that nothing can secure that like the minding of the things of the Spirit. The only way to realize the charm, and fulness, and power of your being, is to live yourselves, in the Bible sense of the expression; to live spiritually, to live for Christ, to live toward God. This is the life that you were made for, and redeemed for; and, without it, the end of your being cannot be attained, its large capacity cannot be filled, its rich privilege cannot be enjoyed. Having this, you will not complain of the littleness of events and lots, for everything is great to him who connects it with responsibility, eternity, and God; or of their meanness, for everything is glorious to him who regards it as the occasion and the instrument of a Divine service and a spiritual salvation; or of their staleness, for everything is new to him who brings to it an eager will, a full purpose, and affections renewed and stimulated by the love of Jesus and the love of men. "Newness of life" must be sought for, not in strangeness of condition, but ever-quickenened spirituality of soul. And let me, in this connection, press home to you the thought, that you have before you an everlasting future. The provision you have to make is not for time, but for eternity. Even if a skilful management of your materials could infuse something like freshness into your existence here, what is your resource for the endless hereafter? The mistake you are making now, even did not more solemn considerations interpose, would be a mistake in the world to come. It is a solemn business to provide for the immortal interest of souls like yours, to secure them against the oppressive monotony of changeless being. All external expedients must of necessity fail, and the only hope remains in an intellect ever opening upon some fresh view of the truth of God, and a heart ever growing into a closer likeness to His holiness, and a fuller fellowship in the eternal Spirit. II. We apply the sentiment to RESPONSIBILITY. Every one who has noticed his own heart or the hearts of others must have perceived how prone is man to rely on time for the production of mental, moral and spiritual changes in himself. They know there are intellectual defects, but they expect them to be supplied; they know there are improper habits, but they expect them to be corrected; they know there are sinful principles, but they expect them to be removed. They do not intend to continue ignorant, or irregular, or ungodly. Now, it is of the first importance to remember and possess, as a practical conviction, that time does nothing, in the case of any of the changes that take place in men's minds and

hearts and lives, besides the affording a season in which they may be effected. He who expects to be mended merely by time, whatever the nature or measure of his defects, will find himself in as poor a plight as he who should stand by the stream till all the waters have passed along. Time will not change the nature of the seed sown, but only afford opportunity for its growth. Men will never be learned without study; will never be purged of bad habits without self-denial and decision and perseverance; will never become Christians, or, as Christians, abound in grace, without repentance, earnest faith, mortification of the flesh, crucifixion of the members, the entire and unconditional conversion of the heart to God and godliness. Is it not, after all, the moral pains, the effort of will, the self-sacrifice required, that let and hinder you? Is not your case exactly like that of a man who begrudges the toil and trouble of clearing a field that is overrun with weeds, and postpones them, in hope that hereafter the labour needed may be less? We implore you to take counsel of past experience. The hope of this present time was the hope of years ago. As you think or rather dream now, you used to dream. With what result? You have not attained the expected change. Will not holiness and duty involve renewal, a labour, a fight? Will it not always require the utmost unity of heart, and strength of will, and application of power? "Ah," say you, "but there is the Holy Spirit." But does He dispense with sorrow for sin, and subjection to Christ, and strenuous exertion? Will He weep for you, repent for you, believe for you, obey for you? Does He work without means and motives? The question then returns, What do you now? No reasonable man can look into the future with any confidence, while he is going on in sin; and he who says, "Time works wonders, I shall be wise, though now a fool, I shall be correct and consistent, though now far from being so, I shall be holy though now cherishing worldliness," only postpones, but thereby augments, not diminishes, the labour. III. We apply the sentiment to PROVIDENCE. The term "providence" is used here, of course, in a restricted sense, to denote the course of events taking place upon the globe. All events are under the control and direction of God; and all are connected, directly or indirectly, with the establishment and extension of His spiritual kingdom. We know of no distinction between ecclesiastical and worldly providence. All things are given into the hand of Christ, and He orders and governs all for the sake of His Body, the Church. The principles of spiritual providence will remain the same. Sometimes we fear. The question is suggested, "If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?" It is highly probable that we are fast entering upon scenes to try the faith and fortitude even of "the elect." It would, however, be a grievous error to suppose that, whatever the materials and outward forms of providence may be, its principles and purposes are not abiding and immutable. The laws which govern all physical and spiritual things "change not." To fulfil the blessed designs of the Gospel is still His end. Christianity is the reason and the rule of all things. Whatever happens is a step towards the final and full attainment of the highest, holiest and most gracious purposes. That which seems to hinder is made to help. The path may be strange, but the Guide will bring them home. The prescription may be in an unknown tongue, but the Physician will complete their cure. God's dispensations may be hidden, but God is not; and "all things are yours, for ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Are you Christ's? The scenes and processes of Providence are more alike in every age than many, at first sight, may suppose. Sometimes the past, especially the ancient ages of the world, seem to have been very different from our own. And, doubtless, in some respects, thank God, they were. But when their spirit is separated from their form, and allowance is made for the fact that they are ancient, that we have, therefore, their great and prominent events and features, without the filling up of things minor and multitudinous, they are not so peculiar after all. What a different earth would ours appear to him who saw nothing but its mountains! God does not work so much by sudden and violent operations as in a gradual and silent way. The most important processes in Nature and in Providence are the most silent. The moral instrument of God's providence is the same. Whatever change may take place in the human mind, in social customs and relations, in outward and material circumstances, truth will still be the means of advancing the Divine designs respecting our world. Our duty is therefore as plain as it is important, to study, to feel, to speak, to act, to spread the truth; in particular, the living and abiding truth of Christianity. Let us not, then, spend our time and waste our powers in a vain attempt to comprehend or predict events, but let

us set about wholesome and unchanging duty. We are not called to be moral astrologers but moral husbandmen, and a miserable thing it would be for us to cast nativities and—die. (*A. J. Morris.*) *On the resemblance between the future and the past:*—The prerogative of imagining and looking into the future is one of which men avail themselves with the least moderation. How much time is spent in conjectures! See this illustrated in the flattering expectations of youth; the sad forecastings of the sorrowful; our conjectures about political complications; the schemings of enthusiasts and partisans; and even in the musings of men who, rising above what is merely pleasant or useful, have the Good in view. This is certainly not the most profitable course. Else, why nothing but a bitter after-taste left of extravagant expectations when these are disappointed? This is commonly thought to be the language of satiety. If it be regarded as a complaint, springing out of a longing for novelty, and adducing as its grievance that there is none to be found, then such a mental condition must be inferred; for when the mind in its hankering after new impressions fails to gain any, there sensibility must have become wholly dead. But these words stand here without reference to a personal experience, as a deliberate observation, followed by a steady and many-sided contemplation of the world. I. "NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN" MOST NATURALLY EXPRESSES THE ASPECT OF THE WORLD TO THE EYE OF THE MAN WHO EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD SEEKS THE LORD. 1. We must have regard, not at all to the exterior, but to the interior of events, both in the material and in the spiritual world. The exterior is ever varying, the interior is ever the same. What of the ever-changing situations of the heavenly bodies? The same laws have determined them from the beginning. What of the changes that appear in my body, in the plant world? The same powers and their laws are ever at work there to produce essentially the same forms. The Unchangeable is everywhere impressed upon His works! . . . So in what concerns you more closely, into which you may fathom still more deeply—the spiritual world. Why wonder at a fellow-creature who furnishes you with an unusual sight by extraordinary virtues or vices, wisdom or folly, skill in thought and action or unaccountable peculiarity in these? Look into his soul! There are the same faculties as in yourself, and the operations of the same laws. Consider the great mystery how the two worlds to which you belong are united; how mind is ever gaining fresh dominion over matter, and thereby advancing human fellowship, and education, and convenience. See in this nothing novel. They are all but evolutions of the same Divine thoughts, advances toward the same goal of His grace, according to the same plan of His wisdom; in short, "there is nothing new under the sun." 2. To him who everywhere in the world seeks the Lord, there is no distinction between Great and Little. If the Lord does everything, and is active in everything, then everything must be worthy of Him, and no one thing will rise superior to another, as He is always equal to Himself. With Him in view, therefore, every event will reveal the same power or principle. This may appear strange to those who consider only the outside of things, and judge by the impressions which it produces on their sense and feeling. They overlook the greatness and glory of the Little; hence they deem great events to spring from trifling causes, and see novelty in quick, unexpected revolutions; hence the wondering gaze of folly here, and their stupid blindness before God's revelation there. They see not the same elements and laws in the desolating storm as in the morning breeze; in the sudden death as in the steadily-maintained warfare of life and death. A new light of truth flames high in some quarter, and errors vanish. Now, what astonishment seizes men, and what congratulations abound! This, because they see not the heralding sparks of that, and the secret decay of these. II. SUCH SENTIMENTS ARE CONNECTED WITH THIS VIEW AS BELONG TO THE EXCLUSIVE ENDOWMENTS OF THE PIOUS. 1. Every one holding this view finds so much the more cause to be contented with the post which God has assigned to him in the world. To him nothing is vain, and every position in the world may be fraught with benefit. 2. With such a view of the world, a man will use even in little and common things far greater diligence than others. Herein we see the humility of the pious man, which is a source of much good both to himself and to the world. Neglectors of the Little are sorry promoters of the good cause, and never come by fair means to the Great. 3. It hence follows that, more than any other, this mode of looking at the world is connected with the assured hope that we shall succeed from time to time in becoming better. This is one of the first characteristics of the future to be perceived. Not so to the man who is waiting for some-

what outwardly great and extraordinary. He is doomed to much anxiety and disappointment. By looking, then, through the surface of earthly things into their inner essence, we see the true connection of the Divine government; are able to greet the future as a friend, of whose thoughts we are sure, however changed his demeanour; and in modesty and humility may calm ourselves with the conviction that we shall receive from our Heavenly Father henceforth nothing different from what His love has already bestowed upon us in the past. (*F. D. E. Schleiermacher.*) *The helpful past*:—There are conclusions in science which are inevitable and independent of the student, except so far as his intellect is clear enough to understand them; but the moral conclusions, and the conclusions of the practical conduct which a man shall try from certain data or propositions upon which he or others shall be agreed—those vary with his immediate state of conscience or spirit. Now, with regard to this principle that Solomon found to be a great weariness. The conclusions that a man shall draw from it are very much dependent upon the man himself. There is a desire in man for that which is best. As long as the river ran into an eternity, it seemed to be lovely, but when we find that has got into a circle too, and that the water will come down in rain back again, that becomes a weariness. Man has a passion for something new; fairy tales, and many romances are built upon a desire that there should be something that has not been, and this spirit in a child is no doubt a great element of joy. Now, whether this weariness is yours, I know not; that it has been a passing feeling—judging from myself—I conclude, but as it is the fate to be so, it is the wisest thing to see what good it has, and to rejoice that this year will bring nothing new at all, that it will be the old story again, which will at times be a weariness, but also at times a joy; for remember that human life is based upon this great postulate—"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." Men try many ways to find out something new, but it is in vain. They travel sometimes for a change, and they go to the East, but they find that there are people there the same as elsewhere, and even travelling sometimes gets a weariness. What has been will be. Humanity is the same. Others try visiting. You get new people to come and see you, and you find out the old tune in new mouths. There are no new people scarcely. It is the old story; there is a little difference in the instrument perhaps, but you hear the old tunes, the commonplace talk, the same things over again, and why not? That is the way of life—let a wise man accept it. Now, see why it is the way. We have all to start from the beginning. We have all to build up, not what many of you love to build up—a house made with hands, but the end of life is to build up "a house not made with hands," to be hereafter "eternal in the heavens." When a man sees clearly that to build his character is of more consequence than to build his fame and fortune, then he is wise, for instead of he—a poor weakling—having to face the unknown, he knows what is coming, he learns to rejoice that he can consult the fathers, for what happened yesterday is a future precedent, and finding the thing that has been is that which shall be, the elements of uncertainty—fear and terror—are removed. If then I forget for a moment that the building of a character is the only wise thing for which I came into the world, and for which all other things exist, as far as I am concerned, then this glorious repetition, this wonderful monotony, this constant changeableness, is an element of my success. I know pretty much what duties and circumstances life can bring, I know its utmost, I have seen its worst and its best, and I know what I am about; I can go forth to build, knowing the materials I have at my disposal, what the dangers and difficulties I have to encounter, and the issues that will come to pass, and so for to-morrow I am prepared. For remember that of all a man's possessions, the past is the surest, greatest, and most useful. The past is man's storehouse, it is his volume to which he goes again and again for advice as to the future. He turns it over, as we turn over the pages of a book of law or a dictionary. He knows where to find each thing he wants. So when to-morrow comes, and brings me a difficulty, I go to yesterday, and, turning the volume over, I look for bodily pain perhaps, and I find that in a certain month of a certain year I suffered bodily pain to a degree to make sleep impossible, and life a despair. But it says at the end—"Got through it, not so bad as I thought." And so the past is my dictionary, I know the meaning; it is my book of precedents, I know what will happen. Some man speaks evil of you, and, when you are young, it disturbs you much. It is like a scratch on the skin, it does not go

deep, but it gives you an amazing pain while it lasts. But one fool saying another is a fool is simply a statement that he is a fool, and thus to the wise man the past is a great hope for the future. It contains balm, consolation and comfort. It is the history of difficulties that turned out not to be so difficult. It is the history of struggles that came to an end. It is the history of long nights that were always followed by morning. Therefore to the wise man it is a joy to say with Solomon: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun." We have character to build up, and we require the old circumstances, ways, results, the inevitable methods of God, in order that we may surely and safely build. Then as we have to learn things, and follow them for ourselves, it is needful that the same old story be applied to each of us, for were the circumstances of a man's life greatly to vary, the character that would result must vary too. I am content. I look forward to this year, I confess, with no great enthusiasm, because I have ceased to be an enthusiast, and am simply a workman now. Life will bring me nothing new. Therefore if you expect me to be eager—excuse me—I have seen the show before. But no terror is possible, no cowardice, and no fear. I go forth with a grave heart, and the reason of it is this—"What has been, will be." Old deliverances are the deliverances of the future. The thing that has been shall be, God who did deliver in the olden time, will deliver now, and the fixity of God, and the uniformity of human experience, then, instead of being (as they were to Solomon) a weariness and vexation, shall become at last a comfort and joy. So that, beginning a new year, we begin it with courage and quiet confidence. The chances are, not one of us will find the year too much for us, because we have tried a great many years, and have got the better of them. "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hands of the Philistine." Thus then I rejoice, and look forward to the three hundred and sixty-five days with all their monotony—the sun rising and setting at the same time and place, knowing that through the same pane of glass the sun will shine (if it shines at all), with a quiet faith and confidence. For if the sun should rise in a different way I should not be ready for it. If the sea should take to going up-hill, there would be very sad changes with regard to human nature. If the law of gravity should take another change in consequence of the millennium, it would be a very sorry thing for human life. But human life is built up, all churches are erected, all institutions are founded, all coal pits sunk, all candles lighted, all the steps of men move according to one great proposition—what has been shall be. (*G. Dawson.*) *Imaginary schemes of happiness*.—There are few people who do not form in their minds agreeable plans of happiness, made up of future flattering prospects, which have no foundation except in their own fancies. This disposition, so general among mankind, is also one of the principal causes of their immoderate desire to live. A child fancies that as soon as he shall arrive at a certain stature, he shall enjoy more pleasure than he hath enjoyed in his childhood, and this is pardonable in a child. The youth persuades himself that men, who are what they call settled in the world, are incomparably more happy than young people can be at his age. Thus we go on from fancy to fancy, and from one chimera to another, till death arrives, subverts all our imaginary projects of happiness, and makes us know by our own experience what the experience of others might have fully taught us long before, that is, that the whole world is vanity. Of this vanity I would endeavour to convince you, and I dedicate this discourse to the destruction of imaginary schemes of happiness. All the past hath been vanity, and all the future will be vanity to the end of the world. The thing that hath been, is that which shall be: and that which is done, is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. I. Let us first of all determine the sense of the text, and EXAMINE WHAT ERROR THE WISE MAN ATTACKS. 1. When the wise man says that which hath been, is that which shall be, he doth not mean to attribute a character of firmness and consistency to such events as concern us. A spectator young in his observations, and distant from the central point, is amazed at the rapid changes, which he beholds suddenly take place like the creation of new worlds; he supposed whole ages must pass in removing those enormous masses, public bodies, and in turning the current of prosperity and victory. But should he penetrate into the spring of events, he would soon find that a very small and inconsiderable point gave motion to that wheel, on which turned public prosperity, and public adversity,

and which gave a whole nation a new and different appearance. Sometimes the rare qualities of one single general animate a whole army, and assign to each member of it his proper work, to the prudent a station which requires prudence, to the intrepid a station which requires courage, and even to an idiot a place where folly and absurdity have their use. From these rare qualities a state derives the glory of rapid marches, bold sieges, desperate attacks, complete victories and shouts of triumph. The general finishes his life by his own folly, or is supplanted by a party cabal, or sinks into inaction on the soft down of his own panegyrics, or a fatal bullet, shot at random and without design, penetrates the heart of this noble and generous man. Instantly a new world appears, and that which was is no more; for with this general victory and songs of triumph expired. It would be easy to repeat of individuals what we have affirmed of public bodies, that is, that the world is a theatre in perpetual motion, and always varying; that every day, and in a manner, every moment exhibits some new scene, some change of decoration. It is, then, clear that the proposition in the text ought to be restrained to the nature of the subject spoken of. 2. But these indeterminate words, "that which hath been shall be, and there is no new thing under the sun," must be explained by the place they occupy. Without quoting other examples, we observe that the words under consideration occur twice in this book, once in the text, and again in the fifteenth verse of the third chapter, where we are told, that which hath been is now, and that which is to be hath already been. However, it is certain that these two sentences, so much alike in sound, have a very different meaning. The design of Solomon in the latter passage is to inform such persons, as tremble at the least temptation, that they were mistaken. But in our text the same words, the thing that hath been is that which shall be, have a different meaning. It is evident by the place in which the wise man put them that he intended to decry the good things of this life, to make the vanity of them appear, and to convince mankind that no revolutions can change the character of vanity essential to their condition. We often declaim on the vanity of the world; but our declamations are not unfrequently more intended to indemnify pride than to express the genuine feelings of a heart disabused. We love to declaim against advantages out of our reach, and we take vengeance on them for not coming within our grasp by exclaiming against them. A man waiting on the coast to go abroad wishes for nothing but a fair wind, and he does not think that he shall find other, and perhaps greater, calamities in another climate than those which compelled him to quit his native soil. This is an image of us all. Our minds are limited, and when an object presents itself to us we consider it only in one point of view, in other lights we are not competent to the examination of it. Hence the interest we take in some events, in the revolutions of states, the phenomena of nature, and the change of seasons; hence that perpetual desire of change. Eyes never satisfied with seeing, and ears never filled with hearing. Poor mortals, will you always run after phantoms! No, it is not any of the revolutions you so earnestly desire can alter the vanity essential to human things: with all the advantages which you so earnestly desire, you would find yourself as void, and as discontented as you are now. II. LET US ENDEAVOUR TO ADMIT THESE TRUTHS WITH ALL THEIR EFFECTS. Let us attempt the work, though we have so many reasons to fear a want of success. There are four barriers against imaginary projects; four proofs, or rather four forces of demonstrations in evidence of the truth of the text. 1. Let us first observe the appointment of man, and let us not form schemes opposite to that of our Creator. When He placed us in this world, He did not intend to confine us to it: but when He formed us capable of happiness, He intended we should seek it in an economy different from this. Without this principle man is an inexplicable enigma: his faculties and his wishes, his afflictions and his conscience, his life and his death, everything that concerns man is obscure, and beyond all elucidation. His faculties are enigmatical. Tell us, what is the end and design of the faculties of man? Why hath he the faculty of knowing? What, is it only to arrange a few words in his memory? Only to know the sounds or the pictures to which divers nations of the world have associated their ideas? Hath man intelligence only for the purpose of racking his brain, and losing himself in a world of abstractions, in order to disentangle a few questions from metaphysical labyrinths, what is the origin of ideas, what are the properties, and what is the nature of spirit? Glorious object of knowledge for an intelligent being! An object in general more likely to produce scepticism than demonstration of a science properly so called. Let us reason in like manner on the other facul-

ties of mankind. His desires are problematical. What power can eradicate, what power can moderate his desire to extend and perpetuate his duration? The human heart includes in its wish the past, the present, the future—yea, eternity itself. Explain to us what proportion there can be between the desires of man and the wealth which he accumulates, the honours he pursues, the sceptre in his hand, and the crown on his head? His miseries are enigmatical. Who can reconcile the doctrine of a good God with that of a miserable man, with the doubts that divide his mind, with the remorse that gnaws his heart, with the uncertainties that torment him. His life is a mystery. What part, poor man, what part are you acting in this world? Who misplaced you thus? His death is enigmatical. This is the greatest mystery of all enigmas. Lay down the principle, which we have advanced, grant that the great design of the Creator, by placing man amidst the objects of this present world, was to draw out and extend his desires after another world, and then all these clouds vanish, all these veils are drawn aside, all these enigmas explained, nothing is obscure, nothing is problematical in man. His faculties are not enigmatical; the faculty of knowing is not confined to such vain science as he can acquire in this world. He is not placed here to acquire knowledge, but virtue. If he acquire virtue, he will be admitted into another world, where his utmost desire of knowledge will be gratified. His desires are not mysterious. When the laws of order require him to check and control his wishes, let him restrain them. When the profession of religion requires it, let him deny himself agreeable sensations, and let him patiently suffer the cross, tribulations and persecutions. After he shall have thus submitted to the laws of his Creator, he may expect another period, in which his desire to be great will be satisfied. His miseries are no more enigmatical; they exercise his virtue, and will be rewarded with glory. His life ceases to be mysterious. It is a state of probation, a time of trial, a period given him to make choice of an eternity of happiness, or an eternity of misery. His death is no longer a mystery, and it is impossible that either his life or his death should be enigmas, for the one unfolds the other. We conclude, then, that the destination of man is one great barrier against imaginary schemes of happiness. Change the face of society; subvert the order of the world: put despotical government in the place of a democracy; peace in the place of war, plenty in the place of scarcity, and you will alter nothing but the surface of human things, the substance will always continue the same. The thing that hath been, is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. 2. The school of the world opens to us a second source of demonstrations. Enter this school, and you will renounce all vain schemes of felicity. There you will learn that the greatest part of the pleasures of the world, of which you entertain such fine notions, are only phantoms. There you will find that those passions, which men of high rank have the power of fully gratifying, are sources of trouble and remorse, and that all the pleasure of gratification is nothing in comparison of the pain of one regret caused by the remembrance of it. In a word, you will there understand that what may seem the most fortunate events in your favour will contribute very little to your happiness. 3. But if the school of the world is capable of teaching us to renounce our fanciful projects of felicity, Solomon is the man in the world the most learned in this school, and the most able to give us intelligence. Accordingly we have made his declaration the third source of our demonstrations. I know no one more proper to teach us a good course of morality than an old reformed courtier, who chooses to retire after he hath spent the prime of his life in dissipation. On this principle, what an impression ought the declaration of Solomon to make on our minds! Few men are so fascinated with the world as not to know that some things in it are vain and vexatious. Most men say of some particular object, This is vanity: but very few are so rational as to comprehend all the good things of this life in the same class, and to say of each, as Solomon did, This also is vanity. A poor peasant, whose ruinous cottage doth not keep out the weather, will readily say, My cottage is vanity: but he imagines there is a great deal of solidity in the happiness of him who sleeps in a superb palace. Solomon knew all these conditions of life, and it was because he knew them all that he declaimed against them; and had you, like him, known them all by experience, you would form such an idea as he did of the whole. 4. To reflections on the experience of Solomon add your own, and to this purpose recollect the history of your life. Remember the time when sighing and wishing for the condition, in which Providence hath since placed you, you considered it as the

centre of felicity, and verily thought could you obtain that state you should wish for nothing more. You have obtained it. Do you think now as you did then?

III. From all these reflections **WHAT CONSEQUENCES SHALL WE DRAW?** That all conditions are absolutely equal? That as they, who actually enjoy the most desirable advantages of life, ought to consider them with sovereign contempt, so people, who are deprived of them, ought not to take any pains to acquire them, and to better their condition? No, God forbid we should preach a morality so austere, and so likely to disgrace religion. On the one hand, they, to whom God hath granted the good things of this life, ought to know the value of them, and to observe with gratitude the difference which Providence hath made between them and others. Do you enjoy liberty? Liberty is a great good: feel the pleasure of liberty. Are you rich? Wealth is a great good: enjoy the pleasure of being rich. Behold the man loaded with debts, destitute of friends, pursued by inexorable creditors, having indeed just enough to keep himself alive to-day, but not knowing how he shall support life to-morrow, and bless God you are not in the condition of that man. Do you enjoy your health? Health is a great good: relish the pleasure of being well. Nothing but a fund of stupidity or ingratitude can render us insensible to temporal blessings, when it pleases God to bestow them on us. As they, to whom Providence hath granted the comforts of life, ought to know the value of them, and to enjoy them with gratitude, so it is allowable—yea, it is the duty of such as are deprived of them to endeavour to acquire them, to meliorate their condition, and to procure in future a condition more happy than that to which they have hitherto been condemned, and which hath caused them so many difficulties and tears. Self-love is the most natural and lawful of all our passions. The more riches you have the more able will you be to assist the indigent. The higher you are elevated in society, the more you will have it in your power to succour the oppressed. Our design, in restraining your projects, is to engage you patiently to bear the inconveniences of your present condition, when you cannot remedy them: because whatever difference there may seem to be between the most happy and the most miserable mortal in this world, there is much less, all things considered, than our misguided passions imagine. Our design, in checking the immoderate inclination we have to contrive fanciful schemes of happiness, is to make you enjoy with tranquillity such blessings as you have. Most men render themselves insensible to their present advantages by an extravagant passion for future acquisitions. Above all, the design, the chief design we have in denouncing a vain and unsatisfactory being in this world, is to engage you to seek after a happy futurity in the presence of God; to engage you to expect from the blessings of a future state what you cannot promise yourself in this. But if all mankind ought to preserve themselves from the disorder of fanciful schemes of future pleasure, they above all are bound to do so, who are arrived at old age, when years accumulated bring us near the infirmities of declining life, or a dying bed. What advantage could I derive from a well-furnished table, I, whose palate hath lost the faculty of tasting and relishing food? What advantage could I derive from a numerous levée, I, to whom company is become a burden, and who am in a manner a burden to myself? In one word, what benefit can I reap from a concurrence of all the advantages of life, I, who am within a few steps of the gates of death? Happy! When my life comes to an end, to be able to incorporate my existence with that of the immortal God! Happy! When I feel this earthly tabernacle sink, to be able to exercise that faith, which is an evidence of things not seen! Happy to ascend to that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God! (Heb. xi. 1, 10).

(*J. Saurin.*) **There is no new thing under the sun.**—*Two standpoints* (with 2 Cor. v. 17):—These words bring before us two opposite standpoints which perhaps may be best described as the world's standpoint and Christ's standpoint. The one represents the Old Testament, the other the New. Solomon and Paul are the two types of these two different tendencies which are here brought before us—the world's standpoint and Christ's standpoint. Now, on the very threshold of the subject, we are arrested by a mighty paradox. If one had been asked beforehand to decide what would have been the origin of these two passages he should certainly, I think, have said that it would have been exactly the reverse. If there ever was a man in this world who ought to have felt the freshness and the joy and the glow of morning's dawn, of the thing called existence, that man was Solomon. If there ever was a man who ought to have felt the extreme jadedness, commonplaceness, disjointedness of the thing called life, that man was Paul.

And yet, strange and wondrous paradox, Solomon found life to be flat, stale, and unprofitable—a thing with all the glow and glory superseded and washed out. Paul felt life to be absolutely ringing with novelty. If any man be in Christ, he is not only new, but a new creation, "Old things are passed away"; and "behold all things are become new." Now, which of these views is the true one? They are both true! That is the mystery, that is the problem to be solved to-day—how two such different estimates of men can both at one and the same moment be true. Now, I think, if you look at these passages, you will find that the two passages themselves give two decided hints as to the reason of the paradox—suggest two causes why two such opposite statements are each of them true of the men whom they represent; why the one man found life to be all novelty, and the other man a scene of commonplaceness. Let us consider these, in the first instance, as an explanation of the reason of the difference of these two views, that Solomon was under the delusion that novelty was to be found in things, in outward objects—"There is no new thing under the sun." Paul, on the other hand, has taken his stand on a totally different principle; he says that novelty lies, and must always lie, not in things, but in men—"If any man be in Christ he is a new creature," or a new creation: "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." It was no change in the outward creation that made Paul feel the sense of novelty in passing into Christianity. How could it? The mirror cannot reveal anything that is not already in the room. You may put a new glass into the mirror, you may polish the old glass a hundred times, but unless you change the furniture beforehand the impression carried to the eye will be exactly the same. Now, let us take the opposite. Let us say, instead of beginning with polishing the mirror, or putting new glass into the mirror, we shall begin by changing the furniture of the room—in other words, by renewing the man. You find in everyday life, you and I find in this world, that a change in inward experience actually produces an absolutely new picture on a perfectly old mirror. You entered, *e.g.* some time ago into a picture gallery, your eye rested there incidentally upon something classical, say the battle of Lake Regulus or the Three Hundred that fought at Thermopylæ; it rested there, but glanced immediately away. What was Thermopylæ to you, with no knowledge of classical history? In five minutes that sight had no more impression on your organism than if it had never existed; you had forgotten its existence. Years pass away: you had begun to study classical studies, without reference to this picture. One day, incidentally, again you entered the same picture gallery: suddenly your eye was fastened, riveted. What a beautiful picture that is! How classical; how it makes the past live and breathe and glow! I never saw anything that expressed to my mind so vividly the old features of the Attic race. And yet that picture is not altered in outward lineament or feature: it is worse than better of the wear. It is the old glass in the mirror, but you have caught the glow of another scene—"Old things have passed away; and, behold, all things have become new." And now, perhaps, you can understand what it was that gave to this man of Tarsus such a thrill and glow in beholding this aspect of nature and of life. He, too, as much as you on these occasions, had been experiencing the hollowness, the barrenness, the nothingness of human existence. Suddenly, suddenly there flashed before him an ideal, a present, a beauty before which the heavens fled away. There came to him the sight of an ideal perfect beauty, and before that ideal of beauty the world burst anew into bloom; and was not Nature, too, glad in mood that half-hour? In very truth the beauty of that idea filled all things—it put out the sun and moon; it put out the stars; it put out the glory of the landscape; it extinguished the forms of Nature and sat upon them; it occupied the place of all things that had occupied his senses before; it made common things precious; it made little things large and grand; it turned the water into wine; it lightened the long and weary marches in Macedonia, Thessalonica, Attica, Achaia; it lightened the long and weary drudgery of commonplace life—of tent-making, the buying, the selling, the jabbering of everyday talk about things of no interest at all. This round earth everywhere was bound with gold chains about the feet of God. Say—in sight of such a transformation as this, in sight of a transformation that came, not from a new glass in Nature's mirror, but from a new impulse imparted to the innermost soul—can you wonder that the great Apostle of the Gentiles should have thus prescribed, inscribed, and stereotyped for ever his experience of the source of novelty—"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"? I come now to the second of the great principles

by which the passage explains its own paradox; the reason why Solomon failed to find that novelty in the things in which Paul expressed himself to have met with what was fresh and new. The second reason I take to be this: Solomon was under a second delusion, he not only thought that novelty lay in things, but he thought that novelty was to be reached by a change of the present, by a doing away with the present. Paul, then, has made the great discovery that in order to get novelty we do not require a change at all: it is the past—"If any man is in Christ he is a new creature," because "old things are passed away," therefore "all things are become new." Solomon had sown his wild oats and passed from the far country into his father's house, he had become a highly respectable member of society, but he was very much astonished to find that the seeds he had sown in the far country—he had finished the sowing of his wild seeds—were attending him in his father's house. It was the past that troubled Solomon. There is a saying common in this world, "It will be all the same a hundred years hence." A more foolish saying, perhaps, never existed. The weight that presses upon you and me is not of the present, but a weight of former years. He must be a poor-minded man, even if he has passed from the far country into his father's house, even if he has sown the wild oats, and is at what we call a staid and sober period of life—he must, I say, be a poor-minded man that never says to himself: "Have I left no cross on the wayside? I am safe now; I have planted my feet upon a rock, but have I left no record, no cross over which my brother man shall fall?" Is there nothing which can comfort a man under these circumstances—supposing you and I have got this fever of the past, this sense of old things present upon us—is there anything which can be to you and me a source of possible comfort? Yes, there is one. Provided now it were revealed to you and me by faith, revealed in such a way that my faith could accept it, that all this time when I thought I was travelling, leaving crosses by the wayside, there was a Being, a mysterious Power, coming up behind me and taking up every cross that I had planted down and transmuting—not cancelling it, that would be impossible, the past can never be restored—but in the literal sense of the word atoning for it, in the sense of a ladder by which my brother, instead of falling, may rise. If, for example, you saw Joseph, that you put last year into the dungeon, step on to the throne of Egypt, not in spite of that, but by reason of it; for that dungeon which you meant to be his destruction had become the first necessary step to his throne. Say, in such a sense as that, in such a sense of transmuted energy as that, would not the regenerated man feel a sense of freedom which would make life bright, happy, and new? Now, that was the case with this man Paul; he had been regenerated, sown his wild oats in the far country—although different from Solomon's, they had been very wild seeds indeed—and so he had still remaining the memory of those seeds. His life was very unhappy, for the old things had prevented the new things from appearing new. It was no mere sense of the abstract horror of sins that weighed him down, that made him cry, "O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Paul had killed a man—killed a man in his youth; the blood of the martyr Stephen lay upon him. That concrete, that personal thing, that thing which continued to meet him at every turn of life, again and again, with odious, horrid touch, it was that which weighed him down, and it was that against which he prayed time after time that it might be removed. "All the perfumes of Arabia would not cleanse that little hand," all the freedom from punishment, all the regeneration would not blot out this dark deed, this murder of Stephen, and he prayed if by any means this cup might pass from him. One day he heard a voice saying to him, "My strength is perfected in your weakness, My strength is perfected in your weakness," and he looked up and suddenly there met him an awful, nay, a glorious apparition; he seemed to see before him the same form that had stood by him at the last, and now it was carrying his cross, that awful deed of shame, the murder of Stephen; but as he gazed, suddenly the brazen cross became gold, it became lighted to all the rays of sunshine; and suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, there flashed upon Paul a new thought, revelation—he had unconsciously been making Christ's kingdom; he had not only made Stephen, but he had made Christianity; he had planted in that blood the first seed of a Church which will never die, and the worn-out man of Tarsus cried, "I am free! I am free! Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (*G. Matheson, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new?—Some-

thing new:—You remember that when Paul visited Athens his attention seems to have been especially attracted by two things: that the city was so full of idols; that the people who dwelt there were so given to change and novelty. "For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." When we read these words we are ready at first to exclaim, What a remarkable people these ancient Athenians must have been! Surely we have in them man's desire for novelty exemplified in a strangely exaggerated and quite exceptional form. But who can read these words without feeling that they describe the prevailing habit and attitude of the human mind? Go to those places where men and women "mostly congregate"—where they meet or work, or walk in friendly intercourse, and what do we see? Why, the same spectacle which engaged the attention of Paul at Athens—some telling, others hoarding, some new thing. Human nature is unchanged by the lapse of centuries; it cherishes the same desires. Anything new, while the charm of novelty remains, will awaken a degree of interest which is quite out of proportion to the intrinsic worth of the thing itself. I. MAN'S HOPELESS INQUIRY, "Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new?" This is evidently the inquiry of some one who has long been engaged in a fruitless and unsatisfactory search after some new thing. Of course, there is very much which is circumstantially new—relatively new—new in form—new in use. We have new machinery, new modes of locomotion, new houses, new furniture, new methods of preparing food; indeed, in one sense, the world seems filled with novelties. But all this does not seem to touch upon, or noticeably to lessen, what some one has called "the miserable monotony of human life." There is something very wonderful and very solemn in the sameness of human life, in the fact that there is nothing new; that there is, with all superficial differences, a substantial uniformity and monotony in human character and experience. If we look upon the family of man, in its present condition or in its past history, we are at first almost bewildered by the endless diversity of appearances. We find age differ from age, country from country, race from race, class from class, individual from individual. And yet, if we disregard the accidents of human life, its mere circumstances, and confine our attention to its essentials—to life itself, what do we find? We can distinguish through successive generations, not only the same leading types, but also the minute varieties of human character. The same feelings, motives, desires, principles of action, are operating now as powerfully and distinctly as before the flood; then and now might we see the glow of love, the elation of hope, the outpouring of gratitude. And we find that the ambition, the avarice, the pride, the sensuality of the nineteenth century after Christ, correspond in character and action with those same evil principles as they were displayed in the nineteenth century before Christ. All the cardinal sins are existing as veritably now as in any previous age. There is very little originality in sin. We are called to contend with, and, if may be, vanquish "old foes with new faces." It is because we are men of like passion with those that have preceded us, that the history of the past is intelligible. We find that the sins which called down the curses of Heaven ages and generations ago are still being perpetrated in our midst. Do you think that Eli's were the only disobedient children, who have brought their parents to grief? I might easily enlarge on this subject. I will confine myself to one illustration—Man's vain and fruitless inquiry after some new thing, an inquiry, the prosecution of which, in some form or another, has distinguished man in every age of the world. Take the case of Solomon. In this quest he spent a considerable portion of his life; and he left off with a sigh of disappointment, and with an inquiry expressive of utter hopelessness. Instead of dwelling on the mere fact, I would point out its significance. I would remind you that the fact of your inquiring, with all this feverish anxiety after "something new," reveals to us in a very clear, though sad and humiliating manner, the hollow, monotonous, unsatisfying nature of your past lives. What is the secret of your desire for something new in the future? Is it not, to a great extent, your dissatisfaction with the past? Now, without knowing anything about your lives individually, I am able to say something concerning them, the truth of which you will all readily admit—that they do not present to you at this moment a very satisfactory appearance. Let us take the most favourable example we can find. We speak of youth as a season of happiness. But are we correct in our estimate? There is a certain exemption from the cares of maturity—there is a certain buoyancy and elation of spirit, which we do not, to the full extent, retain. But, my young friends, tell me, Has

the world made you happy? The old man is so dissatisfied, that he believes that he must have been more happy in some previous period of life than he is now. The young man, not less dissatisfied, believes that a hitherto undiscovered happiness is waiting for him in the future. What, then, is the fact which demands our attention? It is this. You have always been going on from point to point, inquiring after "something new"; and your inquiry for the new is a confession as to the insufficiency of the old. As you pressed on in your way you have seen fruit hanging in the richest and most tempting clusters. You have plucked and tasted, and they have been as the apples of Sodom. What a spectacle does our world at this moment present! You see men everywhere seeking for happiness and rest, and finding them not. But this unceasing search after "something new," not merely reveals the unsatisfactory nature of the past—it ought also to suggest an important caution as to the future. Is it not reasonable that you should pause in your pursuit, and inquire if it is likely that you will find, in the direction in which you have hitherto gone, anything which will really satisfy you? Is it reasonable for a man to go grovelling along, hugging a delusion like this? As long as you continue to indulge the hope of finding happiness and satisfaction in this world, you will never look above or beyond this world for them. Let us admit that in the future everything will turn out as you propose—as you desire. What then? Why, that the future will be as the past. You are seeking happiness, you are seeking contentment in the wrong way; your faces are set in the wrong direction. We see, then, where the mistake is. We want some new thing, but it is within, and not without ourselves. II. GOD'S GRACIOUS AND SATISFACTORY REPLY. To all these dissatisfied searchers after novelty, we can hear God say, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." Yes, this is our great necessity, to become new creatures in Christ Jesus; then shall we find old things pass away, and all things become new. Do you want a new experience? You may have it in communion and fellowship with Christ. Do you, wearied with the familiar and unsatisfying objects of the world, want new sources of enjoyment and new objects of contemplation and pursuit? All these you will realize in a life in Christ. (T. M. Morris.) *Life in the light of Christ*:—Since Ecclesiastes meditated on the problems of human life, one really "new thing" has been seen. The "Sun of Righteousness" has risen upon the world "with healing in His wings." The Word of God took flesh, and dwelt among men. The Only-begotten Son has revealed the Eternal Father, and has "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." This new manifestation of God—this new and fuller revelation of His redeeming purpose for mankind—has entered as a modifying factor into human experience. The cardinal features of life remain as before; but they take on a new aspect when they are seen in the light of our Father's love, and of that glorious immortality for which He is seeking to train us. What may be as "vanity," when it is considered as an end, may be anything but "vain" when it is considered as a means. A scaffolding may be a poor affair; but what if a beautiful and substantial temple is being reared within it? A schoolroom, with its appropriate furniture, might not be a satisfying home; nevertheless it may well fulfil the purposes of education and discipline. The perishable may minister to the everlasting. The unprofitable may lead to higher gains. The unsatisfying may awaken a craving for that which will truly fill the soul. From this point of view the essential sameness of life through the ages bears its testimony to the persistent purpose of God and the constant needs of humanity. Why should not the schoolroom remain the same, if it has been adapted by Infinite Wisdom for the training and discipline of immortal souls? Human life, viewed in itself, as a brief span of existence bounded by death, may be as "vanity"; but human life, viewed in the light of Christ and immortality, is an arena of education by probation—a sphere for the formation of spiritual and enduring character, and for the service of a living and loving Father. (T. C. Finlayson.)

Vers. 13, 14. **I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven.**—*The mysteries of human life*:—Now, there has never been any book which can be compared to this marvellous book of Ecclesiastes. It is the laboratory in which the penitent gathers bitter herbs, the garden in which the wise man gathers sweet flowers. It is the laboratory to which the greatest sage of old times deliberately puts his hand and his head to try experiments, in order to get a little acquaintance with the mysteries of human life.

The scale upon which he experimented is as vast as the power of man; as we may see when we consider the discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton, the speculations of Priestley, the anatomists among the bones, and the geologists among the stones, as also that most sublime of men, full of animal life, sensual desire, and full of wisdom, who obtained a knowledge of all times. What was the object of his experiments? They were deliberately entered upon to try what life could do for his soul, and he tried it in the most philosophical way. How splendid to read his experiment. "I builded me a house." How many men thus see if they can satisfy the desires of their souls. I know of one man who built one of the greatest houses of modern times, and when he had finished it he said, "If I could find as much pleasure in pulling it down as I have done in rearing, I would begin to pull it down." The charm was in the experiment, and not in the thing which was got. So Solomon tried houses; and we know the style in which he built. The very cedars of Lebanon trembled, for there was to be an axe among them; the far-off stones were to be brought, for there was a king building. He tried gardening also—the loveliest of all human pleasures, the sweetest and most innocent, the most lasting, and one from which men get more pure pleasure than anything else. Then he tried society. "I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces." And then he came to the result of all his experiments: "It is all vanity and vexation of spirit." Now, it is a subject worth pondering upon, what is meant by this endless search; whether there be a remedy for this perpetual discontent, and where it is to be found. We never do meet with a contented people. The more cultivated they are, the more real will be the discontent. In which country of Europe do you suppose are there the most suicides—the stupidest or the most cultivated? You will say in the former, of course; but you are entirely wrong. The most elevated districts are more disturbed than others. Solomon also tried whether books and study would give him what he sought; and he came down with a great library and among his parchments, but eventually comes to the conclusion that "much study is a weariness to the flesh." Now, it will be found that there are more suicides in Prussia than in Spain; for these reasons, that in one country they think, and in the other they drink; in one country they lead, and in the other they are driven. Wherever there is but a little looking into its problems, according to the ability they have for making experiments, there is the same result. I envy the souls that never are weary. Is there anything much more touching than this great desire which is upon me, this impatience of the dull routine of things, this great element of weariness, of always seeing the same things over and over again! It is so wonderful! Solomon had seen all the wonderful things that were to be seen, and come to the conclusion that there is nothing new under the sun. Ask a man who is perpetually reading and studying, and he will tell you he gets fearfully weary: he finds the same stereotyped state of things. We toil and fever after wealth, and leave it to somebody, we know not what sort of person he may be—whether a fool or not. We put by a little, and know not what manner of person will have it. We rejoice in building up something beautiful and commanding, and know not what kind of creature will inhabit it. We erect a house, perhaps, to be occupied by beggars; we leave an orchard to be used by fools, gather books to be scattered over the world: or, perhaps, we collect a magnificent gallery of pictures, and leave them to a progeny who cannot understand them. Looking at his own work, and of the labour which his hand had wrought, Solomon said, as he walked through his palaces, "This is a weariness to the flesh." He was conscious of understanding the infinite forms of human weariness; such was the result of his analysis of the experiments he made in Jerusalem, and he ends by showing that nothing would satisfy him. In the effort to get quit of this fearful discontent, men are always trying to get something new, to get something that will satisfy them. One man says he will retire, and fancies for himself some little island in the sweet Mediterranean Sea, where the scene is ever fair, the sky ever blue—where the women are beautiful and never commonplace, and the men classical in contour, and the children sweet little cherubs, never growing vulgar. He dreams of some sweet paradise, and he goes to find it. But he finds that black care, all haunting care, in the saddle behind the horseman. The man carries himself wheresoever he goes. How touching to read of the humble experiment of poor Charles Lamb, longing for the day when he should have nothing to do, no longer confined to the hateful India House, sitting and working sadly and wearily at those ledgers, "The thing that has been will be," when I have stood at

the banks and other places and seen the marble-like figures who have toiled there: such fearful repetition, the manner in which they spend their lives, in adding up the day-books, counting up the figures, with a view to the dividends! What would poor Lamb have given to get out of this condition? What a tragedy that was when he went down to Brighton to enjoy himself, and lay down the burden of his daily routine for a little while; when the coach got half-way and met the one coming in the opposite direction, he got out of the one he was in and stepped into the other! That was vanity and vexation of spirit. What was the secret of Byron, of the strange opinions of that spoiled child of fashion? Now, all this weariness comes very much out of the impatience of the condition by which we are surrounded. Then the majority of people are so fond of the proprieties of life, asking the ordinary questions and receiving the eternal answers. Where have you been? Where are you going? What has happened? So that everything even in friendship gets tiresome. (*G. Dawson.*) *The pursuit of wisdom and knowledge:*—1. This wisdom and knowledge, if a man is determined to go far beyond his fellows in the acquisition of it, must be discovered, and examined, and appropriated, by "much study"; and this, as Solomon observes, is "a weariness of the flesh." The incessant stretch of the mind's faculties, frequent harassing and anxious perplexity, studious days and sleepless nights, must be his portion, who sets his heart on the attainment of unusual eminence, in science in general, or in any of its various departments. 2. In this pursuit, as in others, there are many disappointments to be expected, to fret, and mortify, and irritate the spirit:—such as, experiments failing, some of them perhaps long-continued, promising, and costly;—facts turning out contradictory, and unsettling or overturning favourite theories;—the means of prosecuting a train of discovery falling short, at the very moment, it may be, when they are most desirable;—trifling and worthless results arising, after much labour, long-tried patience, and sanguine expectation;—the anticipated honour and pleasure of introducing a new and important invention or discovery, the product of the experiments and investigations of years, lost on the very eve of arrival, by the priority of an unknown competitor. 3. There are some parts of knowledge which are, in their very nature, painful and distressing. In a world where sin reigns, many must be the scenes of misery, many the afflicting occurrences and facts, which present themselves to the observant and investigating mind, that is in quest of general and extensive information. They abound both in the past and present history of mankind. They are fitted to fill the heart with "grief" and "sorrow"; and the more a man's knowledge extends,—the more he reads, and hears, and observes, the more copious will this source of bitterness become. 4. There is to be taken into account the mortification of pride that must be experienced, in consequence of the limited nature of the human faculties. 5. There is a similar feeling of mortification, arising from the very circumstance, that, with all the knowledge and wisdom that are acquired, there is still a blank,—still a consciousness of want and deficiency, in regard to true happiness. 6. The man of "much wisdom" and "increased knowledge," generally, if not universally, becomes the marked object of the scorn of some, and the envy of others. Some depreciate his studies and all their results, laugh at them, and hold them up to contempt and ridicule. Others are stung with secret jealousy; which is the odious parent of all the hidden arts of detraction and calumny, and of injurious and unworthy attempts to deprive him of his well-earned honours, and to "cast him down from his excellency." 7. The man who occupies his powers in the pursuit and acquisition of human wisdom alone, careless of God, and uninfluenced by regard to His authority and to His glory, is leaving eternally a wretched blank; has no solid and satisfactory support in the anticipation of it, when the thought intrudes itself upon his mind; and is treasuring up grief and sorrow for the close of his career. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. All is vanity and vexation of spirit.—*The vanity of a worldly life:*—The tone of these words is intensely sad, and perhaps some of us are inclined to think that they embody a morbid conception of human life, for they seem to lack the healthy inspiration of hope. However, we shall understand this declaration by considering it, not as a Divine assertion, but as the expression of a particular human experience. God does not condemn all earthly good as vanity, but man in one of his moods utters this bitter cry,—it is the wail of disappointment. Life is a very different thing to different persons in different positions, just as our view of the landscape changes with our standpoint and the varying state of the elements.

The hills and valleys, how different is their appearance when veiled in dim twilight or mantled in thick darkness to what it is when flooded with the glorious sunlight. So is our view of life affected by our fluctuating feelings and changeful circumstances. To the boy life is a promise, a beautiful flower in the bud; to the old man it is a closing day, a solemn sunset; to the man in prosperity it is a quiet lake, with only the gentlest zephyrs rippling its surface; to the man in adverse circumstances it is a stormy sea kept in perpetual disquiet by the rude and boisterous breezes; to the satiated pleasure-seeker, the worn-out sensualist, the disappointed voluptuary, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." But while human life has many phases corresponding to the many moods of the soul, each life is developing into something real, and what that something shall be depends upon how the life is lived. In changing circumstances we are forming a permanent character, transitory experiences are creating in us settled dispositions; and we must decide whether our life shall culminate in the joy of satisfaction or the agony of despair. I. A LIFE SPENDING ITSELF IN SEARCH OF PLEASURE IS A VEXATIOUS EXPERIENCE. Here we have the representation of a man seeking everywhere for pleasure; yet, completely baffled in his search, the phantom constantly eludes his grasp. This man was not limited to a very narrow sphere in his endeavours after happiness; he had a kingdom at his command; he made its vast resources subservient to his amusement. He ransacked the treasures of earth to find some new source of delight, and was determined, if possible, to discover pleasurable excitements. He seems almost to have exhausted the science of pleasure, and he sums up the result of his experiments in these words, "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." From this we learn that pleasure sought for itself has no reality; it is a vain imagination, a deceitful fancy. Selfishness defeats and torments itself until it becomes the victim of a perpetual discontent. Or, in other words, to seek happiness for its own sake is not the way to find it; it comes constantly to pure and healthful activity; it dwells ever in the hearts of the good; but it does not reveal itself to the mere devotee of pleasure. This is true of every kind of pleasure of which our nature is capable. 1. The natural and moderate gratification of our appetites yields satisfaction, and so God has ordained that a healthy human life shall be sweet and enjoyable. But when a man makes this sensuous gratification his god, and hopes to find in it an unfailing source of joy, he deceives himself. Even natural indulgence exalted so as to become the chief end of life soon loses its power to please. The sensibilities are dulled, the palate fails to relish luxuries which once ravished it with delight, the eye tires of splendid artificial sights, and the ear grows weary of sound in its most pleasing combinations. The system is thrown out of tune, and that which should produce sweet harmony makes only annoying discord. 2. We are susceptible of still purer and deeper delights through the medium of the intellect. The arts and sciences may contribute largely to our enjoyment if we possess the power to appreciate them. The man who seeks pleasure in philosophy will find more problems to perplex than ideas to amuse; whereas the man who strives after truth will always discern some heavenly thoughts capable of stimulating him amid the uncertainties of his investigation. The man who ransacks the treasures of literature with no higher aim than entertainment will have no continuity of joy, for he will be the victim of inclination, the sport of passion; he will not see the beauties which have charmed men of nobler motive. When we learn that life is not a selfish search, but an unselfish service; not the sacrifice of everything to self, but the subordination of self to God; then we receive a spiritual joy. The man who has spent his life like a butterfly flitting from flower to flower in search of sweets at last whines out the melancholy cry, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." But the noble soul who has used himself in the service of God and humanity goes to his heaven exclaiming, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand," etc. II. AN EARTHLY LIFE SEPARATED FROM THE FUTURE IS A PERPLEXING MYSTERY. To the mind of the disappointed pleasure-seeker all is vanity, because the future is left completely out of sight. This view of life is secularistic. It regards only one world, and in this world seeks the highest good, but does not find it. This worldly view of human existence transforms our life into a dark mystery, and shuts out every ray of Divine light. This world is incomplete, it needs another to explain it; this life requires another for its interpretation. The first paradox that meets us is—1. If this be the only world, earthly enjoyment is the highest good, but the struggle for it brings vexation. Banish the belief in an

eternal future, and the first reflection is, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Let us regulate our life so as to secure the largest share of earthly good, even though we thus destroy our finer feelings. Being convinced that there is no future life, we must value things by their power to fill up our measure of present gratification. Why should thoughts of morality or retribution be allowed to bridle our inclinations if morality is a delusion, and judgment simply a dream? But this conception of human life is a glaring contradiction. The life which it sets before us leads to sorrow, and ends in pain. Indulgence induces weariness, selfishness creates disquietude, and passionate pleasures bring forth death. 2. When the future is left out of sight the godly life loses one of its most powerful motives. The culture of manhood is at a discount in a world where men are estimated by what they have, and not by what they are. The devout and thoughtful man finds himself in possession of truths which the world is not prepared to receive, the utterance of which will call forth the opposition of prejudice and pride. The honest man must suffer if he will carry his convictions into the realm of daily business life. True, some modern teachers say that we should be strong enough to live a Christly life without the hope of personal immortality, consoling ourselves with the sublime idea that we shall live on in the influences which we transmit to posterity. This doctrine may possess charms for the select few, it is scarcely suited to the multitude of disciples. III. A LIFE WHICH DOES NOT ACKNOWLEDGE GOD IS A HOPELESS DISAPPOINTMENT. This is the root of the matter: man is restless and dissatisfied so long as he puts selfish pleasure in the place of God. It is taught in the Bible, engraven on our constitution, and attested by experience that every attempt to find a substitute for God is vain. We owe our supreme love to Him, and can only be really happy when we render it cheerfully. 1. Faith in God reveals an inexhaustible source of bliss. Of every other fountain Christ has said, "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life." Here we have an unfailing spring of joy, a sun always shining. 2. Faith in God exerts its highest influence when earthly joys are fading. In sorrow, when worldly joys are distasteful, faith illumines the darkness and gently dissipates our fear. In pain, when pleasures have fled and human consolations are feeble, God is manifest as the God of all comfort. Oppressed by the thought of having grieved our God, Christ appears as the Pardoner of our sins and the Healer of broken hearts. And at last, when this world is passing from our gaze and we enter the thick gloom of death, we shall hear the Divine Voice saying, "Fear not, for I am with thee." Then, when we tremble before the portals of the mysterious future, and pass through the last trying storm, inspired by heavenly love, we may cry, not "All is vanity and vexation of spirit!" but "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" (W. G. Jordan, B.A.) *Pessimism* (with Gen. i. 31):—What could be more different than the tempers of mind which uttered sayings like these? Creation and life very good. Creation and life, vanity, delusion, hollowness, and vexation of spirit. Both cannot be right. But statements so diverse are easily enough explained if we remember that in the Bible we are dealing, not with a book, but with a library; not with a literary work, but with a nation's literature. It is not a pure revelation we have, but the strange eventful history of one. We may expect, therefore, to find in it great variety, and almost hopeless difference of view. The present form of that chapter of Genesis may be regarded roughly as bearing the impress of the eighth or ninth century B.C., the sanguine stamp of a great prophetic time. The Book of Ecclesiastes, on the other hand, is not earlier than the third century, when the disruption of the two kingdoms, the insecurity of an absolute and semipagan monarchy, the captivity of the nation, the setting up of the hierarchy, and the conquest by both Greek thought and Greek arms had deeply changed and saddened the spirit of Hebrew dream. Our own generation finds a special attraction in this Book of Ecclesiastes. We too have fallen on an age when the first free fearless vigour of our Elizabethan time has gone by, when even the John Bull view of England is collapsing, when the condition and prospects of our crowded society are raising questions which only the stupid can face with a light heart, or treat with the old answers. The old pharmacopeia of politics has no medicine for the new disease. We in England doubt and fear. Abroad they deny and destroy. In this country we are not as yet seriously troubled with the more thoroughgoing forms of pessimism; but I do not think we have escaped it, for the reason that we have not yet come to it. We are as yet only

in the Agnostic stage, but we are fairly well through that, and are beginning to get dissatisfied with it. From that stage we must go either up or down. We may go up. A truer philosophy (not even now without a witness) may restore the vigour of a nobler faith. Or we may go down. We may descend to the next level of unbelief, to the lower cycle in the mind's inferno. The next level is pessimism. To deal with pessimism and to prevent pessimism we must have an ideal which is something more than an idea of ours, something more than an ambition of ours. We must have an ideal which is the fountain head of our ideas and ambitions, one which is working incessantly to bring us to its own image; one in whose presence we feel inspiration and attainment; one last and surely blended; one that is gradually filling up the abysses of pessimism by drawing together its edges and reconciling what we are with what we long to be. We must have a God, in brief, who is at once our Mighty One and our Redeemer. The solution of life is not to be found in grappling with pain, but in the conflict with sin. The strongest soul that ever lived was crushed by sins rather than pains, by sins not His own, not by the pains which were. Here lies the centre and secret of Christianity, not in the miracles of healing, but in the miracles of forgiveness, and in the Cross, the greatest of them all. And here lies the key and reason why Christianity, with all its melancholy, with all its Divine sadness, can never be pessimist. It is not simply and generally that, being a religion of faith and hope, it cannot give way to despair. But it is here, in this principle, viz. that in Christianity we never become aware of the worst till we are in possession of the best. The deepest sense of evil is possible only to a believer in redemption—not a redemption that shall be one day, but that is now going on. How could we bear to see the worst and utmost evil and sorrow, but for the sense and certainty that it has in it the sentence of its own death? How could we, as a race, face death successfully—death, the great ravager of love—except in the loving faith that death itself is wounded unto death? The best, in revealing to us the worst, abolishes it, and the light of God, which maketh all things manifest, brings sin out only that it may die in the great and terrible daylight of the Lord. (*P. T. Forsyth, M.A.*) *Insatisfaction*.—Various explanations have been offered of this strange restlessness and insatisfaction. 1. One set of observers see in this the mainspring of activity, progress, and improvement. If man, say they, found happiness at any point of his life, he would cease to aim at a higher state. The most contented people are ever the most barbarous, and the beast of the field is more contented than the lowest classes of men. With animals and men of the lowest grade there is stagnation. Not until you produce insatisfaction, not, rather, till you give the mind ability to conceive the higher state, and aim at elevation from the lower, will the world be improved. Without insatisfaction the arts would be impossible, and all higher enjoyments unknown. 2. A second and higher view is that which, while admitting that insatisfaction is the mainspring of activity and progress, still further affirms that it is indicative of a nature in man to be satisfied, not with the terrestrial, but with the heavenly,—not with the things of sense, but with the things of faith,—not with the creature, but with God. This is surely the true explanation of that unrest of the soul which still, after each new conquest, whether of truth or means of enjoyment, feels unsatisfied. It is the higher nature in us that is still ungratified. We want to know truth and beauty—all truth and beauty; not merely their outward shadows, but themselves. 3. But, further, we have to take into account the fact of depravity and sinfulness. I rather think that this fact, however, is not to be considered as explanatory of our insatisfaction so much as of dissatisfaction. Insatisfaction is right; dissatisfaction is wrong. God intended that the soul should not be satisfied; but He wants that we shall not be dissatisfied. Much light is yours, which Solomon, wise as he was, had not. He probably had glimpses of the depravity of his own heart, and generally of the human heart, yet hardly with the demonstrative clearness with which it comes home to our convictions; and he seems to have been greatly in the dark relative to that future life which hath been brought to light through Christ, to which is reserved the full enjoyment of the soul. He said, All is vanity, because he did not know the all. His eye ranged only over time. Eternity was all darkness. 4. And this summons before us another view explanatory of the insatisfaction of man. We are here preparing, conning our lesson, forming our character—a character which is to last with us for ever. We were not sent here that we might enjoy, but that we might learn, that we might grow up strong men fit to live through the everlasting ages. The Christian life is

a race, a battle, a work, a crucifixion. Through the portals of death alone we gain the Elysian fields. (J. Bennet.)

Ver. 15. **That which is crooked cannot be made straight.**—*Making the crooked straight* (with Isa. xl. 4):—Both these men gaze upon the affairs of human kind, and are afflicted with the sense of crookedness. It does not require much insight to perceive that much in human nature is marred and crooked, and life is gnarled and twisted. The world is a place of grand plans and poor executions, a realm of broken columns, snapped friendships, strained relationships. It abounds in crooked things. Both men pronounced the things crooked, but one said it in a despondency, the other said it in hope. One man's heart shrinks up in despair, the other man's expands in the strength of a great assurance. The two types belong to every age. They rub shoulders in common life. We meet them everywhere, the prophets of melancholy and the cheery bearers of glad tidings of great joy. There are always those who behold the crooked and see no prospect of rectification; and there are always those who see the crooked and also behold its ultimate correction. How do these contradictory conclusions arise? How can we explain the despondent judgment which anticipates no day of renewal? We are always very much inclined to seek our explanation in our natural temperaments. How frequently we hear this word in common life, "I am naturally of a despondent turn of mind." There is certainly some truth in these explanations, but when we seek for an excuse in our temperament, we are attended by grave and serious perils. It is possible to regulate our powers, by observing the law of balance. If a man's constitution has some ingredient in excess, he can restrain and control it by developing another ingredient. It is by the balance and antagonisms of our faculties that we shape our characters. Let us cultivate the opposite to our excesses. Or, let us exercise ourselves in some grace which will act as guardian upon our natural bias. I have said that both men saw the crooked things. Is that quite true? To a certain degree it is true, but the half remains unsaid. To see anything clearly in all its vivid relationships we must believe strongly. The Word of God proclaims that believing is seeing. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see?" "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day." He saw it through the lens of faith. If we would have clear sight, we must have firm belief. If we desire to see things clearly in their far-reaching relationships, we must come to them with a confident faith. Koheleth had no faith, and therefore his sight was only partial. He beheld the crookedness; he did not see its infinite relationships. Isaiah believed in God, and with his faith-washed eyes he looked at the crookednesses of men with the vision of an optimist. (J. H. Jowett, M.A.) *The crooked things straightened*:—It is easy enough to straighten some crooked things. Here, for instance, is a piece of paper. I can take it in my hand, and squeeze and crumple it all up till there is not one straight piece in it as big as your little-finger nail. And then I can spread it out on the table, and smooth it down, and make it just as straight again as ever it was. And just so, if I take a tender willow twig, I can wind it round my finger like a thread; then I can unwind it again, and it will come out as straight as ever. But let that willow twig remain crooked while it is growing for five or ten years, and then you may write on it the words of our text; for "that which is crooked cannot be made straight." I. WE ARE ALL BORN WITH CROOKED HEARTS. II. LIKE THE TREE OR THE CLAY, OUR HEARTS ARE HAVING SOMETHING DONE TO THEM WHICH WILL MAKE IT MUCH HARDER TO STRAIGHTEN WHAT IS CROOKED IN THEM. With the tree, it is its growth that will make its crookedness hard to straighten. With the clay, it is the baking or burning of it. With ourselves, it is the exercising or practising of what is sinful in our hearts that will make it hard to straighten them. This world is God's school. All the time spent in it is time spent at school. We are getting educated here for eternity. And when we form a wrong habit of thinking, or feeling, or acting, we are hardening a crooked point and fastening it upon our characters. And when we go out of the school of life,—that is, when we come to die and go into eternity,—then it will be true that "that which is crooked cannot be made straight." And so it is with the gardener and his trees. While they are young and tender it is very easy to straighten them when they get crooked. But let them only grow crooked, and then what can he do with them? III. THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING STRAIGHT WHILE WE ARE GETTING EDUCATED. Did you ever know a person who had charge of a nursery of young trees? If you did, you might learn some very useful lessons from his example.

The great object with him is to keep his trees in proper shape while they are growing. He walks about among them very often, and watches them closely. If he sees one getting crooked, he tries to straighten it. If merely bending it with his hands will not keep it straight, then he puts a stake in the ground, and ties the young tree to it, so as to keep it in a right position all the time it is growing. And if the gardener thinks it worth his while to take so much care and pains with the education of a mere tree, which, after all, will only last a few years, how much more careful should we be in educating our souls, which are to live for ever and ever! Did you ever go to a photographer's to have your likeness taken? If you did, you remember how very careful he was to have you seated properly before he began to take it. Then, when everything was arranged just to suit him, he said, "There now; keep just so for a little while, and we'll get a nice picture." Suppose, now, you had shut one eye just at that moment, and kept it shut for two or three minutes: what then? Why, you would have had the likeness of a one-eyed boy or girl. Or suppose you had twisted your face, or screwed up your mouth: why, you would have had a picture of yourself with a screwed-up mouth or a twisted face. Nothing in the world could prevent it. Now, this world is God's photograph office; and we are all staying here to have our likeness taken. While we are young the likeness is being taken of what we are to be as men and women. And all the time we are living here the likeness is being taken of what we shall be hereafter for ever. IV. HOW CAN WE GET STRAIGHT AND KEEP STRAIGHT TILL OUR LIKENESS IS FINISHED? This is the most important question. Remember we are not straight, to begin with. Recollect that we are all born with crooked or sinful hearts. They must be made straight before they can be kept straight. How, then, can a crooked, sinful heart be made straight or good? We must take it to Jesus, and pray for Him to take away all that is wicked in it. Jesus is able to do this. But no one else besides Him can do it for us. But when our hearts are made straight, how are we to keep them straight? Two things are necessary for this:—we must get Jesus to help us, and we must help ourselves. We must get Jesus to help us. Without His help we can do nothing at all in this matter. But how will God help us here? By giving us His grace and His Holy Spirit. These are just the kind of help to us, in trying to keep our hearts straight, that the sun and rain are to the farmer in making his crops grow. But how are we to get this help from God? By earnest prayer. (*R. Newton, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. **I communed with mine own heart.**—*The wisdom of self-communion*:—"I communed with mine own heart." Solomon, by self-communion, by questioning his own consciousness, and by contemplating the facts of his career, guided by the Spirit of his God, evolved a theory of morals concerning the highest good for man. This royal genius, and genius royal, gives us a list of all his experiences undertaken in the search after "What was that good for the sons of men which they should do." "I communed with mine own heart." Yes, and he communicated the result of his self-communings for the benefit of mankind. Like all who approach him nearest in genius he was communicative and not secretive. A cunning man would have hidden his experiences as the hypocrite hides his sin; but this man was too wise to be cunning. Solomon's self-communing was not of the sort of one of your hermit philosophers, who write about a world with which they have little consorted, and whose throbbing life-pulse they have seldom felt; who are busy dissecting the body of its dead past while the living present is dying before them. His self-communing was not the brooding pessimism and acrid egotism of the lonely, self-isolated cynic: his chair of study was the seat of judgment; his college, the thronged courts of royalty; his books, the men and women of his time. He was a philosopher who was a man of affairs and busy, not with theories and truisms alone, but with the political and social commerce of his epoch. He stood in the eye of the world, and the world lay open to his eye; and this man, who with largest oversight could look abroad upon the world, could also look with keenest insight upon the world within himself. These powers of prospection and introspection lifted him, and according to the degree in which we possess them, lift us out of the dust of mere animal existence: they are the motor of our will's responsibility. Self-introspection, self-communion, is as a mirror, wherein the ego beholds the reflection of itself, and plays the spy upon the secret movements of the soul; it is the keenest detector of furtive faults, and the severest monitor of sly sins. Commune with your own heart frequently, if you would learn to know your own self truly. Commune with your

own heart, and you will learn the necessity of its closer communion with God, in order that you may gain from Him the wisdom and knowledge necessary to reform and renew its sad estate. Do you ever commune with your own hearts, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate in the kingdom of Jesus Christ;—lo, that kingdom which, if it be not, should be within you? Are you able to say, in the words of the text, "Yea, my heart hath great experience of wisdom and knowledge"—experience of Him who is the Wisdom of God and the First Fruits of knowledge? Have your hearts this experience, this knowledge? If you have, you shall obtain your allotted part in the freehold of a spiritual estate unencumbered by vanity and vexation of spirit, to which you are called to be heirs in the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ. (C. R. Panter, LL.D.) **My heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.**—*The experience of wisdom and knowledge:*—In order to realize the goodness or badness of a thing, there is nothing like experience: not simply under favourable circumstances alone, but under unfavourable ones; not now and then, by mere fits and starts, but uniformly so. Now, we do not hesitate to affirm that the general experience of a careless and sinfully-disposed person is, on the whole, one of a most unsatisfactory character: for, while such an individual may appear to the eye of others free from all alarm of danger, and under the most pleasurable excitements, yet, as long as the conscience is not absolutely deadened, and there is any impressive idea of God's existence and power, and an apprehension of a future retribution, the soul of such an individual cannot be otherwise than restless, and far from peaceful. On the other hand, the upright, honest, sincere, and trustful Christian, although struggling against his own corrupt tendencies, and daily striving to obtain a mastery over himself, experiences within his own heart the unspeakable satisfaction of knowing that he is on the path of duty and of safety. That path, we all know, is sometimes a troubled one: yet, withal, the Christian is more substantially and lastingly happy than the ungodly and reckless, be their outward circumstances ever so flourishing, and their aspect ever so imposing. And this fact is palpably and unmistakably so, when the test of experience is brought to the bar of death.

I. THE EXPERIMENTAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE LIFE WHICH IS TEMPORAL. 1. With respect to wisdom, the word has various meanings in Scripture. Thus it is put for prudence and discretion, which enables us to perceive what is fit to be done, at the right time, in the right place, and by the right person. The word "wisdom" is taken for the faculty of invention, skill, and ingenuity, as when God told Moses He had filled with wisdom, and understanding, and knowledge, Bezaleel and Aholiab, to invent several sorts of work for completing the tabernacle. Wisdom is used for craft or subtily—as when Pharaoh said, "Come on, let us deal wisely with the Israelites." It is also taken for doctrine, learning, and experience. There can be no doubt about the excellency of this wisdom, when judiciously, or rather legitimately employed. We do not blame the artisan for his skill, the man of science for his discoveries, the politician for his conscientious part in legislation, the tradesman for his forethought, industry and skill of management, and the housewife for her careful economy. No; but the evil of worldly wisdom is when it is exercised in the pursuit of worthless objects; when it schemes and plans for the mere gratification of some fleshly passion; when it wraps itself up in disguise, in order to lead astray the innocent, and to entrap wickedly the virtuous; when it plans only for time, without a due reference to eternity: when all its superstructures bear the character of earth, and have written upon their portals, "Ichabod"; their glory vain, perishable, and passing away.

2. And then, with respect to the knowledge of Solomon: he was well acquainted with the various principles, and passions, and objects, and pursuits, and tendencies of human nature. This royal king, gifted with a large and capacious intellect, well versed in the affairs of human life, as they apply to human character and station, raised to a throne in his day among the greatest seats of royal power, fed with every dainty the earth could produce, and constantly encircled with the charms of beauty, and all the enchanting glory of a rich and prosperous principedom, was nevertheless a stranger to the sweet peace of the humble-minded, of the Divinely trustful and obedient—a peace which sometimes passes by the couch of the palace, and rests softly and sweetly upon the hard pillow of the cottage.

II. CONSIDER EXPERIENCE AS IT APPLIES ITSELF TO THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHRISTIAN. 1. Here also is a knowledge which is experimental, that is to say, not a mere thing of hearsay or of theory, but something which is felt; realized as a daily matter-of-fact truth. It is not altogether a knowledge gathered from books, or from intercourse with man, but it is a Divinely communi-

oated knowledge. It is a light from above, revealing new and striking aspects of God, as He stands related to us under the titles of Father, Saviour, Friend. 2. The experimental fact of Christian wisdom is very strikingly illustrated in the conduct of the five wise virgins waiting at midnight for the coming of the bridegroom; and it is practically exemplified in the daily life and character of the man who acts in strict accordance with the laws of God, and with the dictates of conscience. Wisdom, in this instance, is the very opposite of folly. It is not seen to build upon the sand of earthly trust, but upon the rock of Divine faith. It is not seen in the midst of widely built up barns, but in the calm of patience, and in the endurance of hope. (*W. D. Horwood.*)

Ver. 18. **And he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.**—*The heritage of knowledge*:—1. How is THE INCREASE OF KNOWLEDGE ALSO AN INCREASE OF SORROW? The affirmation of the text is not that knowledge is not intended for men, but that the highest intention and the greatest gift carry with them also a corresponding sorrow. Greater the boon, more the sorrow to acquire it; higher the price, greater the difficulties to obtain it. Sorrow is not sin. It may be in some cases that it is the result of sin; but not in all cases, and not necessarily so in any. It is possible that sorrow accompanies many other things as well as that of knowledge. He that increases friends increases grief, for they turn faithless possibly, or they leave or die, and grief is the result. He who increases in wealth increases also in sorrow, for fear of loss or sense of responsibility, or some other perplexity ever accompanies the acquisition of possession. He who gains a high position increases sorrow, for it brings with it care and responsibility, extra toil and numerous trials. As there are different forms of sorrow, a thing may be accompanied with sorrow in various ways. 1. Knowledge alone, as an intellectual possession, not only satisfies not, but may even increase sorrow. The more persons know, the more dissatisfied they become with their own ignorance; so knowledge can never satisfy the craving of the intellect it feeds. But there is a moral emptiness felt in the heart and conscience which knowledge cannot satisfy. To know the good without enjoying it is an increase of sorrow; to see life without being able to avail ourselves of it is more distressing than if we had known nothing of it. It is not unfrequent that we hear persons attributing this only to speculative knowledge, meaning by it, I suppose, things above sense and the common transactions of every day's life. It would appear from such view that ordinary knowledge satisfies its possessors, and never gives any sense of pain or sorrow; so in this it is superior, and to be preferred before the speculative. The fact is, the knowledge of things common, as that of sense and experience, does not satisfy more than the other—if anything, it does it in less degree. The limited knowledge of sense or experience surely cannot satisfy; its limit and commonality make it weary. There is something in every object beyond our knowledge, so the most common object is surrounded with mystery, and leads to the speculative. If any kind of knowledge could satisfy, it would appear that the speculative has the advantage in its favour. The speculative is the kind of knowledge that transcends sense, and has God and the invisible, the causes and laws of the universe, and the infinite and absolute as its object-matter, which are more likely to satisfy than the small everyday transactions of earth. Another thing, it cannot satisfy the moral conditions and relations of man's nature, which makes knowledge as a matter of intellectual apprehension, incomplete to supply all the need of man as a moral being. For these reasons and others, it may, with its increase, be the indirect means of sorrow. 2. Knowledge of evil, in the absence of that of goodness, increases sorrow in the degree it is possessed. A knowledge of the evil of our hearts and actions gives sorrow, and if it were greater I doubt not but our sorrow would be increased by it. The more we know of the evil policy, the treachery, the corruption, and all the moral evil of society in all its forms and relations, the heavier is our sorrow. Such a sorrow is right; it proceeds from our dislike of the bad and the thing which gives pain, and our sympathy with the good and happy. 3. The increase of knowledge without faith is another condition that tends to the increase of sorrow. The knowledge of sin and evil as they are, without faith in God's order of grace and mercy, assuredly produces anything but happy emotions in our minds; and if our knowledge were more extensive, our sorrow would be enhanced accordingly. The knowledge of the laws and resources of the universe, without faith in God; of wants, sufferings, danger, and afflictions and death, without faith in the great Lord of life as a Friend and Father; the knowledge of sin without

faith in a Saviour; the knowledge that we die to-night or to-morrow, without hope of a happier existence beyond—little of such knowledge gives pain, and if it were increased, our sorrow would also increase in the same ratio. 4. Apart from truth, the increase of knowledge is also that of sorrow. When not governed by truth, everything we do increases our guilt, and becomes means of corruption and danger in our hand. Thus the thing which was intended to be a blessing becomes a curse, and knowledge, which is needed and adapted to advance the interests of society, becomes means of sorrow. Knowledge is a blessing, connected with other things; in the hand of a wicked man, it may be a cause of endless sorrow. 5. The increase of knowledge without love is also an increase of sorrow. Love is possible by us towards others, or by others towards ourselves; in the first, we are the agents, in the second, we are the objects. Suppose our knowledge increases of all around us, without love to God or man, would this not be an increase of sorrow to ourselves and others? 6. The increase of knowledge viewed as an end in itself is also an increase of sorrow. A man knowing all relative to all matters of life and godliness, yet doing nothing, gets none the better, none the happier. Would this be an increase of joy, or sorrow? II. WHY AN INCREASE OF KNOWLEDGE IS ALSO AN INCREASE OF SORROW. 1. The increase of knowledge of ourselves increases sorrow, because we have become more familiar with the fact of our frailty and sin. 2. It proceeds from the character of the knowledge itself. To know the bad gives sorrow to the good; to know the calamities which happen to our friends and people generally, increases the sorrow of our social feeling. 3. The path to knowledge is not an easy one, it is one of toil and trial, thus the increase of it is also an increase of sorrow. Whether we make reflection, experiment, or reading, the paths of knowledge, none of these can be pursued earnestly without a feeling of weariness, sorrow, or toil; they exhaust and weary both the physical and mental powers when they are pursued long and earnestly. 4. The more knowledge people have the more they deplore their ignorance. Their insight is so keen and their ambition so great, their plans so comprehensive and their thirst so intense, that they almost despise what they possess by reason of the great portion outside their possession. They are awakened to the greatness and grandeur of God and His universe in belief and perception, so that their present store appears but a small star in the vastness of space, or just the beginning of the alphabet of the endless career of truth and knowledge outside and above them. In this sense the increase of knowledge is not the way to immediate happiness, but to sorrow. 5. The increase of knowledge produces in the mind of its possessors an anxious thirst for more. If this desire is cultivated to a high degree, it becomes an intense feeling, almost too much for our nature to bear; and the danger is that it will lead those governed by it too far and intensely on, until they injure themselves. 6. It increases sorrow, because it shows more clearly the unsatisfactory character of all things earthly. In the light of knowledge we become conscious of our imperfection; by its aid we become familiar with sin and deformity everywhere; the more we increase in it, the greater is our reason of sorrow for those deformities everywhere found in life. 7. The character of knowledge is to excite, and not allay. It never satisfies, but always excites its subjects to higher effort, sacrifice, and ambition. III. THE LESSONS OF INSTRUCTION AND APPLICATION WHICH THE SUBJECT IMPARTS TO ALL. 1. Sorrow in some way or other is connected with the best and greatest things in this life. 2. It is not the end of life to get free from sorrow. It is not intended that we should be without knowledge, but rather that we should pursue and possess it; but it will entail sorrow upon us; it is not less our duty on that account, indeed it cannot be found without. The end of life is to do the work given us faithfully in the fire and in the midst of sorrow, and make sorrow subordinate to the doing of our work better, and the fitting of us more perfect and complete for our future heaven and home. 3. The more superior we become in anything, the more conscious we become of our own imperfection and that of others in the thing we excel in. 4. Everything true and right has its sacrifice, and no one will exceed, and is a true disciple, except he is prepared to offer what is required in the order of truth and law. 5. Everything, even the highest and the best, denies to us undisturbed rest and unalloyed happiness in this life. Prickly thistles grow among wheat, pointed thorns are found with flowers, dross is mixed with the best gold; there is something to convince us everywhere that there are no objects that can satisfy us all in all; there is a deficiency or something to lead us to seek something higher, purer, nobler, and more comprehensive than we see and know here. Everywhere we are led from the created

to some One above the creature; in everything we are reminded that the object of our want is not in the limited and partial, but in some One infinite and all-comprehensive of the good and pure. (*T. Hughes.*) *Increase of knowledge attended with sorrow*:—I. KNOWLEDGE IS THE PARENT OF SORROW FROM ITS VERY NATURE, as being the instrument and means by which the afflicting quality of the object is conveyed to the mind; for as nothing delights, so nothing troubles till it is known. The merchant is not troubled as soon as his ship is cast away, but as soon as he hears it is. The affairs and objects that we converse with have most of them a fitness to afflict and disturb the mind. And as the colours lie dormant, and strike not the eye, till the light actuates them into a visibility, so those afflictive qualities never exert their sting, nor affect the mind, till knowledge displays them, and slides them into the apprehension. It is the empty vessel that makes the merry sound. It is the philosopher that is pensive, that looks downwards in the posture of the mourner. It is the open eye that weeps. Aristotle affirms that there was never a great scholar in the world but had in his temper a dash and mixture of melancholy; and if melancholy be the temper of knowledge, we know that it is also the complexion of sorrow, the scene of mourning and affliction. We are first taught our knowledge with the rod, and with the severities of discipline. We get it with some smart, but improve it with more. The world is full of objects of sorrow, and knowledge enlarges our capacities to take them in. I might now, from the nature of knowledge, pass to the properties of it, and show its uncertainty, its poorness, and utter inability to contribute anything to the solid enjoyments of life. But before I enter upon this, there may be a question started, whether or no there be indeed any such thing as true knowledge in the world? for there want not reasons that seem to insinuate that there is none.

1. As first: because knowledge, if true, is upon that score certain and infallible; but the certainty of the knowledge cannot be greater than the certainty of the faculty, or medium, by which it is acquired: now, all knowledge is conveyed through sense, and sense is subject to fallacy, to err, and to be imposed upon.
2. Knowledge is properly the apprehension of a thing by its cause; but the causes of things are not certainly known: this by most is confessed.
3. To know a thing is to apprehend it as really it is, but we apprehend things only as they appear; so that all our knowledge may properly be defined the apprehension of appearances. And though I will not say that these arguments prove that there is no such thing as knowledge, yet thus much, at least, they seem to prove, that we cannot be assured that there is any such thing. But you will reply that this overthrows the hypothesis of the text, which supposes and takes for granted that there is such a thing as knowledge. I answer, it does not: for the arguments proceed against knowledge, strictly and accurately so taken; but the text speaks of it in a popular way, of that which the world commonly calls and esteems knowledge. And that this is but a poor, worthless thing, and of no efficacy to advance the real concerns of human happiness, might be made most evident. For, first, it is certain that knowledge does not either constitute or alter the condition of things, but only transcribe and represent the face of nature as it finds it; and therefore is but a low ignoble thing, and differs as much from nature itself, as he that only reports great things from him that does them. What is it to me whether the will has a power to determine itself, or is determined by objects from without? when it is certain that those here that hold a different opinion, yet continue in the same course and way of action. Or am I anyways advantaged, whether the soul wills, understands, and performs the rest of its actions, by faculties distinct from itself, or immediately by its own substance? Is it of any moment whether the soul of man comes into the world with carnal notions, or whether it comes bare, and receives all from the after reports of sense? What am I benefited whether the sun moves about the earth, or whether the sun is the centre of the world, and the earth is indeed a planet, and wheels about that? Whether it be one or the other, I see no change in the course of nature. Who in the world finds any change in his affairs whether there be little vacuities and empty spaces in the air; or whether there is no space but what is filled and taken up with body? I could reckon up a hundred more such problems as these, about an inquiry into which men are so laborious, and in a supposed resolution of which they so much boast; which shows that that which passes with the world for knowledge is but a slight trivial thing; and that men's being so eager and industrious in the quest of it is like sweeping the house, raising the dust, and keeping a great do only to find pins.

II. KNOWLEDGE IS THE CAUSE OF SORROW, IN

RESPECT OF THE LABORIOUS AND TROUBLESOME ACQUISITION OF IT. For is there any labour comparable to that of the brain? any toil like a continual digging in the mines of knowledge? any pursuit so dubious and difficult as that of truth? any attempt so sublime as to give a reason of things? The soldier, it is confessed, converses with dangers, and looks death in the face; but then he bleeds with honour, he grows pale gloriously, and dies with the same heat and fervour that gives life to others. But he does not, like the scholar, kill himself in cold blood; sit up and watch when there is no enemy; and, like a silly fly, buzz about his own candle till he has consumed himself. Then again; the husbandman, who has the toil of sowing and reaping, he has his reward in his very labour; and the same corn that employs, also fills his hand. He who labours in the field indeed wearies, but then he also helps and preserves his body. But study, it is a weariness without exercise, a laborious sitting still, that racks the inward, and destroys the outward man of the body; and, like a stronger blast of lightning, not only melts the sword, but also consumes the scabbard. Nature allows men a great freedom, and never gave an appetite but to be an instrument of enjoyment; nor made a desire, but in order to the pleasure of its satisfaction. But he that will increase knowledge, must be content not to enjoy; and not only to cut off the extravagancies of luxury, but also to deny the lawful demands of convenience, to forswear delight, and look upon pleasure as his mortal enemy. He must be willing to be weak, sickly, and consumptive; even to forget when he is hungry, and to digest nothing but what he reads. He must read much, and perhaps meet with little; turn over much trash for one grain of truth; study antiquity till he feels the effects of it. We may take a view of all those callings to which learning is necessary, and we shall find that labour and misery attends them all. And first for the study of physic: do not many lose their own health while they are learning to restore it to others? Then for the law: are not many called to the grave, while they are preparing for a call to the bar? III. KNOWLEDGE INCREASES SORROW, IN RESPECT OF ITS EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENTS. 1. The first effect of the increase of knowledge is an increase of the desire of knowledge. It is the covetousness of the understanding, the dropsy of the soul, that drinks itself athirst, and grows hungry with surfeit and satisfaction. Now, an endless desire does of necessity vex and torment the person that has it. For misery and vexation is properly nothing else but an eager appetite not satisfied. In fine, happiness is fruition; but there is no fruition where there is a constant desire. For enjoyment swallows up desire, and that which fulfils the expectation also ends it. The bottomless appetite of knowledge will not be satisfied, and then we know that sorrow is the certain result and inseparable companion of dissatisfaction. 2. The second unhappy effect of knowledge is that it rewards its followers with the miseries of poverty, and clothes them with rags. Reading of books consumes the body, and buying of them the estate. The mind of man is a narrow thing, and cannot master several employments. A scholar without a patron is insignificant: he must have something to lean upon: he is like an unhappy cause, always depending. As for instance, he that follows chemistry must have riches to throw away upon the study of it; whatever he gets by it, those furnaces must be fed with gold. In short, I will not say that the study of knowledge always finds men poor, but sure it is that it is seldom or never but it leaves them so. 3. The third fatal effect of knowledge is that it makes the person who has it the butt of envy, the mark of obloquy and contention. How are Galileo and Copernicus persecuted, and Descartes worried by almost every pen! And now, if this be our lot, what remains for us to determine upon? Is there no way to get out of this unhappy dilemma, but that we must needs either dash upon the sorrows of knowledge, or the baseness of ignorance? Why yes, there is a fair escape left us; for God has not placed mankind under a necessity either of sin or misery. And therefore, as to the matter in hand, it is only to continue our labour, but to alter the scene of it; and to make Him, that is the great Author, also the subject of our knowledge. (*R. South, D.D.*) *The acquisition of knowledge attended with sorrow*.—It is highly important that we should keep in mind, as well in respect of the declarations of Scripture, as of the maxims of mere temporal and secular concernment, that many things which, in one point of their application, are altogether undeniable, may in another point be contrary to reason and experience. The words of the text may serve as an illustration of this principle. There is wisdom which bringeth no grief; and there is knowledge whose increase implies no increase of sorrow. We shall find in the Bible no plea for ignorance. "That the soul be

without knowledge it is not good," is the declaration of Scripture. Of all the gifts which the Lord has bestowed upon His creatures, none ranks higher, or involves weightier responsibility than the gift of intellect. The talent must be used, not laid by; it must be put out to interest, not hidden in a napkin, nor buried in the earth. It is indeed a high and noble thing to consecrate our minds, with all their best and brightest faculties, to Him who bestowed them for His own service. There is no finer spectacle than that which is presented by the man of science, who searches the records of creation, written in characters which no time can obliterate, and on a page which no changes can efface; and fetches in from them proofs of the character, and illustrations of the dealings, and doings of Deity.

I. SOME OF THE CASES IN WHICH THE APPLICATION OF THE TEXT IS UNDENIABLE. We may say in general terms that the text applies to all the acquisitions of knowledge, which are independent of God, and from which considerations of the soul and of eternity are excluded. The limitation of the sphere of human science must necessarily produce dissatisfaction and disappointment. When it has been urged to its farthest extent, its discoveries are but mean and ignoble in comparison of what remains yet unknown; its acquisitions are little worth, when contrasted with the extent of the field which can never be brought within its grasp and compass. And if science be applied to trace out the machinery and operations of our own minds, the result is still less satisfactory. One generation of metaphysicians builds up a system, which another generation employs itself to pull down and to destroy. Human knowledge is, moreover, confined within as narrow limits in point of time. The present is that which it can alone claim. The annals of past ages convey falsehoods intermingled with truth; so that the most patient research cannot distinguish between fact and fiction: and infinitely the larger portion of the transactions, which have occupied the millions of mankind, have obtained no record, and have left no memorial. Of the mighty future which lies beyond the boundary of time, of that inconceivably long existence to which the present life forms but the commencement and the vestibule, unassisted reason can make no discovery. But there are circumstances in which sorrow more directly tracks the footprints of that wisdom which is of the earth. The annals of human science, the history of students in human learning, might furnish forth many a heart-rending page. We might read of many an one, who having ardently pursued the object which seemed to promise most of reputation and advancement, has derived from his pursuit only the keenness of disappointment, and the bitterness of a broken heart. You might see the sad spectacle of such an one sinking to an untimely tomb, because he followed his one object too intently and too devotedly. And while he is sacrificing so much for intellectual distinction, he is keenly and painfully sensible of neglect. He feels himself a lonely and forsaken creature. The world is too busy to mark his doings. Human knowledge, while it is unsanctified by grace, tends to lead us away from God. We may become so absorbed in the contemplation of the Creator's works; in tracing the various processes through which they pass, and the various laws to which they are subject, as to forget the high attributes of the Creator Himself. To be thus turned aside from Him who is the source of present blessing and eternal hope, will sooner or later be felt to be an evil and a bitter thing. It issues not unfrequently in yet more disastrous effects. The mind which has been so deeply engaged in following the discoveries of science and gathering stores of intellectual treasure, in ways which it has shaped out independently of God, may at length, in the uncured pride of reason, reject the evidence for the truth of His revealed Word; may deny His providential interference in the transactions of the earth; and plunging yet deeper in the abyss of unbelief, may join the fool of old, in denying His very existence. He will feel, at length, that, in his much wisdom hath been much grief, and in the increase of his knowledge hath been increase of sorrow. He has treasured up evil for the latter day, and has laid upon his own soul the bitterness of anguish, which found him out at the last. And that which is true of individuals is not less true of communities. If it be a dangerous thing for a man to cultivate intellectual accomplishments, at the expense of personal piety; no less is it hazardous that religion should be dissociated from knowledge, in the prevailing schemes for the instruction of a people.

II. SOME OF THE CASES IN WHICH NO APPLICATION OF THE TEXT CAN BE MADE. 1. It cannot be applied to the knowledge of ourselves, and of the condition to which our nature has fallen. No acquisition is more important, for it lies at the threshold of all spiritual advancement; none more difficult, for the heart is deceitful above all things, as well as desperately

wicked. The declaration of the text cannot be applied to the knowledge of God. No subject on which the intellectual faculties can spend themselves is so elevating and ennobling as the character of Him who bestowed them. To know God, as He is revealed in the Gospel record of His love to a ruined world, is to open the inlets of comfort to the soul. But if Scripture knowledge is to produce such effects, it must never be separated from grace. This separation is one of the dangers which specially belong to a period of so much religious profession as the present. There are many persons who pore on the pages of the Bible, and have become familiar with its statements, over whose lives, and conversation, its principles have never exercised any perceptible control. There is no necessary connection between the gifts of the Spirit, and the attainments of human learning; no confinement of the blessings of spiritual knowledge to men whose minds are furnished with other stores. God often hides these things from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes. Such knowledge continually increases. As the believer goes on his way, he gradually discovers more of the will and the dealings of his Father. At first there might have been much of zeal, and less of knowledge; but while the former burns as brightly as when it was first kindled in his bosom, the latter is increased by continual accessions. This knowledge shall not only form the staple of our earthly happiness, but shall outlast the span of our present existence, and reach forward into the outlying region of eternity. And God shall advance His glorified saints, by continual revelations of Himself. Increasing knowledge shall be an element of that blessedness, which for aught we know may increase in the same proportion for ever. (*S. Robins.*) *Knowledge and sorrow*:—We will, in the first place, confine our attention to the present life; in the second place, extend it to the future life; and in both cases endeavour to show you with how great truth it may be said, "In much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Now, it is a common observation, and one borne out by the experience of all who are qualified to give witness, that it is the property of knowledge to humble a man, and not to puff him up or to make him arrogant. We may take it as a rule that you will seldom find falsified, that where there is conceit there is shallowness, and that the man who has palpably a high opinion of his attainments, and who moves through a circle in all the pride of a presumed intellectual superiority, is indebted to his not being well dissected and well sifted, for the reputation he enjoys and the attention he commands. There is nothing which, however hard of acquisition, shrinks into so small a space as knowledge when acquired. A library would seem an atom when the bookcase is the mind. So that we may lay it down as an ascertained fact that the acquiring of knowledge is a humiliating thing. Each step only shows us that the plain is broader and longer than we had thought, and the further we advance the further off seems the boundary. Thus, self-complacency at our progress is inconsistent with progress; for if it be progress to discover that we are no nearer the end, what cause of exultation can making progress furnish? It is with the sphere of knowledge as it is with the sphere of light; enlarging it you enlarge equally the circumscribing sphere of darkness. But if it be thus certain that the increase of knowledge is accompanied by, if not identical with a growing sense of absolute ignorance, what can be clearer than that "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow"? We think, for example, that when the telescope and microscope were first put into the hands of the philosopher, then was increase of knowledge hardly to be measured, but at the same time a consequent increase of sorrow. There was increase of knowledge: distant worlds were brought near, whilst worlds were found in every atom and in every waterdrop; and enlarging the field of contemplation man only learned that the workmanship of God, like God Himself, could never be explored. And if such are the lessons taught man by the telescope, surely the very apparatus which must increase his knowledge must show him his ignorance. He was not only taught how little he knew before, but how little he would be able to know after. Would not then the increase of knowledge be attended by an increase of sorrow? Would not the very boundlessness of creation which he gathered from the disclosures of the telescope, and the fact made known to him by the microscope that in the minutest subdivisions of space there was the furniture and population of the universe—would not these, whilst filling him with admiration for the workings of Omnipotence, have filled him also with regret at the feebleness of his own powers? Would they not have conveyed to him an idea such as he could not have otherwise obtained of the utter vanity of the hope of embracing within the range of his investigation

all the marvel and grandeur of nature; and what motto, therefore, could he have felt disposed to grave on an apparatus which amplified indeed vastly the sphere of his contemplation, but which taught him that when amplified the sphere was but a sand grain which, assisting him to be a learner, told him he could never be a proficient—what motto, if not the motto of our text, "For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow"? And in matter of fact, the earliest and at the same time the most wonderful lesson ever given to this creation was, that he that increased knowledge should increase sorrow. It was the tree of knowledge on which grew the forbidden fruit, by the eating of which our first parents forfeited immortality. It was the hope of an increase of knowledge which moved Eve to the act of disobedience, Satan telling her, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," and the woman perceived "that the tree was to be desired to make one wise"; and thus moved ate of the fruit, and gave to her husband, and he did eat also. The hope was realized; the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew good and evil; but oh, it was a fatal knowledge! There is not a woe in the long, dark catalogue of mortal afflictions, there has not been the tear shed, nor the sigh heaved, nor the shroud woven, nor the grave dug, which must not be referred to the acquisition of knowledge as its producing cause. What, then, is there no exception? None, we believe. It holds good of religious knowledge as well as of worldly knowledge, that to increase it is to increase sorrow. Religious knowledge may be resolved into knowledge of oneself and knowledge of God in Christ. No man knows anything of himself, but the man who is enabled to examine himself by the light of the Holy Scripture; and as self-knowledge increases, must not sorrow also increase? What is this knowledge but the knowledge of our own corruption, the knowledge of the deceitfulness of the heart, the knowledge of one's own depravity? He who is increasing knowledge of himself, is he not possessed of a growing sense of his own weakness, his own depravity, his own obduracy, his own ingratitude? He will not seem to himself to be growing better. The proof that he grows better is that he seems to himself to grow worse; and day by day the Holy Spirit will show him some new and foul chamber of imagery in the heart; day by day this Celestial Agent will unveil some fresh dormitory and lay bare some cherished and unsuspected evil. And though it be most wholesome and most necessary that we be thus taught ourselves, can it be denied that there is something painful and grievous in the lessons which are furnished? In like manner, with respect to a knowledge of Christ, there will be just that contemporaneous increase which we are setting ourselves to discover. I must know, experimentally know, that Jesus died for me, before I can know anything of the hatefulness of sin; and when a man is enabled to look by faith on the Lamb of God, bearing his sins in His own body on the tree (and this it is to know God in Christ), then alone will he entertain a genuine and heartfelt sorrow for sin. And the more earnestly he gazes, the more he contemplates the dignity and innocence of the Victim, the more he ponders the mystery, that the Being who was One with the Father should have been given up to execration and sacrifice, the more disposed will he be to abhor and reproach himself, and the more will he bewail his own guiltiness, which demanded so awful an expiation. Yea, and will it not continually happen, that as his soul is most elevated with the contemplations of Christ, and he has the fullest assurance of interest in the saving work of the atonement—will it not continually happen, that at moments such as these, when knowledge is at the highest, contrition for sin will be most bitter and deep? And will there not thus be given a proof uttered in sighs and written in tears, that even when knowledge is the knowledge of God in Christ, "in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow"? Now, we may, perhaps, illustrate our text by another kind of knowledge. Just take the knowledge of history. We will suppose a man studying diligently every record of antiquity, thus possessing himself of the events and transactions of which this earth has been the scene. We are clear that he who increases his knowledge of history must have daddened himself to impressions, if he did not thereby increase sorrow. What is history but a record of crime and calamity, a melancholy summary of the woe and the wickedness with which our globe has been burdened? Here and there we have a bright light, some noble instance of the struggle and the triumph of virtue, but on the whole, feuds and wrongs and rivalries, the oppression of the innocent, the struggles of ambition, the earth reeking with blood, polluted with guilt, and bathed with tears; these are ordinarily the features of the historic picture. Who

that calls himself a man can gaze on these and not be sorrowful? If it be true that to read history is to read the proofs of human apostasy, and the curse which it entailed—if it be true that the knowledge of what has befallen our race in successive ages is the knowledge of a long series of evidence of the total corruption and the consequent misery of man, then assuredly whatever the pleasure and whatever the profit of storing the mind with the facts, the material of melancholy reflection will be forced on us by every page of the record; and we must either profess ourselves insensible to the sufferings with which guilt has endowed human nature, or we must assent to it as a truth, that when history is concerned, to increase knowledge is to increase sorrow. And even if the increase of knowledge be a knowledge of the character and happiness of the excellent of the earth, it still brings with it the material of sorrow. Who can read the biography of saints without having two feelings excited in his mind: first, the feeling "how imperfect are the best!" and secondly, "how much nearer have others gone to perfection than myself?" The telescope and microscope ministered gladness to the philosopher, and they helped him to explore a thousand before-hidden wonders, though all the while teaching him the dwarfishness of his highest possible attainments; they made him sorrowful by showing him that perfection would be always out of reach. And when the spiritual telescope is put into our hands, and we direct it to the home of the justified, and lovely things, and rich and sparkling cross the field of vision; or when we are equipped with the spiritual microscope, and can look into ourselves and see a world of iniquity in the tiniest motes that float in the mind's recesses, do we say that it is other than delightful to catch glimpses of the land of promise, or other than profitable to be helped to the scrutiny and anatomy of the heart? Each kind of knowledge is delightful, and each is profitable; at the same time each furnishes material for sorrow. It is delightful to hold the telescope and to see by the lenses of faith the domes and pinnacles of the heavenly city; and it is also profitable thus to have the vision of the saints' inheritance, for looking on the recompense we shall be animated to the toil. But who ever surveyed the palaces of the faithful without self-reproach at the little influence which things eternal have upon him, when compared with things temporal, and without a painful consciousness that, though a king and an heir of glory, his deportment is often such as if slavery were his choice and corruption his element? Nothing so shows man his own coldness, his own backwardness, his own insensibility to the high destinies of the redeemed, as a glimpse of heaven. He cannot behold the reserved joys without feeling that he deserves to lose them for the slight hold which, after all, they have on his affections. The closer the view, the stronger will be this feeling; so that whilst he is enraptured at the disclosures of the telescope, yea, and excited by them to exertion, he will be covered with shame at his own lukewarmness in the pursuit of what is infinitely desirable. And thus it will come to pass, that though there is joy, and though there is profit in increasing knowledge, he will increase also sorrow. And if, laying down the telescope, he take up the microscope, and subject his own heart to the magnifying power, then we need not tell you that it is profitable for him to be informed of the depth and extent of the corruption, and we need not tell you that it is delightful for him to be thus informed, seeing that the nature of the instruction proves God's Spirit to be the Instructor, and any proof that we are taught of the Spirit is too precious to be bartered for the universe. But neither, at the same time, need we tell you that it is a saddening thing to be shown one's own vileness—vileness resisting all processes of sanctification; and thus, though with the moral microscope, as with the natural, joy and profit are gained from its showings, it remains true of both, that in increasing knowledge, they increase also sorrow. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) *Increase of knowledge, increase of sorrow*.—I. *MERE EARTHLY KNOWLEDGE IS UNSATISFACTORY IN ITS NATURE.* Take as an illustration of this the field of creation. The knowledge of facts and laws can employ man's reason, but it cannot ultimately satisfy it, and still less can it soothe his soul, or meet the longings of his spirit. Law everywhere cannot permanently satisfy man without a Lawgiver; order, without a primordial reason; forms of skill and beauty, without a great Thinker, from whom they are emanations, and whom our own thoughts can touch, as they touch kindred souls, till we can say, "How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God!" II. *MERE EARTHLY KNOWLEDGE IS PAINFUL IN ITS CONTENTS.* For an illustration of this, we may go from creation to history, from space to time. Take away our hope in God, and history becomes a sea of tumbling billows, dark and shoreless; nations rising only to fall; great souls shooting across

the horizon like dying meteors; and all the spiritual longings of the past written down but to tell us of the vanity of our own efforts. History would be a dreary study when it had lost all the higher ends it might serve as a school of training for immortal souls, and as the steps of a Divine Architect through the broken scaffolding and scattered stone-wreck upward to a finished structure. The very glimpse of this is reviving, but to give up at once Architect and end, and see human lives shattered and strewn across weary ages, and human hearts torn and bleeding, with no abiding result, this surely would fill a thoughtful mind with pain. The more of such history, the more of sorrow. III. MERE EARTHLY KNOWLEDGE IS HOPELESS IN ITS ISSUE. For an illustration of this we may take the field of abstract thought. The ultimate object of man's search is to find the centre of knowledge which commands the whole field. The man who begins the search after truth is generally more satisfied with his progress than he who has been long in the course. Those things which, like the stem of a tree, seem simple and easily grasped, spread away beneath into interminable roots, where we can never count them all nor reach the end of any one. Let a man try to master a single subject, and he will find it so. The road becomes longer and the field wider as he proceeds. And if a man should feel impelled to go beyond the surface of things, and to inquire into the origin of being and the end of all things, without accepting a God, doubt and darkness would only gather at every step. With no lamp in the soul there is no light in the world. His own being and end become an increasing perplexity. He grows in uneasiness and irresolution, which men do not feel who have not entered on such a search. As he enlarges the circumference of knowledge he enlarges the encircling darkness, and even the knowledge yields no ray of true satisfaction. IV. MERE EARTHLY KNOWLEDGE IS DISCOURAGING IN ITS PERSONAL RESULTS. We may consider here the moral nature of man. Earthly science can do very much to improve man's external circumstances. It can occupy his reason, it can refine and gratify his taste; but there are greater wants that remain. If the man seeks something to fill and warm his heart, all the wisdom of this world is only a cold phosphorescence. He pursues its waters like thirsty Tantalus, and they touch his lips and flee from them. He must say with Goethe, "Alas that the yonder is never here!" The tree of knowledge never becomes the tree of life. If the man is desirous to have his own moral nature rise to a noble elevation, he must be equally disappointed with the result of bare knowledge; not merely with what is accomplished by it, for here we may all be sad enough, but with what is promised by it. It may have its negative value in occupying thought and time, which might be devoted to ignoble uses; but it cannot conquer passion, nor renew a nature that has felt the degradation of sin. The great heights of holiness may sometimes rise before such a man, and the sublime form of duty may gleam out and beckon him to the sun-lit summit of perfection; but there is no power, out of God, to help him to it,—“The depth said, It is not in me,” and such an ideal, rising without the power or hope to reach it, can only fill the man with a more profound sadness. V. MERE EARTHLY KNOWLEDGE HAS SO BRIEF A DURATION. Here we may contemplate life as a whole. If the thought of God be admitted, all real knowledge has the stamp of immortality. The happy seeker of truth is he who feels that in gaining it he is taking possession of a perpetual treasure, and beginning a quest which is to be enlarged by a new life in new worlds. But if there be nothing of this, “in one day all man's thoughts perish,”—“The wise man dieth and the fool also.” The sweeter truth is to the taste, the more bitter must be the thought of leaving the pursuit of it for ever. After all, it is a question which the head cannot answer without inquiring at the heart. It is this, can any progress of earthly science reconcile us to the loss of God and of the hope of immortality? and we feel assured that, with the immense mass of men, when their inner nature is truly consulted, the answer would be found here,—“The increase of knowledge is the increase of sorrow.” Whatever we may come to know, if God be not, and earth be all, “Vanity of vanities” is the epitaph of life. (*John Ker, D.D.*) *The pursuit of knowledge*:—Ecclesiastes is here speaking simply of that knowledge of earthly things and human affairs which a man may acquire by intellectual study and observation. And what he says is that the amassing of mere earthly knowledge, as if this were the chief good, is a delusion—that such knowledge is full of disappointments and sorrows, and cannot really satisfy the soul of man. Now, it is indeed true that our minds have been so constituted that the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge, simply as knowledge, is naturally accompanied with pleasure. And to a young and eager student rejoicing

in the wider views and the fresh discoveries which his increase of knowledge brings, it may sometimes seem as if a life spent in study and research would give him the fullest satisfaction. But he is apt to forget that a wider view of things is not always a more pleasant view. Knowledge often destroys illusions. Knowledge often makes us more sensible of our ignorance, and more conscious of the limits of our powers. Knowledge often confronts us with problems which cause us perplexing and painful thought, and which had not previously come within the range of our vision. The most learned philosopher or the most brilliant student of natural science often finds that all his knowledge is utterly unavailing in the presence of some practical difficulty—something "crooked" which he cannot straighten, something "wanting" which he cannot supply. How often the very knowledge of a skilful physician gives him a sadder because deeper insight into the malady which he knows to be incurable! And how often we can see a tinge of melancholy in some of the world's greatest thinkers! This is indeed no argument for indorsing the words of the poet, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise"; for even the knowledge which brings sorrow may have some advantages over the ignorance which preserves happiness. But it is an argument for the conclusion of Ecclesiastes, that the mere possession of earthly wisdom is not the supreme good of human life, and that the attempt to satisfy one's soul with such knowledge is a "feeding on wind!" (T. C. Finlayson.)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-26. Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth.—*The threefold view of human life*:—Three views of human life are given in this remarkable chapter. I. **THE THEATRICAL VIEW OF LIFE** (vers. 1-11). The writer seeks to prove his heart with mirth and laughter; he treats his flesh with wine; he gathers peculiar treasure; he is enamoured of greatness, magnificence, and abundance; he delights in architecture, scenery, literature, music, song. Everything is spectacular, dazzling, wonderful. This is a very misleading idea of the world in which we find ourselves. 1. It is partial. Nothing whatever is said here of the problems which challenge us—of duty, enterprise, discipline, work, sacrifice, suffering; nothing about character or conduct. It really leaves out two-thirds of life, and the noblest two-thirds. 2. It is exaggerated. It contemplates great works, great possessions, and great fame. Life is largely made up of commonplace tasks, homely faces, uneventful days, monotonous experiences. 3. It is selfish. You see throughout how prominent the individual is. It is all "I." The writer never thinks of other people except as they may enhance his pleasure, or be spectators of his glory. 4. It is superficial. There is not a word about conscience, righteousness, responsibility. Now beware of the theatrical view of life—of the great, the gaudy, the glistening. True life, as a rule, is simple, sober, and severe. Beware of companions who would represent life to you in a gay and voluptuous light. Beware also of your reading, and see that it does not give a false and delusive idea of the life that awaits you. The world is not a theatre, not a magician's cave, not a carnival; it is a temple where all things are serious and sacred. II. **THE SEPULCHRAL VIEW OF LIFE** (vers. 12-23). Men usually start with the rosy ideal of life, and then finding its falsity—that there are tears as well as laughter—they sink into vexation and despair, and paint all things black as night. But the world is not emptiness; it is a cup deep and large, delightful and overflowing. Fulness, not emptiness, is the sign of the world. There is the fulness of nature—of intellectual life—of society—of practical life—the manifold and enduring unfolding of the interests and movements and fortunes of humanity. There is the fulness of religious life. A true man never feels the world to be limited, meagre, shallow. God is no mockery, and He will not mock us. III. **THE RELIGIOUS VIEW OF LIFE** (vers. 24-26). 1. The purification and strengthening of the soul will secure to us all the brightness and sweetness of life. 2. And as the Spirit of Christ leads to the realization of the bright side of the world, so shall it fortify you against

the dark side. Carry the Spirit of Christ into this dark side, and you shall rejoice in tribulation also. In one of the illustrated magazines I noticed a picture of the flower-market of Madrid in a snowstorm. The golden and purple glories were mixed with the winter's snow. And in a true Christian life sorrow is strangely mingled with joy. Winter in Siberia is one thing, winter in the flower-market of the South is another thing; and so the power of sorrow is broken and softened in the Christian life by great convictions, consolations, and hopes. Do not accept the theatrical view of life; life is not all beer and skittles, operas, banquets, galas, and burlesques. Do not accept the sepulchral theory of life; it is absolutely false. Tocqueville said to Sumner, "Life is neither a pain nor a pleasure, but serious business, which it is our duty to carry through and conclude with honour." This is a true and noble conception of life, and it can be fulfilled only as Christ renews and strengthens us. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *The pleasures of sin and the pleasures of Christ's service contrasted*:—I. WHAT ARE THE PLEASURES OF SIN? 1. They are present pleasures; now and here; not in the dim distance; not in the next world, but in this. 2. They are varied and many: adapted to every taste, capacity, age, condition. 3. They fall in with the desires and cravings of our carnal nature. 4. They possess the power to excite in a wonderful degree,—the fancy, the mind, the passions,—ambition, lust, pride, etc. II. WHAT ARE THE PLEASURES OR REWARDS OF CHRIST'S SERVICE? 1. They are real and substantial, not fictitious and imaginary or deceptive. (1) A good conscience. (2) A contented mind. (3) Rational enjoyment and satisfaction. (4) Elevation of being. (5) A quiet, growing consciousness of God's approval. (6) A sweet sense of living and breathing in a sphere of sanctified thought and life, illumined by the sunlight of Heaven, and vocal with the joys and harmonies which proceed from Calvary. 2. They are not all in the future. No small part of them are here, and enjoyed day by day. Heaven is the ultimate state of blessedness, the final reward in Christ's service. But heaven is begun in every reconciled, sanctified soul at once and progresses to the consummation. 3. Christ's service is soul-satisfying. It touches, elevates, expands, gives dignity to, and harmonizes and gladdens man's highest nature. 4. The pleasure, the reward of Christ's service is enduring. It fears no death, knows no end. It is perpetual, everlasting, ever augmenting. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *A strange experiment*:—He now resolves to abandon the "studious cloisters." For their quiet he will substitute the excitement of feverish pleasure. But this tremendous reaction from the joys of the philosopher to coarser animal pleasure is not easy. He has to goad his mind before it is ready for this new and low direction. He has to say to his heart, "Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth." What a fall is here, from the contemplation of high themes of truth, the works of God and man, to merely sensual pleasure! But the experiment is brief. It would be. For a man of wisdom could not be long in discovering the utter worthlessness of sensual gratification; sharp and swift comes the conclusion: "I said of laughter, It is mad, and of mirth, What doeth it?" It has sometimes been the question of thoughtful people how the wise man could bring himself to try this second experiment, the effort to find happiness in "the lust of the flesh" and "the lust of the eye." This, it is usually thought, is the delight of fools. But that a man who could say he "had seen the works that are done under the sun," whose philosophy had ranged over new things until they were seen to be the old things recurrent, who could truly say that he had "gotten more wisdom than all they that had been before him in Jerusalem,"—for such an one to fly from philosophy to pleasure, from meditation to mirth, is accounted phenomenally strange. But it is not. Across just such extremes does the restless spirit fly that has not yet learned that happiness is not the creature of circumstance, but the outgrowth of the life. And how it magnifies this inner character of happiness to reflect that even wisdom pursued for its own sake may be seen to be so hollow that the soul will fly to the farthest distance from it, inferring that even sensual folly may be a relief from the emptiness of knowledge! (*C. L. Thompson, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. *I said of laughter, It is mad.*—*The wit and the madman*:—If you were asked who had sat for the portrait of a madman, you would be disposed to look out for some monster, some scourge of our race, in whom vast powers had been at the disposal of ungoverned passions, and who had covered a country with weeping and with desolate families; and at first we might be readily tempted to conclude that Solomon employed somewhat exaggerated terms when he identified laughter

with madness. Neither need we suppose that all laughter is indiscriminately condemned; as though gloom marked a sane person, and cheerfulness an insane. "Rejoice evermore" is a scriptural direction, and blithe-heartedness ought to be both felt and displayed by those who know that they have God for their Guardian, and Christ for their Surety. But it is the laughter of the world which the wise man calls madness; and there will be no difficulty in showing you, in two or three instances, how close is the parallel between the maniac and the man by whom this laughter is excited. We would first point out to you how that conflict, of which this creation is the scene, and the leading antagonists in which are Satan and God, is a conflict between falsehood and truth. The entrance of evil was effected through a lie; and when Christ promised the descent of the Holy Ghost, whose special office it was to be to regenerate human kind, to restore their lost purity, and therewith their lost happiness, He promised it under the character of the Spirit of truth; as though truth were all that was needed to the making of this earth once more a paradise. And it is in accordance with this representation of that great struggle, which fixes the regards of higher orders of intelligence, as being a struggle between falsehood and truth, that so much criminality is everywhere in Scripture attached to a lie, and that those on whom a lie may be charged, are represented as thereby more especially obnoxious to the anger of God. "A lying tongue," says the wise man, "is but for a moment"; as though sudden vengeance might be expected to descend upon the liar, and sweep him away ere he could reiterate the falsehood. And if there be thus, as it were, a kind of awful majesty in truth, so that the swerving from it is emphatically treason against God and the soul, it follows that whatever is calculated to diminish reverence for truth, or to palliate falsehood, is likely to work as wide mischief as may well be imagined. You are all ready without hesitation to admit that nothing would go further towards loosening the bonds of society than the destroying the shame which now attaches to a lie; and accordingly you would rise up as by one common impulse to withstand any man or any authority which should propose to shield the liar, or to make his offence comparatively unimportant. But whilst the bold and direct falsehood thus gains for itself the general execration, mainly perhaps because felt to militate against the general interest, there is a ready indulgence in the more sportive falsehood, which is rather the playing with truth than the making a lie. Here it is that we shall find laughter which is madness, and identify with a madman him by whom the laughter is raised. There is very frequently a departure from truth in that mirthful discourse to which Solomon refers. In amusing a table, and causing light-heartedness and gaiety to go round the company, men may be teaching others to view with less abhorrence a lie, or diminishing in them that sanctity of truth which is at once an admirable virtue and essential to the existence of any other. I do not fear the influence of one whom the world denounces as a liar; but I do of one whom it applauds as a wit. I fear it in regard of reverence for truth—a reverence which, if it do not of itself make a great character, must be strong wheresoever the character is great. The man who passes off a clever fiction, or amusingly distorts an occurrence, or dextrously misrepresents a fact, may say that he only means to be amusing, and that nothing is further from his thoughts than the doing an injury; but nevertheless, forasmuch as it can hardly fail but that he will lower the majesty of truth in the eyes of his neighbourhood, there may be equally ample reason for assenting to the wise man's decision—"I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?" But we have not yet given the worst case of that laughter which may be identified with madness. It is very true, that whatever tends to diminish men's abhorrence of a lie, tends equally to the spreading confusion and wretchedness, and may therefore be justly classed amongst things which resemble the actings of a maniac. It is also true that this tendency exists in much of that admired conversation whose excellence virtually lies in its falseness; so that the correspondence is clear between the wit and the madman. But it is not perhaps till the laughter is turned upon sacred things that we have before us the madness in all its wildness and in all its injuriousness. The man who in any way exercises his wit upon the Bible conveys undoubtedly an impression, whether he intend it or not, that he is not a believer in the inspiration of the Bible; for it is altogether insupposable that a man who really recognized in the Bible the Word of the living God, who felt that its pages had been traced by the very hand which spread out the firmament, should select from it passages to parody, or expressions which might be thrown into a ludicrous form. It may be true that he does this only in joke, and with no evil

design; he never meant, he may tell you, when he introduced Scripture ridiculously, or amused his companions by sarcastic allusions to the peculiarities of the pious—he never meant to recommend a contempt for religion, or to insinuate a disbelief in the Bible, and perhaps he never did; but nevertheless, even if you acquit him of harmful intention, and suppose him utterly unconscious that he is working a moral injury, he who frames jokes on sacred things, or points his wit with scriptural allusions, may do far more mischief to the souls of his fellow-men than if he engaged openly in assaulting the great truths of Christianity. If you have heard a text quoted in a ridiculous sense, or applied to some laughable occurrence, you will hardly be able to separate the text from that occurrence; the association will be permanent; and when you hear the text again, though it may be in the house of God, or under circumstances which make you wish for the most thorough concentration of thought on the most awful things, yet will there come back upon you all the joke and all the parody, so that the mind will be dissipated and the very sanctuary profaned. And hence the justice of identifying with madness the laughter excited by reference to sacred things. Now, the upshot of the whole matter is, that we ought to set a watch upon our tongues, to pray God to keep the door of our lips. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Of all the gifts with which we have been entrusted, the gift of speech is perhaps that through which we may work most of evil or of good, and nevertheless it is that of whose right exercise we seem to make least account. It appears to us a hard saying, that for every idle word which they speak men shall give an account at the last, and we scarcely discern any proportion between a few syllables uttered without thought and those retributive judgments which must be looked for hereafter; but if you observe how we have been able to vindicate the correctness of the assertion of our text, though it be only the idle talker whose laughter is declared to be madness, effecting the same results, and producing the same evils as the fury of the uncontrolled maniac, you will see that a word may be no insignificant thing—that its consequences may be widely disastrous, and certainly the speaker is answerable for the consequences which may possibly ensue, however God may prevent their actual occurrence. The fiction may not make a liar, and the jest may not make an infidel, but since it is the tendency of the fiction to make liars, and the tendency of the jest to make infidels, he who invents the one, or utters the other, is as criminal as though the result had been the same as the tendency. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Ver. 11. I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do.—*The review:*—Our Lord pronounced the children of this world "wise in their generation"; and who can doubt that thousands who are lost would, with God's blessing, be saved, did they bring the same prudence, and diligence, and energy to their eternal, as they do to their temporal interests? Some years ago a man was called to decide between preserving his life, and parting with the gains of his lifetime. A gold-digger, he stood on the deck of a ship that, coming from Australian shores, had—as some all but reach heaven—all but reached her harbour in safety. But, as the proverb runs, there is much between the cup and the lip. Night came lowering down; and with the night a storm that wrecked ship, and hopes, and fortunes, all together. The dawning light but revealed a scene of horror—death staring them in the face. The sea, lashed into fury, ran mountains high; no boat could live in her. One chance still remained. Pale women, weeping children, feeble and timid men, must die; but a stout, brave swimmer, with trust in God, and disencumbered of all impediments, might reach the shore, where hundreds stood ready to dash into the boiling surf, and, seizing, save him. One man was observed to go below. He bound around his waist a heavy belt, filled with gold, the hard gains of his life; and returned to the deck. One after another, he saw his fellow-passengers leap overboard. After a brief but terrible struggle, head after head went down—sunk by the gold they had fought hard to gain, and were loath to lose. Slowly he was seen to unbuckle his belt. If he parts with it, he is a beggar; but then if he keeps it, he dies. He poised it in his hand; balanced it for a while; took a long, sad look at it; and then with one strong, desperate effort, flung it far out into the roaring sea. Wise man! It sinks with a sullen plunge; and now he follows it—not to sink, but, disencumbered of its weight, to swim; to beat the billows manfully; and, riding on the foaming surge, to reach the shore. Well done, brave gold-digger! Aye, well done, and well chosen; but if "a man will give all

that he hath for his life," how much more should he give all he hath for his soul! Better to part with gold than with God; to bear the heaviest cross than miss a heavenly crown. I. INQUIRE WHAT WE HAVE DONE FOR GOD. We have had many, daily, innumerable, opportunities of serving Him, speaking for Him, working for Him, not sparing ourselves for Him who spared not His own Son for us. Yet, how little have we attempted; and how much less have we done in the spirit of our Saviour's words, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" There is no moor in our country so barren as our hearts. They drink up God's blessings as the sands of the Sahara heaven's rain. II. INQUIRE WHAT WE HAVE DONE FOR OURSELVES. No profit? Do you reply, I have made large profits—my business has paid me, and yielded large returns—I have added acres to my lands. But, let me say that that, perhaps, is not all you have added. What if by every day you have lived without God and for the world, you have added difficulties to your salvation; shackles to your limbs; bars to your prison; guilt to your soul; sins to your debt; thorns to your dying pillow? Let no man be cast down; give way to despair! Years are lost; but the soul is not yet lost. There is still time to be saved. Haste, then, and away. III. INQUIRE WHAT WE HAVE DONE FOR OTHERS. Suppose that our blessed Lord, sitting down on Olivet to review the years of His busy life, had looked on all the works which His hands had wrought,—what a crowd, a long procession of miracles and mercies had passed before Him! I believe there were more good works crowded into one single day of Christ's life than you will find spread over the lifelong history of any Christian. Trying our piety by this test, what testimony does our past life bear to its character? The tree is known by its fruits. In conclusion—1. This review, God's Spirit blessing it, should awaken careless sinners. 2. This review should stir up God's people. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *Love not the world.*—I. THE HABIT OF MEN IN PURSUING WORLDLY OBJECTS. 1. By worldly objects we mean those which terminate entirely on the earth, and which occupy human thought and pursuit without any connection with spiritual and eternal things. 2. The cause to which the pursuit of worldly objects is to be ascribed it is of course of immense importance to assign and to remember; and that cause is to be found only in the moral corruption or depravity of human nature. (1) Men from their depravity are prone to indulge in inordinate attachment to immediate and visible things. (2) Men from their depravity are apt to indulge an entire and practical disbelief in the existence of eternal realities. II. THE EVILS BY WHICH THE PURSUIT OF WORLDLY OBJECTS IS INVARIABLY ATTENDED. 1. The pursuit of worldly objects is associated with much disappointment and sorrow in the present state. (1) Notice the dissatisfaction and sorrow connected with the attainment of worldly objects. When the imagined good is grasped, it leaves "an aching void," a still unsatisfied craving, revealing itself at the last but as a detected imposture, which only excited that it might exhaust, which only promised that it might betray, and which only attracted that it might sting. (2) Observe the disappointment and sorrow connected with the actual or threatened loss of worldly objects. How often has it been, that what man has painfully and laboriously acquired, has been torn suddenly and rapidly away! The fountains of pleasure, honour, and power are dried up and exhaled, like the dew-drop before the sunbeam; and those who have had them are left at last in disgrace, beggary, and penury emphatically as being the very bankrupts and paupers of the world. And then, while worldly objects are actually held within the grasp, how much of anxiety arises from the thought that they may be lost, from the complicated contingency to which human affairs are liable; and especially from the reflection that they must at last be lost by the arrival of death! (3) Again: we remind you of the disappointment and sorrow connected with the remembrance of sins committed for the sake of worldly objects. Take especially the cases which have occurred in the pursuit, for instance, of wealth, pleasure, or power. There has been the flagrant violation of moral principle, the perpetration of fraud in the pursuit of wealth, the perpetration of lewdness in the pursuit of pleasure, the perpetration of oppression and cruelty in the pursuit of power. 2. The pursuit of worldly objects places in jeopardy the final and immortal happiness of the soul. III. THE VAST IMPORTANCE OF TURNING OUR ATTENTION FROM WORLDLY OBJECTS, AND OF SEEKING THE ATTAINMENT OF FAR HIGHER BLESSINGS. 1. As we are devoted to religion, in the present world we obtain solid satisfaction and peace. There is no disappointment in religion; all that it confers is solid and lasting; nor is there one who under Divine grace has been led to yield his heart to its power, who does not at once, according to its

legitimate operation, find the storms and tempests of the spirit subside into one placid and beautiful calm. 2. As we are devoted to religion, we secure, beyond the present state, the salvation and immortal happiness of the soul. (*J. Parsons.*)

The failure of pleasures.—I. THE PLEASURES OF GREAT AND GOOD MEN MAY BE VANITY AND VEXATION OF SPIRIT. Solomon was great, and he was good. This is the inspired judgment of him (Neh. xiii. 26). But he had for the time declined from greatness, swerved from goodness, and it was in this search for pleasure. Here we see how degraded a man of high rank, splendid genius, rich character, may become. Truly "the pinnacle overhangs the precipice." II. THE PLEASURES OF SKILL AND TOIL MAY BECOME VANITY AND VEXATION OF SPIRIT. Those that Solomon found so utterly dissatisfying were not alone pleasures of appetite and of indulgence. There were thought, contrivance, taste, effort involved. So pleasures along the lines even of art, and science, and literature may, as Dundas, and David Scott, and Chesterfield all prove, become vanity and vexation of spirit. III. PLEASURES IN THEMSELVES FITTED TO DELIGHT MAY BECOME VANITY AND VEXATION OF SPIRIT. The abundance of life, the hues of the flowers, the fragrance and melodies and shade, all make "gardens" sources of exquisite delight, and it may be of innocent and high delight, for God planted a garden for unfallen man. Yet these gardens gave no satisfaction to Solomon; and similarly many real pleasures give no joy to men. So it has with many become an adage, that "Life would be very tolerable if it were not for its amusements." IV. IN ALL THESE CASES THE SELFISH SEARCH FOR PLEASURE HAS MADE IT VANITY AND VEXATION OF SPIRIT. It was thus with Solomon: it will be thus with all. Selfishness is the cankerworm in the flower of such pleasures, the alloy that the laboratory of such experiences as Solomon discovers in such would-be delights. (*R. Thomas.*)

The vanity of worldly happiness.—There is no man living can ever expect to be in more happy outward circumstances than Solomon was, or to enjoy more of this world's good than Solomon did. And if he, after all, found nothing but labour and trouble, and dissatisfaction and emptiness, no real profit, no advantage in any worldly thing, what must we expect to find? Certainly no better fortune than he did. And if this be the case of mankind, how unaccountable is it that any of us should fix our thoughts and designs, our comforts and expectancies upon anything under the sun. It is just the same folly that those men are guilty of, that being tossed up and down at sea, yet nevertheless desire to be still there, and cannot endure to think of coming to a port. It is the madness of those, that being condemned to dig in the mines, are so much in love with toil and labour, with chains and darkness, that they despise a life above ground, a life of light and liberty. In a word, it is the fantastic punishment of Tantalus in the poets that these men wish for themselves: they desire to spend their time for ever in gaping after those lovely pleasant fruits which (they fancy) seem almost to touch their mouths. Yet all their labour is in vain; and as they never did, so they never shall be able to come at them. 1. Let us consider the continual toil and labour that mankind in this world are exposed to. The despatching of one business is but the making room for some other, and possibly more troublesome one, that is presently to follow after. We toil till we are weary, and have exhausted our strength and spirits, and then we think to refresh and recruit ourselves; but, alas! that refreshment is only to prepare and enable us for the bearing the next hour's burthen, which will inevitably come upon us. 2. But this is not all: we might, possibly, find some comfort in that pains and labour we take in this world, at least they would be much more supportable if we were sure our designs would always succeed; if we were sure to attain that which we labour for; but, alas! it is oftentimes quite otherwise. We meet with frequent disappointments in our endeavours; nay, we cannot say beforehand of anything we undertake that it shall certainly come to pass as we would have it. And this is a matter that renders the world a place of still more restlessness and disquiet. 3. Supposing, after several disappointments, and with much difficulty, we do attain our ends, and get what our souls desired, yet doth the thing answer our expectation? Do we find that it is fit, and good, and convenient for us? If so, then we seem to have laboured to some purpose. But if not, then we are but still where we were; nay, we had better never have troubled our heads about it. In all our labours we either hit, or miss; we either succeed, or are disappointed. If we be disappointed, we are certainly troubled; and if we do succeed, for anything we know, that very success may prove our greatest unhappiness. 4. But let us suppose that we have brought no inconvenience upon ourselves by our choice. Let us

suppose our designs were reasonable, and they rightly succeeded, and the circumstances of our condition are every way fit and proper for us; yet, is this sufficient to procure us content? Alas! there is too much reason to fear the contrary; for such is the constitution of this world, that let us be in what circumstances we will, yet we shall meet with many troubles and inconveniencies that do necessarily flow from the nature of that condition which we are in, though otherwise it may be the fittest for us of all others. There is no sincere unmingled good to be met with. Every state of life, as it hath something of good in it, so the best hath some evil displeasing appendages inseparably adhering to it. Nay, perhaps, in true speaking, the worldly happiness of any man's condition is not to be measured by the multitude of goods he enjoyeth in it, but rather by the fewness of the evils it brings upon him. 5. But let us suppose we find no inconvenience in the circumstances of our lives: we will suppose we are possessed of many goods from the enjoyment of which we may promise to ourselves solid contentment and satisfaction. These are our present thoughts. But are we sure we shall always continue in the same mind? Are we sure that that which is now very grateful and agreeable, and affects us with a sensible pleasure and delight, will continue always to do so? On the contrary, have we not much reason to fear, that, in a little time, it will grow dull and uninteresting; nay, possibly, very irksome and displeasing? 6. To all these things let us add the numberless daily troubles and discomposures of mind, not peculiar to any condition, as those I spoke of before, but common to all, arising from men's minds and tempers, and the things and persons they converse with in the world. It is a melancholy consideration; but I believe the experience of mankind will make it good, that there is scarce a day in our lives that we pass in perfect uninterrupted peace and content, but something or other every day happens that gives us trouble, and makes us uneasy to ourselves. 7. But what must we say of the many sad accidents and more grievous and weighty afflictions that do frequently exercise the patience of mankind? If in the best condition of human life men are not happy, but everything is able to ruffle and disorder them; O how miserable are they in the worst! So long as we have mortal bodies exposed to sickness and diseases, to sad accidents and casualties; so long as we have a frail nature that betrays us to a thousand follies and sins; so long as we have dear friends and relations, or children, that we may be deprived of; so long as we may prove unfortunate in our marriage, or in our posterity, or in the condition of life we have chosen; so long as there are men to slander us, or to rob us, or to undermine us; so long as there are storms at sea, or fire upon land; so long as there are enemies abroad, or tumults, seditions, and turns of state at home: I say, so long as we are exposed to these things, we must, every one of us, expect, in some degree or other, to bear a share in the miseries of the world. And now, all these things considered, judge ye whether this world doth look like a place of rest; whether it is not rather a stage of calamities and sad events. Judge ye whether the best of human things be not "vanity"; but the worst of them intolerable "vexation of spirit." 8. Which will still appear the more evident if we add this, that though all we have hitherto said did go for nothing; though we could be supposed to be exempted from all those inconveniencies and mischiefs I have mentioned; though we could be supposed to be capable of an uninterrupted enjoyment of the good things of this life as long as we live; yet even this would not satisfy much to the making our state in this world easy and happy; for there is one thing still would spoil all such hopes and pretences, and that is, the fear of death, which hath made mankind all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. ii. 15). O what a dismal reflection must this needs be to a man who hath set up his rest in this world, and dreams of no other happiness but what he hath here! To think that in a few years at the farthest, but possibly in a few months or days, he shall lie down in the dust, and then all that he hath here possessed and enjoyed is lost and gone, irrecoverably gone! O that we would seriously think upon these things! We should certainly have this advantage by it, that we should not any longer be cheated with the gaudy appearances of this world, but look after something more solid, more substantial, than anything we find here to live for, to set our hearts and affections upon. (*Abp. Sharp.*) *The vanity of life*:—Consider the vanity of the present state of being, considered as our only state. Suppose, first, that a decree were to go forth perpetuating your present condition—pronouncing that you should remain eternally just as you are now. How would you receive such a decree? Is there one of you who would be willing to stop the wheel of fortune

now and for ever? If you will look into your own hearts you will find that you are living more in the future than in the present, more in your plans than in your possessions,—that you depend more on what you think that you are laying up for time to come than on any means of enjoyment actually in hand. But what will this future on which you are building bring to you? Incompleteness, vexation, disappointment, bereavement, sorrow. Few of your blossoms will ripen into fruit; few of your plans will be realized; very little of what you now clearly see in the future will shape itself as you see it. The farther you go on in life, the more blighted hopes will lie behind you, the more vacant places will there be in the circle of your kindred and friendship, the more will there be in your outward condition to make you feel that there is no rest or home for you on this side of the grave. Again, if you would look into your hearts, in the gayest and most gladsome moments of earthly enjoyment, you will perceive much of this same emptiness and vanity. Who has not at such times been conscious, as it were, of a double self, of an uneasiness in the midst of gratification, of a restless feeling in the very fulness of seeming joy, of a voice that whispers, "Up and be doing," while many voices bid us stay, and drown all other thoughts in the scene before us? But though at these seasons such thoughts will come over us, we crowd them out. There are, however, times when they are forced upon us, and we cannot expel them. There are times of sudden and overwhelming grief, when calamity breaks in upon us like a swift flood, and seems to wash away the very ground on which we stand—that earth's fairest mansions are but whitened sepulchres, her choicest fruit but dust and ashes. We are then conscious of the frailty of what remains to us, no less than of what has been taken from us, and can say from the heart that there is nothing here below on which we can place the least dependence,—nothing which we dare to love as we have loved, or to trust as we have trusted. Then, were it not for the words of eternal life, we could say in intense anguish,—"All is vanity and vexation of spirit, and there is no profit under the sun." But after all, though we walk in a vain show, there is enjoyment in life,—in our mere earthly life. Yet from what does it flow? Not from the ever-changing scene, not from the winter-frozen and summer-dried fountains around us, but from the unchanging love of God, the bow of whose promise remains fixed over the stream of time and the waves of unceasing vicissitude. He who gives the ravens their food feeds also His human children, and by filling all things with His love makes us happy. And, blessed be God, there is that in life which is not vanity or vexation. The outer man may perish, the desire of eyes and the pride of life may fail; but the signature of God's spirit on the inner man time cannot efface, or the waves of death wash away. The soul, character, virtue, piety, remain, amidst the reverses of fortune, the desolation of our households, the wasting of disease, and the thunder-blast of death. (A. P. Peabody.)

Ver. 14. **The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness.**—*The advantage of wisdom over folly*:—Wisdom possesses the same advantage over folly that sight does over blindness. The man of wisdom, having all his wits about him, in the full possession and the appropriate exercise of all his faculties, "guides his affairs with discretion," looks before him, thinks maturely of what he is doing, and by his knowledge of men and things, is directed to the adoption of plans which promise to be profitable, and to the prudent and successful prosecution of them. He "foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself." He aims at worthy ends, and employs suitable means for their accomplishment. But the fool—the ignorant, and inconsiderate, and improvident man—is continually in danger of stumbling, or of going astray, like a person overtaken by darkness, who "knoweth not whither he goeth." He is ever prone to run blindly and heedlessly into absurd and injurious projects, or to destroy such as are in themselves good, by blundering in the execution of them. The fool's eyes, it is elsewhere said, are "in the ends of the earth," roaming vainly and idly abroad, without serving his present and needful purposes; gazing, as the organs of a vacant mind, on far-off objects, and allowing him to stumble over what is immediately in his way. Without foresight to anticipate probable evils, without even sagacity to avoid such as are present, the fool is in perpetual hazard of injuring and ruining both himself and all who are so unfortunate as to stand connected with him, or to be exposed to his influence. (R. Wardlaw, D.D.) *The wisdom of the eye*:—I. To understand this proverb, notice, first, **THE CONTRASTS**

WHICH IT SUGGESTS. One of these is expressed in the context; the other is to be readily and clearly inferred. 1. First, there is a contrast between persons. We have before us the believer in God and the unbeliever, the child of light and the child of darkness, the converted and the unconverted, the spiritual and the natural. Whatever may be their relative state of knowledge or ignorance, of wealth or poverty, in the sense of the Bible of truth, and in the judgment of the God of truth, the one is wise and the other a fool. 2. Secondly, there is a contrast implied: "The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness." And why is his path in darkness? Because, unlike the wise man, his eyes are not in his head; if they had been there, he would have walked in light, surely, safely. But they are in his heart, and so he walks foolishly, erringly, darkly. The eye in the head—the wise man's eye, sees under the direction of reason, and faith, and of right understanding. The eye in the heart—the fool's eye, sees under the direction of the affections, the disposition and the feelings. And so, while the one man walks in light, the other man walks in darkness. II. But now let me more pointedly and practically set out the MEANING OF THIS VERSE. Let us take by itself each part of this proverb and consider it. 1. First, then, it is implied that the fool's eyes are in his heart. He sees all things through the medium of his own wishes and inclinations; his reason and conscience do not control, but they are possessed by his inclinations. (1) Hence I believe, because the eye of many is in the heart, the scepticism which obtains in our day, especially the scepticism which obtains in the minds of young men. No man, I believe, ever became an infidel against his will. Inclination, not evidence, has been deficient to the man. The evil heart of unbelief is at the root of scepticism. (2) Hence I believe the prejudice with which many professed Christians turn away from the doctrines of evangelical religion. They do not question their reality, but they just dislike their practical consequences. (3) A fool's eyes are in his heart, because his bondage is to things present and temporal, and he is indifferent to things unseen and eternal. The Bible, though not a fable, is as another book to him, and nothing more. Truth, if not a fiction, is not a fact. Earth is a loved present; possessed; heaven is a forgotten, distant future. 2. But "the wise man's eyes are in his head." The light of a holy knowledge shines upon them, and in this light the eye of reason and of faith, the eye, not of blind inclination, but of Christian consciousness and confidence, sees light. (1) Hence a Christian man feels the right and the responsibility of private judgment on the truth and the service of God. The authority of Christ is supreme authority unto him. He will allow no interference with it; he will allow no usurper to take its place. (2) Hence the Christian man prays for the light of Divine teaching. The possession of truth has taught him the possibility and the peril of error. He would be found never trusting in man, but he would always pray—"That which I know not, Lord, teach Thou me!" (3) Hence the impression which he receives of the things around him and before him. The rule of duty, read by the eyes in his head, is just this—his Father's will. The measure of goodness, admired by the eye in his head, is just this—his Saviour's image. (4) Lastly, when our eyes are in our head, under the government of an enlightened reason and a Christian faith, they will always be doing a holy and a godly service to our souls—never an injurious one. They will not, then, wander lustfully where they should not even steal a glance; they will be turned away from all vanities. Looking ever, will they be found, unto Jesus; ever, will they be found, setting the Lord before them; single will they ever be, full of light, turning the whole body into light also. (*J. Eyre, M.A.*) **One event happeneth to them all.—Wisdom and folly compared:**—Looking simply at knowledge as such, and looking merely at the brief span of our existence "under the sun," we must confess that the wise man is sometimes as powerless as the fool. Two men take their seats in a railway train. The one man is an accomplished scholar, or mathematician, or philosopher. He has disciplined his mental powers, and has amassed large stores of knowledge. He has even acquired, it may be a certain reputation as a man of learning, or as a leader of the thoughts of others. The man who is sitting beside him cares nothing for intellectual culture. Animal enjoyment is his ideal. Give him a good dinner, and you may keep your books to yourself! He could never see any good in racking his brains over hard problems. There sit these two men in the railway carriage, side by side: the one, perhaps, reading the latest book of science; the other, perhaps, glancing through some "Sporting Gazette." Suddenly, in a moment, there comes the collision which it was utterly impossible for either of them to foresee:

the train is a wreck; and these two lie together, crushed, mangled, and dead! "One event, one chance, has happened to them both!" Now, sbout out the thought of God, and the thought of immortality, and what "advantage" has the one man over the other? The student has had his intellectual enjoyments: the votary of pleasure has had his enjoyments also. The scholar, along with his enjoyment, has had much fatiguing toil, and, it may be, painful thought; the pleasure-seeker also has doubtless, on his part experienced some of the penalties of self-indulgence. The lover of knowledge has, indeed, had this advantage, that his "eyes" have been "in his head": he has had a wider and clearer vision; and he has lived a higher kind of life. But to what purpose? Where is the permanent advantage? These two men have lived their short span: and here has come Death, as the great leveller! For a few years, perhaps, the scholar may be spoken of; his name may even get into some "biographical dictionary": but, unless he is one of a very select few, it will be little more than a name, and, in the ages to come, he will be altogether forgotten. To what purpose, then, has he "scorned delights, and lived laborious days"? Can he be said to have made the best use of human life, if he has simply spent it in acquiring a "wisdom" which leaves him, in the end, indistinguishable from the fool? Thus, then, we seem to be driven to the same conclusion as Ecclesiastes. Whatever advantages earthly wisdom has, it cannot be regarded as the chief good for man. The amassing of knowledge as the one supreme object of human existence is a vain delusion: it is a "feeding on wind": it fails to satisfy the deepest cravings of the human soul. (T. C. Finlayson.)

Ver. 17. *Therefore I hated life.—Is life worth living?*—"Is life worth living?" is a question that is continually coming before the public mind in one form or another. When Mr. Maddock's book appeared, as many of you may remember, there was an attempt to make light of it by the pun contained in the supposed doctor's answer, "It depends on the *liver*." This has been capped by "Punch's" clergyman, who replies, "It depends on the *living*." One must, however, approach the matter with the utmost seriousness, as it touches upon the deep basal truths and principles of existence, and is too solemn a subject to admit of any flippancy in our treatment of it. The problem would be met by an unqualified affirmative wherever life is young, healthy, and active, and the environment favourable to a rich, varied, and exuberant form of existence. In some respects, therefore, the doctor is right; it does depend upon the state of the health and the physical condition. I wonder what a happy schoolboy, rushing out with the football under his arm, would say if he were asked, "Is life worth living?" His expression would be a curious study as he gave his reply, and would itself convey deep significance. What a happy thing it would be if that schoolboy aspect of life were only exchanged for a deeper conviction of its fuller value and noble possibilities, and that it should never occur to us to ask whether this breath of life might not as well cease, and that perhaps the whole had been a hideous mistake! The words of the Koheleth express the sentiment of those who thus pass an adverse sentence upon the value of life, condemning both the career of the wise man and the fool, and who have come to hate life, for "all is vanity and vexation of spirit" or "a striving after wind." The grand old Greeks, with their highly-refined conditions of life, and life itself full of richness and variety, and ennobled by the splendid idealism of the fine arts, now and then fell into this sad vein. Even the ancient poet, the "sunny-browed" Homer, sang—

"For there is nothing whatever more wretched than man
Of all things that breathe and that move o'er the earth."

We have, further, in Theognis, "It would be best for the children of the earth not to be born . . . next best for them, when born, to pass through the gates of Hades as soon as possible." Can anything be more touching than the words of Cassandra in "Agamemnon" by Æschylus: "Alas for the conditions of mortals! When prosperous, a shadow may overturn them; if, however, they be in adversity, a moistened sponge blots out the picture." Then we find Seneca, one of the best of the Roman Stoics, whose maxims came so near to many of the sayings of St. Paul, praising death as the "best invention of nature," and Marcus Aurelius, "a seeker after God," expressing his disgust at human life, with the apostrophe, "O death, delay not thy coming." There is much the same in the literature of Persia, and in the sphere of the religion of "the light." The pure-souled and

seraphic Buddha considers that "True wisdom is a desire to be nothing, to be blown out, to enter into Nirvāna, i. e. extinction." Coming to modern times we find in French literature of the Pompadour period the same strain of melancholy. Diderot wrote, "To be, amid pain and weeping, the plaything of uncertainty, of error, of want, of sickness, and of passions—every step, from the moment when we learn to lisp, to the time of departure, when our voice falters—this is called the most important gift of our parents and of nature—life." This is more than equalled by the words of Schelling, "The death's head never fails behind the ogling mask, and life is only the cap and bells which the nonentity has donned just to make a jingle, and afterwards to tear it to pieces and cast it away." These instances will suffice to indicate the strongly marked pessimistic tendency amongst some of the finest thinkers, and would lead those who are predisposed to this kind of philosophizing to the inevitable conviction that, on the whole, life is not worth living.

1. The value of life, if judged from the point of view of happiness, depends upon the sum of its functional activities and interests. Our pessimistic views concerning life are largely the result of our mistaken ideas of happiness. We are apt to imagine that health, leisure, and a splendid income are absolutely necessary to our happiness; and when there is a prospect of losing these permanently, life is no longer desirable. No man is really unhappy who realizes that he has work to do and sets himself in earnest to do it. The utmost of pain and sorrow can be borne if only one has an object in life. Men who throw up all for lost are those who have abandoned, if they ever had it, their object in life. Let a person once set his mind upon some worthy aim, and allow his interest to centre in that, and let it absorb his energies, and never will he think of laying violent hands upon himself. When the Christians assembled in the catacombs we discover none of those traces of pessimism that are so characteristic of the poems of Horace. Their interest was centred in their Lord and Master, and His royal will. We can understand, then, how a truly Christian man, following in the experiences of the Apostle Paul, would apprehend Christ to be the true object of existence. "To live is Christ," to learn about Christ, to live for Christ, to gain Christ, and to realize the life and character of Christ within oneself, so that the very principle of the within, is Christ. Such realization gives life its value.

2. The value of life further depends upon its extrinsic utilities in the service of our fellows. We owe a debt of gratitude to the *past*, which can only be paid to the *future*, for this, and it is a point of honour, that every man should acknowledge, to make his life valuable to others to those who shall come after him. It would be ignoble to slight that which has cost so much to develop, and especially since every life is capable of being made useful in a greater or less degree.

3. If we are men of faith we shall value life for the sake of its higher development beyond the grave. Even though this life were spent in a purgatory of torture, or a hell of pain, which life need never be, no one who believes in the Christ can deny that the great hereafter will more than obliterate the traces of this sorrowful world in the glorious activities of the heavenly state and all its grand developments. Cheer up, brothers, and brace yourselves for manly effort. There are no sorrows or difficulties that a brave-hearted man, who trusts in God, need fear to encounter. Whatever straits one may find oneself in, there is no lot so painful, so bitter, or so trying that it may not be sweetened and ennobled by effort—and that effort will be our joy. (*J. G. James, B.A.*) *Pessimism and optimism* (with Ps. xxvii. 1):—We all of us are by turns followers of the laughing philosopher and of the weeping philosopher. Life sometimes appears full of joy, at other times full of sorrow. Hence the folly of labelling the souls of our fellow-men is manifest, of calling one man an optimist and another a pessimist. Deep souls are both at different periods of their development. We are all pilgrims; and so we pass through many widely different countries during our journey. And it is much to be wished that men would not be so precipitate in guessing at the goal or terminus, to which the spirits of their brethren are going. To all of us that really think, there has been given a new commandment: and it is this, Thou shalt not label thy brother's soul. Pessimism is often like the moulting of birds, a thing not pleasing in itself, but still a necessary process. A moulting eagle is grander far than a well-conditioned sparrow. Pessimism is often only a sort of prolonged moulting of the divine eagle wings of the most soaring faith and the noblest compassion and love.

1. Christianity has obviously very much in common with pessimism. It has nothing in common with the fantastic optimism of Emerson, which deliberately chooses to ignore the darker side of

human life. It plainly teaches that the present condition of the world is abnormal, and in many respects evil. Our religion fully recognizes the fact that we are pilgrims and strangers here, and that our life is essentially a warfare. It does not require us to be always in a triumphant mood. It knows that many of the very greatest of the elect are destined to pass long years in the dark valley of the shadow of death. It blesses those that mourn. 2. Christianity nowhere teaches that pleasure, or even happiness, is the end or object of life. On the contrary, our religion teaches that progress through suffering is the real end and object of our life. The doctrine of the Cross, with its divine amplitude of meaning, is to use a precious rock-hewn path of safety between the deceptive quagmire of a flimsy Emersonian optimism and the hideous abysses of a despairing pessimism. The very fact that God has brought the human race so far in its spiritual pilgrimage forbids any reasonable despair. The old, sacred, guiding fire of the Eternal still leads us on. The burning and unearthly splendours of the mighty Ideal from time to time disperse the thick clouds of the actual. The far-off goal of the human race gleams fitfully on our worn eyes; even amidst the heart-breaking sorrow of prolonged moral failure, an angel of the Divine pity sometimes "carries us away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shows us that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." There, in God's nearer presence, the ailing soul knows that it shall one day grow well and strong. (*A. Crawford, M.A.*) *Tired of life*:—What are the causes of suicide? The general impression is, insanity: this is for the most part the verdict of juries over the corpse of the self-slain man. But insanity is not always the cause. In most cases of suicide there have been displayed on the part of the perpetrator forethought, deliberation, plan. What then can prompt a man who is not actually mad to this terrible deed? I. SEVERE TRIALS. The feeling that Solomon had, rushes into the soul of not a few at times. The children of Israel in the wilderness had it when they said, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt." Elijah had it when he said, "It is enough now, O Lord! take away my life." Job had it when he said, "I loathe it: I would not live alway." II. SICKENING SATIETY. The men of leisure and affluence, who are freed from the necessity of work, enterprise, and business, who fare sumptuously every day, and run the round of fashionable life and sensuous enjoyment, have always shown the greatest susceptibility to this disgust with life. Over-indulgence in worldly pleasures seldom fails to produce a moral nausea. There is what the French call the *ennui* that comes out of it, "that awful yawn," says Byron, "that sleep cannot abate." As a proof of this, in the countries where luxuries most abound, suicides are the most numerous. Whilst in Sweden there is only one suicide to every ninety-two thousand people, in Paris there is one to every three thousand. III. SPIRITUAL DISGUST. Men whose moral susceptibilities are exquisitely tender, whose intellectual eye is keen and strong enough to penetrate into the motives that govern society, and whose sympathies run strongly with the right, the true, and the divine, often experience such an inexpressible revulsion at certain popular developments of character and phases of society, as to lead them to say with Solomon, "I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me." IV. TEMPERAMENTAL MELANCHOLY. So oppressive does the dark atmosphere of their irritable tempers become, that they are ready to seize the rope or the razor, or to plunge into the river. V. INORDINATE EMOTIONALITY. There are those whose emotional natures seem stronger than their intellectual force. The winds and the waves of passion are too strong for the helmsman. Their emotional nature is like a deep and tumultuous sea, whose billows are ever breaking over the walls of their understanding. Sometimes, for example, revenge is a passion that prompts the deed. Samson was an example of this. Sometimes humiliation prompts the deed. Something occurs which overwhelms the man with shame. Ahithophel is an example of this. Sometimes desperation prompts the deed. Sometimes fear overwhelms the man, and prompts the deed. It was thus with the Philippian jailor. Sometimes remorse prompts the self-destroying deed. No passion that can seize the soul is so unbearable as this; "A wounded spirit, who can bear?" Thus Judas, when he saw that Christ, whom he had betrayed, was condemned to death, his guilty conscience made life so intolerable that he went out and hanged himself. Other passions may be mentioned, such as jealousy, which perhaps is the most prolific parent of suicides of all the passions. I learn from this subject—1. That the poor need not envy the condition of the rich. 2. That all men have not an equal love of life. 3. That confidence in the redemptive Provi-

dence that is over us is the only security for a happy life. The voice of Providence to every man is, not only "Do thyself no harm"; but free thyself from all anxious cares, and trust in the love and guidance of the great Father King. (*Homilist.*) *Disgust with life*:—The connection of our text with preceding and following verses, and its perfect harmony with the design of the wise man, which was to decry the world and its pleasures, and by his own experience to undeceive such as made idols of them, authorize us to consider the words as proceeding from the mouth of Solomon himself, expressive of his own sentiments and not those of others, and what he thought after his reconversion, and not what his opinion was during his dissipation. I. On this principle we will first RID THE TEXT OF SEVERAL FALSE MEANINGS, WHICH IT MAY SEEM AT FIRST SIGHT TO COUNTENANCE; for as there is a disgust with the world, and a contempt of life, which wisdom inspires, so there is a hatred of the world, that ariseth from evil dispositions. 1. We may hate life because we are melancholy. Only he whose ideas are disconcerted by a dark and gloomy temper can say fully and without qualification, "I hate life." To attribute such a disposition to the wise man is to insult the Holy Spirit who animated him. 2. Some are disgusted with life from a principle of misanthropy. What is a misanthrope, or a hater of mankind? He is a man who avoids society only to free himself from the trouble of being useful to it. He is a man who considers his neighbours only on the side of their defects, not knowing the art of combining their virtues with their vices, and of rendering the imperfections of other people tolerable by reflecting on his own. What a society would that be which should be composed of people without charity, without patience, without condescension! My text doth not inculcate such sentiments as these. The wise man had met with a great many disagreeable events in society which had given him a great deal of pain, but, far from being driven out of it, he continued to reside in the world, and to amend and improve it by his wise counsel and good example. 3. Sometimes a spirit of discontent produces disgust with the world, and contempt of life. To hear the people I mean, one would think it was impossible that this world should be governed by a wise being, because, forsooth, they are doomed with the rest of mankind to live in a valley of trouble. But who art thou, thou miserable man, to conceive ideas so false, and to form opinions so rash! 4. We are sometimes disgusted with the world through an excess of fondness for the world, and hate life through an over-valuation of it. Man enters the world as an enchanted place. While the charm lasts, the man I speak of is in raptures, and thinks he hath found the supreme good. He imagines that riches have no wings, that splendid fortune hath no reverse, that the great have no caprice, that friends have no levity, that health and youth are eternal; but as it is not long before he recovers his senses, he becomes disgusted with the world in the same proportion as he had been infatuated with it, and his hatred of life is exactly as extravagant as his love of it had been. 5. It is not in any of these senses that the wise man saith, "I hated life." He would have us understand that the earth hath more thorns than flowers—that our condition here, though incomparably better than we deserve, is, however, inadequate to our just and constitutional desires—that our inconveniences in this life would seem intolerable unless we were wise enough to direct them to the same end that God proposed by exposing us to suffer them—in a word, that nothing but hope in a future state formed on another plan can render the disorders of this world tolerable. So much may serve to explain the meaning of the wise man. II. LET US NOW PROCEED TO JUSTIFY THE SENSE GIVEN. The phantoms that seduced Solomon during his dissipation may be reduced to two classes. The first suppose in the dissipated man very little knowledge, and very little taste; and it is astonishing that a man so eminently endowed with knowledge could set his heart upon them. The second may more easily impose on an enlightened and generous mind. I put these into three classes. In the first I put the advantages of science—in the second the pleasures of friendship—in the third the privileges, I mean the temporal privileges, of virtue and heroism. I will endeavour to unmask these three figures, and to prove that the very dispositions which should contribute most to the pleasure of life, mental abilities, tenderness of heart, rectitude and delicacy of conscience, are actually dispositions which contribute most of all to embitter life. 1. If ever possessions could make man happy, Solomon must certainly have been the happiest of mankind. Imagine the most proper and the most effectual means of acquiring knowledge, joined to an avidity to obtain it, both were united in the person of this prince. Now what saith this great man concerning science? He

acknowledgeth indeed that it was preferable to ignorance, the wise man's eyes, saith he, are in his head, that is, a man of education is in possession of some prudential maxims to regulate his life, whereas an illiterate man walketh in darkness; but yet saith he, "it happeneth even to me, as it happeneth to the fool, and why was I then wise?" (1) Observe first the little progress made in science by those who pursue it to the highest pitch. As they advance in this immense field they discover, shall I say new extents, or new abysses, which they can never fathom. The more they nourish themselves with this rich pasture, the more keen do their appetites become. (2) Remark next the little justice done in the world to such as excel most in science. 2. The second disposition, which seems as if it would contribute much to the pleasure of life, but which often embitters it, is tenderness of heart. It is clear by the writings of Solomon, and more so by the history of his life, that his heart was very accessible to this kind of pleasure. How often doth he write encomiums on faithful friends (Prov. xvii. 17; xviii. 24). But where is this friend who sticketh closer than a brother? Where is this friend who loveth at all times? What an airy phantom is human friendship! 3. If anything seem capable to render life agreeable, and if anything in general render it disagreeable, it is rectitude, and delicacy of conscience. I know Solomon seems here to contradict himself, and the author of the Book of Proverbs seems to refute the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes. The author of the Book of Ecclesiastes informs us that virtue is generally useless and sometimes hurtful in this world; but according to the author of the Book of Proverbs virtue is most useful in this world. How shall we reconcile these things? To say, as some do, that the author of Proverbs speaks of the spiritual rewards of virtue, and the author of Ecclesiastes of the temporal state of it, is to cut the knot instead of untying it. Of many solutions there is one that bids fair to remove the difficulty; that is, that when the author of the Book of Proverbs makes temporal advantages of the rewards of virtue, he speaks of some rare periods of society, whereas the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes describes the common general state of things. Perhaps the former refers to the happy time in which the example of the piety of David being yet recent, and the prosperity of his successor not having then infected either the heart of the king or the morals of his subjects, reputation, riches and honours were bestowed on good men; but the second, probably, speaks of what came to pass soon after. In the first period life was amiable, and living in the world delicious; but of the second the wise man saith, "I hated life because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me." To which of the two periods doth the age in which we live belong? Judge by the description given by the Preacher, as he calls himself. Then mankind were ungrateful, the public did not remember the benefits conferred on them by individuals, and their services were unrewarded (Eccles. ix. 14, 15). Then courtiers mean and ungrateful basely forsook their old master, and paid their court to the heir apparent (Eccles. iv. 15). Then the strong oppressed the weak (Eccles. iv. 1). Then the courts of justice were corrupt (Eccles. iii. 16). Such is the idea the wise man gives us of the world. Yet these vain and precarious objects, this world so proper to inspire a rational mind with disgust, this life so proper to excite hatred in such as know what is worthy of esteem, this is that which hath always fascinated, and which yet continues to fascinate the bulk of mankind. (*J. Saurin.*) *Life with and without God*.—Contrast this verdict of the Preacher with that calm, clear, victorious utterance of the great apostle, ringing like a clarion, as he utters the words, "Lay hold on the life that is life indeed," and you will have the subject of my sermon—life without God, and life with God—the misery and disappointment of the one, the fulness and satisfaction of the other; the one vanity and vexation of spirit, the other life which is life indeed. I. Let us look at LIFE WITHOUT GOD. Let me frankly acknowledge that there are some things in life even without God which are pleasant, and delightful and beautiful. First of all we begin life as little children, and to children the next pleasure is quite enough to make life worth living; their little hearts are not troubled with the deep problems of life, and God forbid they should be. And then I do not deny that there is some real satisfaction and pleasure, as every one knows, in all healthy activity. Then, too, no one can doubt that there is very much that is very beautiful in human love. Some young people in the golden days of their early married life, when love is very beautiful, and real, and fresh, bright as a spring morning, may be tempted to think that is enough. "We want no other life, this satisfies us." Now, I admit of this freely and frankly; but oh, it does

not settle the question. The question comes back, "Does it satisfy?" There are very many indications in this present day that the world is finding out what this old preacher found out, that life without God is vanity and vexation of the spirit. Let me just give you one of them. Have you ever noticed the very remarkable fact that much of our higher poetry is unutterably sad? Take, for example, the poems of Matthew Arnold: they are Greek in perfection of form and in their faultless beauty, but how sad they are! That deep sadness that lay over the world of which he so pathetically sings broods like a cloud over his own poetry. And when you come to examine the reason why he so depresses you, the answer is because there is no living personal God in it—it is the loss of God which explains it all. Do not misunderstand me. I am not imagining that life is to be lived solely with religious aims and religious objects. I do not take a narrow view, I trust, of human life. God has given us various and ample powers, and each one of them has to find its own appropriate satisfaction. I do not condemn any of the generous ambitions of youth. I would not even forbid the less noble ambitions of life so long as they are kept subordinate to the will of God. Let a man earn knowledge or fame, or distinction, or wealth, or influence, and if he earn them honestly, well; but I do desire to impress upon you this one lesson—that it does not matter what the end you set before yourselves in life may be, whether it be pleasure, or intellectual eminence, or wealth, if you leave God out it will so disappoint you, miserably disappoint you, and you will have a time, in your own experience, when you will turn from it with the muttered curse, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." II. LET US ASK WHAT LIFE WITH GOD MEANS. "Lay hold on the life which is life indeed." Shall I tell you what it is? "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Those are the words of Jesus: that is Christ's own definition of the life indeed—to know God, the true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent. No man requires demonstration that this is life indeed. It needs none: the mere statement of the truth is its proof. If there be an eternal and infinite God on whom I depend for all things, if He has created me and loves me with unspeakable love, if He has spent all the riches of His love to redeem me from sin, if I am to live with Him through eternity a life removed from all the conditions of time and space—then, of all the self-evident propositions you can put into words, this is the most self-evident and certain, that I am created and redeemed solely to find my life in God, I am too great to find my life in anything less than God. Ah, "He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son hath not life." This is the life indeed. And now you see the meaning of what we are so apt to call the mystery of sorrow, the mystery of pain. The other day I was reading the diary of a life which in many respects is most instructive and pathetic. It was the story of a man who had had unusual prosperity, and in looking through this diary I came across these words: "God has broken silence with me." Great crushing sorrow had fallen on him, and that man who had lived many years in the sunshine of prosperity without God, without ever speaking of God or hearing God speaking to him, suddenly in the darkness awoke to the fact that God was near to him, and that God had come to him in the great trouble of his life; and then he wrote these words, "God has broken silence with me." Ah, life indeed! That is its designation. I do not say it will not have its troubles, its disappointments, perhaps even its failures; but the troubles and disappointments of that life as little affect it as the storms that sweep across the Atlantic touch the deep calm of the ocean beneath. It is life indeed! Nothing disturbs its central peace, for it is founded upon God. And then, when the end comes—as it will come to us all—and friends stand round the bed, and the last farewells are spoken, and the eyes are closed in death, and we make the last journey to that "bourne from which no traveller returns," and our feet touch the waters of the cold river—in that supreme and awful hour will the life indeed fill us then? Listen! The man who wrote these words, "Lay hold of the life which is life indeed," tells us what he felt on the verge of eternity: "I am now ready to be offered." (G. S. Barrett, D.D.)

Vers. 18, 19. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me.—*The dirge of the dead hand*:—Solomon's life was complete from the naturalistic standpoint. He sought pleasure with a zest we should condemn as licence nowadays, but which the spirit of those times was accustomed to count lawful, at least for kings. And

more than that, he gave himself to great and imposing enterprises, diligently seeking the welfare of his people as well as his own personal and family aggrandizement. And yet work upon an unspiritual plane of ideas could not altogether satisfy him. He had an unhappy forecast of pending changes, for Rehoboam was not an ideal youth. He already seems to be hearing the cry, "The king is dead: long live the king!" And how sick at heart he feels as all the signs seem to show that the new king will be an iconoclast, a reactionary, a fool, or at least a man who does not think in the same groove as his predecessor! But this heart-sick pessimism, like the same temper everywhere, was misjudging. That which was ignoble in his work perished, and deserved to perish. His heart-ache, as he thought of how much in the schemes he had tried to carry out would be altered by his successors, was relevant only to the lower ranges of his work. But the royal preacher was thinking not so much of his work as of himself. He wanted to invest his own dead hand with perpetual power; but that is not permitted to the best of the children of men. In this lament we can find traces of self-idolatry, and self-idolatry is allied with contempt of our fellows and disbelief of the living God. I. THIS TEMPER REPRESENTS THE MOOD OF ONE WHO IS DOING MUCH OF HIS WORK UNDER THE UNWHOLESOME STIMULUS OF PRIDE AND AMBITION. Why should even Solomon flatter himself that all his works were so perfect that they were beyond the need of modification and readjustment? There were wise men before him, and wise men were destined to come after him, and he had contemporaries who, if not equalling him in the range of his knowledge, had at least kept themselves from plunging into the same abysses of folly and self-indulgence; and yet the great king was under the impression that he was probably the last of the sages, and that the distinguished race would vanish at his own funeral. We know now how groundless his assumption was; for in every age the world has had in it men whose gifts, acquisitions, and practical sagacity have far outmatched those of this much-bepraised king, who was sybarite as well as sage, and who, through untempered success, over-deep draughts of intoxicating flattery, and polygamistic animalism, was spoiled into an ignoble old age. The man who looks upon life from Solomon's standpoint has obviously set his heart upon achieving what will be an enduring monument of his own reputation, and, like the Pyramids, which defend nothing, shelter nothing, protect nothing, teach nothing, will immortalize, in an indestructible edifice of colossal barrenness, the faded empire of a royal mummy. The vain man wants to do something that will be sacred from the hands of the would-be reformer, or it will be no true tribute to his infallibility. Why should posterity, out of mere respect for us, refrain from trying to improve upon our work? Men are sent into the world in ever fresh tides of young hope and vitality to help the common good of the race, and not to be our minions and satellites. Others may succeed in cultivating finer blooms to put into our gardens, trees of nobler stature to adorn our parks, herbs of more medicinal virtue to plant in our fields: in substituting rarer and more translucent stones for the crude and unwrought material with which we reared temples and palaces. II. THIS UTTERANCE IMPLIED AN UNORACIOUS DISDAIN OF THE MEN WHO WERE SHORTLY TO STEP INTO POWER. Of all men in the world Solomon ought not to have been hard upon the fools. He had not uniformly set the wisest example in his own person, and the luxurious harems he had acclimatized upon Jewish soil were not likely to be schools of the sublimest philosophy and breeding-places of the most stalwart virtue. And in a lukewarm and unspiritual state of society an evil prophecy of this sort always tends to fulfil itself. Not to trust those who are around us, and who expect to take up our work, is just the way to corrupt and demoralize them. The effect is the same as that produced by the suspicious head of a household who keeps every cheap trifle under lock and key. The mistrust of posterity is, perhaps, a meaner and a more wicked thing than the mistrust of our contemporaries, for posterity cannot speak for itself and lift up its voice in protest against this unjust and wholesale condemnation. We do our utmost to imperil our own work, when we assume that no one will be fit to carry it on after the sceptre has fallen from our lifeless grasp. III. THIS TEMPER OF SOUL IMPLIES A GLOOMY VIEW OF THE FUTURE OF THE HUMAN RACE. The wise man lacked faith in humanity and its unknown possibilities, lacked that faith which it was the specific intention of the promise made to his forefathers to produce. To his own complacent estimate it seemed that the race had touched the high-water mark of intelligence and character in himself, and that now the inevitable decline must begin. How inferior in faith to Samuel, and Elijah, and Elisha, who nurtured schools for the future

prophets, and who, in spite of the stern work they had to do, turned an undespairing outlook upon the future. Jesus and His apostles expected unbroken files of sowers and reapers to co-operate with each other and to carry on the victorious work of the kingdom to the end of time. The Church could not fail, although the gates of hell might send forth red-hot torrents of rage and opposition; and the lineage of godly and discerning workers would never be cut off root and branch, like the house of Eli. If we think, and speak, and act as though future workers would spring up and worthily carry on our modest beginnings, unborn and ungrown generations will respond to our confidence, and we shall not lack men to stand before the Lord in our room for ever. The man is both an atheist and a hater of his kind who asserts that the world is moving backward into the abyss of barbarism and folly. IV. THIS TEMPER INDICATES A DEEP AND OMINOUS LACK OF RELIGIOUS FAITH. He who speaks in any such strain has for the time being lost faith in the providential sovereignty of God. There is a touch of Manichæism in this heart-sick pessimism. It sees a mere Puck installed over the universe and clothed with infinite attributes, satisfying his soul with mischief, and encouraging the fools who make havoc with the achievements of the wise. All such vapourings show that there is a heathen or an infidel half in our personalities, sadly needing to be exorcised so that we may become sane, and useful, and happy men. Faith in God is one with the gift of prophecy; and if this royal preacher had always stirred up the gift which was in him, he would have felt how all that was best in his work would be preserved through apparent decline and reaction, till at last one wiser and greater than Solomon had appeared, to gather up into His plans all the true and unselfish work of the past, and to fulfil the fair and holy dreams of the world's ardent youth. V. THIS UNHAPPY, CORROSIVE TEMPER MAY EAT INTO OUR HEARTS, NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE WE REPUDIATE THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL SOVEREIGNTY, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE NOT LIVING AND WORKING IN HIGH HARMONY WITH HIS COUNSELS. In catering so lavishly for his own lusts and luxuries, this king was doing his own will and work, rather than God's, and it may have been the appointed penalty of his ornate selfishness that fools should make havoc of his accomplished dreams just as soon as he had passed away. He speaks of parks, pleasure gardens, fountains, artificial lakes, palace orchestras, fortune making, personal enrichment, material aggression. It is true there was a point at which he became patriotic, and sought his people's prosperity; but that seems to have been his second thought rather than his first. And this policy of self-aggrandizement was identified with foreign marriages and heathen coalitions, which had such a demoralizing effect upon his own successors and the nation at large, and which prepared the way for the schisms and tragic apostasies of the coming times. If we cherish no higher views of life, we cannot fairly count upon the good offices of Divine Providence in protecting our enterprise from the pranks of fools. What right has that man to look for the enduring blessing of God who chooses his tasks in selfishness and pride? Let our work be holy, unselfish, spiritual, and God will accept it as a sacrifice for Himself, and preserve it in the unknown future from violation; for the sons of light, seen by the seer of Patmos, who compass the divine altar in heaven, hover in their strong ministries about every altar upon earth where lies the accepted oblation of unselfish toil. (*Thomas G. Selby.*)

Vers. 24-26. There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour.—*The simple joys of godly industry*:—We are not to regard these words as at all akin to the utterance of the baser Epicureanism, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" We are not to suppose that the Jewish philosopher, looking around him, and finding all to be "vanity and feeding on wind," concludes that the best thing a man can do, under the circumstances, is to give himself up to a life of sensuous enjoyment. This cannot possibly be his meaning here; for he has already shown the emptiness of a life of sensuous gratification, and he has also recorded it as his conviction that "wisdom is better than folly." Moreover, the words themselves do not point to mere idle self-indulgence; for they speak of a man's "enjoying good in his labour." Ecclesiastes seems to have before his mind a life in which hearty and honest toil is blended with a contented enjoyment of the fruits of toil. In the maxim, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," eating and drinking stand for all kinds of sensuous gratification, and even of sensual excess. But here, to "eat and drink" seems to stand rather for the simpler forms of living, as contrasted with luxurious and excessive self-indulgence. That this is the meaning

of Ecclesiastes here is further evident from the manner in which he goes on to speak of the conditions of this contented and cheerful enjoyment of life. "This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God." This introduction of the thought of God is itself sufficient to show that Ecclesiastes is not here speaking as a sensualist, or as a mere pleasure-seeker. Amidst the many anomalies of life, Ecclesiastes clings to the assurance that there is a moral government of God in this world. There are indeed perplexing problems in relation to this moral government, which he felt he could not solve, and which led him to look forward to a world beyond death where the dealings of God with men would be completed and vindicated. But still, looking at the broad facts of human life, and excluding cases apparently exceptional and perplexing, he saw that God does make a distinction, even here and now, between the "sinner" and the "man who pleaseth Him." The virtuous and godly man has an advantage, even in this world, over the wicked. He receives from God a "wisdom and knowledge" which are associated with "joy." He finds a pleasure in his work, and is contented to eat the simple fruits of his toil. He may be a poor man, labouring for daily bread; and yet he may receive from God this gift of thankful enjoyment. Whereas, on the other hand, Ecclesiastes saw that the "sinner"—the man who has no thought of God's commandments—may "gather together" and "heap up" riches, and yet have no heart to enjoy his own wealth. Now, the lesson which Ecclesiastes here sets before us is one of which we all need to be continually reminded. Patent as the fact may be to us that the higher happiness of life is far more closely associated with unanxious labour, simple habits, and cheerful contentment, than with wealth or luxury, we are all more or less apt to live in forgetfulness of it. The social atmosphere which we breathe is too feverish and restless. We are apt to lose the blessings of to-day through over-anxiety about the morrow. We are apt to miss the enjoyment which God has put for us into the simple, common blessings of life, through our eager pursuit of something more which may not really be anything better. It might be a desirable thing for some men who are spoiling their lives through selfish ambition or sordid Mammonism, to sit for a little while even at the feet of Epicurus! But far better for all of us to sit at the feet of Christ. All that was really true and valuable in the higher Epicureanism is to be found, in a more exalted form, in Christianity. It does not bid us proudly trample on either pleasure or pain; but it bids us cultivate an inner peace and strength which shall prevent us from becoming the mere victims and slaves of circumstance. Without despising any "creature of God," it nevertheless teaches us to estimate things according to their relative importance. And if only our hearts were set more steadfastly on higher things, if only we were more bent on "pleasing God," we would be the better able to "eat and drink and enjoy good in our labour"—to enjoy with a more serene and contented spirit the simple, ordinary blessings which are common to humanity. (*T. C. Finlayson.*)

Ver. 26. **For God giveth to a man that is good in His sight.**—*True goodness*:—I. **HE WHO IS GOOD BEFORE GOD IS GOOD.** 1. A man may be good in his own esteem, and yet not be really so. The way in which we sometimes mistake ourselves is altogether pitiable. 2. A man may be good in the estimate of society, and yet not be really so. Dr. Bushnell relates how he was much struck by the remark of an elderly gentleman touching hero-worship: "From the moment of my leaving college to this present hour I have been gradually losing my respect for great names." 3. A man may be accepted as good by the Church, and yet not be really so. The diamond fields of South Africa produce large numbers of diamonds whose yellow colour lessens immensely the value of the gem, and rogues have hit on an ingenious method for the falsification of these jewels; they are put into some chemical solution, and for a while after the bath the yellow diamond appears perfectly white, deceiving the very elect. Character also is capable of falsification; we may appear to ourselves and to others brighter and costlier than we intrinsically are. 4. But they who are good before God *are* good. He who has the testimony that he pleases God needs no more. II. **WHO IS TRULY GOOD BEFORE GOD?** Who is this man, this woman, this child? The goodness that is good before God is the goodness that God inspires, and that He maintains in our heart and life by His Holy Spirit. Whatever is truly good is made so by its motive, its principle, its aim; and he who is truly good acts from the purest motive, obeys the loftiest rule, aspires to the supremest end. Well then, the purest motive is the love of God; the loftiest rule is the will of God; the supremest

end is the glory of God. In a word, the essence of goodness is godliness; and where there is no godliness there is no goodness in the deep scriptural signification of that word. But the goodness that comes from God, that lives through Him, that gives, acts, suffers, hopes for His name's sake—that is goodness indeed. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) **Wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.**—*Joy in religion*:—I wish to call your attention to the last gift here mentioned—joy. To have goodness is by many supposed to inherit grief in proportion. The bestowment of wisdom and knowledge is considered to carry with it the addition of many troubles. The text tells us that God gives to those who have found favour in His sight "wisdom and knowledge"—"joy," or the sense of enjoyment, the pleasant appreciation of the delights of true wisdom and knowledge, is added to counteract and enliven the weariness and depression which ever accompany the possession of great learning. Joy comes after, not before, wisdom and knowledge—as we have it in the text. It is the rapturous outcome of acquired wisdom—the balance given, the beauty bestowed, the relish awarded to dissipate the despondent gloom which is too often the result of mental activity. Now, what is true in secular things is clearly and even more true in spiritual matters. When Christ is made to us wisdom and true knowledge He gives the soul joy—His joy; and the real Christian not only rejoices in the Lord, but he will rejoice in every good thing which the Lord his God hath given unto him. He will have a joyous, buoyant, glad nature, exulting in God's favour, and opening his mouth to sing and laugh and be merry; and in this and other ways he will strive to show forth his Lord's praises before the world. There are some who are wont to urge that the Christian believer must necessarily, from the condition of things, be a shrinking, grave, and even melancholy being; that in bearing, and cast of countenance, and conduct he must be the very reverse of a joyous, light-hearted, laughter-loving creature of the world. With his own sins, past and present, to mourn over, the ever-recurring shortcomings of duty, the never-ending slips of temper, the coldness of feeling and the too slow approach of the new life to the fixed standard of that perfection which is the Father's in heaven, how can that man, it is often asked, be otherwise than tearful in word and look? Truly this is all wrong, producing results of a most painful kind, and life runs with slow, unvaried, saddening sound, till all presented to the eye or ear fills the lone soul with misery, and grief, and fear. I believe that this is a true picture of some who, being morbidly and ghastly grief-struck by some deep and immedicable wound, are ever looking with melancholy eyes upon the night side of things until the sense of present evils never ceases to annoy them. Fretful, feverish, gloomy, excusing nothing and accusing every one, the tired brain never gets relief from the heavy heart. Now this ought not so to be in the Christian character, and when they exist the most strenuous exertions ought to be made, the most determined efforts of the will, to get rid of them. He who made us made us capable of joy. It is a holy necessity of man's nature. If God had meant us to be always grave, and serious, and down-looking, He might have constituted us so that we could have been nothing else: He would not have chosen as the emblem and image of His chiefest blessing, even the blessing of redeeming love, the glad symbol of the festive scene, that His Son would give us "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." The truly Christian mind, filled with the love of the Saviour, will sanctify everything lawful by the presence of a holy, kindly feeling, and will derive benefit from such allowance, consciously or unconsciously. But the indulgence of our susceptibilities to pleasurable impressions is itself an end which, in due mode and measure, Christian men may seek and the happy God of love not disapprove. God giveth joy. He not only re-bestows the gift in Christ, but He made us originally susceptible of the keenest enjoyment. The gift is to be cherished; the susceptibility is to be encouraged and strengthened; but it is most important that a cheerful and chastened exercise of the gift should vindicate the joyfulness of saints, and present a safe and suitable example to the world. One of the strongest prejudices felt against religion is because of its supposed gloomy character. Those who are destitute of a religious spirit can find little or no enjoyment in religious occupation, and are naturally disposed to think that others must be like themselves. It has been too often the fault or the misfortune of Christians to confirm this erroneous impression; and it behoves them, by every lawful method, to endeavour to remove it. If we are Christ's, let us pray and strive that our religion may be one of sunshine—a religion of happiness, a rejoicing religion. (*G. H. Connor, M.A.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-8. *To everything there is a season.*—*Times and seasons in the Church.*—The principle which Solomon asserts, and which is of extreme importance in all matters connected with our practical life in this world, is also of equal importance in religious matters. It is true of religion as of all other things, that in it too there is a time for all things, a time to be merry and a time to be sad; and moreover that true wisdom consists in regulating these times, not in leaving them to take their chance (so to speak), but in fixing seasons and periods as aids to the various religious feelings. Let me then bring under your notice a few points illustrative of the method which the Church adopts, a method which is the carrying into religion the principle of the text, cutting out our time, allotting to each portion its proper work, and so economizing the whole and guarding against waste and misuse. The first instance I shall take will be that of our observance of the Sunday. I ask myself—why is this day set apart as it is? and looking upon it not merely as a day of animal rest, but as a day of religious service, the reply is ready, that although men ought to serve God every day, yet they are more likely to remember their duty if a special day be set apart for the purpose; the Sunday, in fact, is a great practical call to worship God; the most thoughtless person cannot fail to have the duty of worship brought before him; no man can by possibility live in this country, and not know that prayer and praise are a duty; few men can have failed to have heard of Christ's Sacraments, however much they may have neglected them. The great truth also of the resurrection of the Lord, the great truth upon which all our own hopes of a resurrection depend, how completely and powerfully is that preached by this same institution! for Sunday is emphatically the feast of Christ's Resurrection. It is in strict accordance with this principle that the Church has attached a peculiar solemnity to the Friday. As Easter Day throws a light of joy upon all the Sundays in the year, so is it deemed right that the awful event of Good Friday should throw a shade of sadness upon all other Fridays; accordingly you will find the Friday marked in the Prayer-book as a day of fasting and abstinence. Is this a vain rule, a relic of Popery, a remnant of the Dark Ages? I think that sober, thoughtful Christians will not say so; for indeed there is nothing which will tend so much to Christianize the mind, if I may so speak, as to meditate upon the Passion of the Lord Christ. On the same principle we have certain days set apart for the commemoration of saints. The first founders of the kingdom of Christ, those to whose zeal and faithfulness we owe the preservation of the precious deposit of faith, are men to be kept ever in our minds as the great champions of God's noble army, whose faith we may well follow. It may be said that every Christian will have a grateful sense of the debt he owes to the apostles and martyrs of Christ; yes, but the question is whether the debt will not be discharged more punctually and more completely, if the work be arranged upon system, if a day be set apart for consideration of the character and works of this apostle, and another for that; in fact, if a person throws himself into the Church system and follows her mode of commemorating the saints, is it not to be expected that he will take a more complete view of the various characters and excellences of the apostles, than a man who acknowledged their excellence in general, but does not thus study them in detail? Take the Ember weeks as another example of the same principle. It is desirable that God's blessing should be invoked by the Church at large upon those who are ordained to the ministry, and upon whose faith and pure conversation so much of the prosperity of the Church depends; how can this great end be best secured? by appointing to the work its proper time. Once more, take the round of great festivals, which, beginning with Advent, terminate in Trinity Sunday. You cannot have failed to observe the manner in which the round of feasts brings before us all the great Christian doctrines; how the Church, preparing at first for the advent of Christ, exhibits Him to us as a babe in swaddling-clothes, then carries us up to His betrayal and death, His burial, His rising again, His ascension into heaven, the coming of the Holy Ghost, and then exhibits to us the full mystery of Godhead, the incomprehensible Three Persons in One God. Lastly, I will take as an example of the Church system the season of Lent. Its meaning may be briefly stated thus, it is the season of penitence. Season of penitence? a person may say, ought not all seasons to be seasons of penitence?

Truly; but as there is a time for all things, so has penitence its special time; and the Church requires of us that for forty days before the Passion of Christ, we should meditate upon and grieve over the sins which caused His death. I think I need not say much to convince you of the wisdom of this appointment; if you were perfect, like the angels, you would not require such a season; there is no change of season in heaven, because the blessed spirits around God's throne have but one occupation, and that is to sing His praise; but in like manner "there is no night there," because, being freed from the burden of the flesh, there is to them no weariness; and just as in this world night is necessary for us, which has no existence in heaven, so on earth we may find help to our souls from those aids to our infirmity, which the Church on earth requires, but which the Church triumphant knows not. (*Bp. Harvey Goodwin.*) *The realities of life* (with ver. 10):—There are many falsehoods written over the ashes of the dead; but none more flagrant and profane than that inscribed on the monument erected in Westminster Abbey, by the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry, to the memory of the poet Gay. It was written by Gay himself, and reads thus—

"Life is a jest, and all things show it;
I thought so once, but now I know it."

What a miserable estimate of the grand existence of man on earth! What a gross misrepresentation of the lessons taught by God's works and ways! What a libel on the momentous revelations of the future world! What a noble answer to Gay's wretched falsehood Longfellow supplies in his "Psalm of Life"! How many souls have been stirred to action by its trumpet-call! How many true and brave lives have been lived in response to its appeal! I. THE REALITIES OF LIFE SURROUND US ALL. There are the realities of your calling; the duties connected with it, which you feel must be discharged in the most efficient manner possible; the responsibilities attaching to it, which perhaps in several ways are heavy; the temptations to swerve from the line of rectitude, and practise that which is mean and sinful; the worry and anxiety arising out of the keenness of competition, the sharp dealing and fraud of your fellow-men, and the uncertainties of all secular life. We are not to be slothful in our secular pursuits; if we are, we may as well give them up altogether; yet, at the same time, we should see that we have them all in subordination to our spiritual interests, and the life to come. Often the realities of life thicken around men while they are destitute of all preparation. They have failed to exercise forethought—neglected to make provision for the future. All previous periods of life have seen them unfaithful to themselves, to their opportunities, to their calling. You can never redeem what you have lost; but you may avoid losing more. It is of no use bemoaning the past. "Let the dead past bury its dead!" At once embrace the opportunities of the "living present." Forget the things which are behind, and reach towards the things which are before. II HEarken to the word of counsel, as to the way in which you should meet the realities of life and turn them to good account. Cultivate earnestness of character. History furnishes us with some rare instances of earnest purpose and endeavour—vigorous grappling with the realities of life, that should inspire us with enthusiasm. "I am doing a great work," said Nehemiah, while rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, "so that I cannot come down." "This one thing I do," exclaims the Apostle Paul. Minutius Aldus, a famous printer at Venice in the sixteenth century, had this significant inscription placed over the door of his office—"Whoever thou art, Aldus entreats thee again and again, if thou hast business with him, to conclude it briefly, and hasten thy departure: unless, like Hercules to the weary Atlas, thou come to put thy shoulder to the work, then will there ever be sufficient occupation for thee and all others who may come." In the diary of Dr. Chalmers, under the date of March 12th, 1812, there occurs this entry—"I am reading the life of Dr. Doddridge, and am greatly struck with the quantity of business which he put through his hands. O God, impress upon me the value of time, and give regulation to all my thoughts and to all my movements. May I be strong in faith, instant in prayer, high in my sense of duty, and vigorous in the occupation of it! When I detect myself in unprofitable reverie, let me make an instant transition from dreaming to doing." I think it was Sir James Mackintosh who said that whenever he died, he should die with a host of unaccomplished purposes and unfinished plans in his brain. So every earnest man will leave behind him many a half-finished, and even many an unattempted work. Nevertheless, with a true

and earnest heart we may complete some things—we may weave the threads of life into a fabric of varied use and beauty—and, like David of old, serve our generation by the will of God before we fall on sleep, and are laid among our fathers. Once more, nothing will so help you to deal with the realities of life as true religion. Do you possess it, and are you living under its influence? (*W. Walters.*) *The fall of the leaf*:—At no period of the year are the sunsets so varied and beautiful as in autumn. The many-coloured woods of the year's eventide correspond to the many-coloured clouds of the sunset sky; and as the heavens burst into their brightest hues, and exhibit their loveliest transfigurations when the daylight is fading into the gloom of night, so the year unfolds its richest tints and its fairest charms when it is about to sink into the darkness and desolation of winter. The beauty of the autumnal tints is commonly supposed to be confined to the fading foliage of the trees. This is indeed the most obvious feature of the season—that which appeals to every eye, and reads its lesson to every heart. But nature here, as everywhere else, loves to reproduce in her smallest things the peculiarities of her greatest. It was a beautiful myth, created by the glowing imagination of the Greek poets, that the great god Pan, the impersonation of nature, wedded the nymph Echo; so that every note which he blew from his pipe of reeds awakened a harmonious response in her tender bosom. Most truly does this bright fancy represent the real design of nature, according to which we hear on every hand some curious reverberation of some familiar sound, and see all things delighting to wear each other's robes. The fading trees pipe their many-coloured music aloft on the calm blue October air—for the chromatic scale is the harmonious counterpart of the musical—and the lowly plants that grow beneath their shadow dance to the music. The weeds by the wayside are gifted with a beauty in the decline of life equal to that of the proudest oaks and beeches. Each season partakes to some extent of the characteristics of all the other seasons, and shares in all the varied beauties of the year. Thus we find an autumn in each spring in the death of the primroses and lilies, and a harvest in each summer in the ripe hay-fields; and every one has noticed that the sky of September possesses much of the fickleness of spring in the rapid change of its clouds and the variability of its weather. Very strikingly is this mutual repetition by the seasons of each other's characteristic features seen in the resemblance between the tints of the woods in spring and in autumn. The first leaves of the oak expand from the bud in a pale tender crimson; the young leaves of the maple tree, and all the leaves that appear on a maple stump, are of a remarkable copper colour; the immature foliage of the hazel and alder is marked by a dark purple tinge, singularly rich and velvety-looking. Not more varied is the tinting of the autumnal woods than that of the spring woods. And it may be remarked that the colour into which any tree fades in autumn is the same as it wears when it bursts the ceremonies of spring, and unfolds to the sunny air. Its birth is a prophecy of its death, and its death of its birth. Nature's cradles have not more of beginning in them than of ending; and nature's graves have not more of ending in them than of beginning. No one can take a walk in the melancholy woodland in the calm October days without being deeply impressed by the thought of the great waste of beauty and creative skill seen in the faded leaves which rustle beneath his feet. Take up and examine one of these leaves attentively, and you are astonished at the wealth of ingenuity displayed in it. It is a miracle of design, elaborately formed and richly coloured—in reality more precious than any jewel; and yet it is dropped off the bough as if it had no value, and rots away unheeded in the depths of the forest. Myriads of similar gems are heaped beneath the leafless trees, to moulder away in the rains of November. It saddens us to think of this continual lavish production and careless discarding of forms of beauty and wonder, which we see everywhere throughout nature. Could not the foliage be so contrived as to remain permanently on the trees, and only suffer such a periodical change as the evergreen ivy undergoes? Must the web of nature's fairest embroidery be taken down every year, and every year woven back again to its old completeness and beauty? Is nature waiting for some great compensation, as Penelope of old waited for her absent husband, when she unravelled each evening the work of each day, and thus deluded her eager lovers with vain promises? Yes! she weaves and unweaves her web of loveliness each season—not in order to mock us with delusive hopes, but to wean us from all false loves, and teach us to wait and prepare for the true love of our souls, which is found, not in the passing

things of earth, but in the abiding realities of heaven. This is the secret of all her lavish wastefulness. For this she perpetually sacrifices and perpetually renews her beauty; for this she counts all her most precious things but as dross. By the pathos of her autumn loveliness she is appealing to all that is deepest and truest in our spiritual nature; and through her fading flowers and her withering grass, and all her fleeting glories, she is speaking to us words of eternal life, whereby our souls may be enriched and beautified for ever. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) *The clock of destiny*:—"Destiny!" What a word! Orthographically it is composed of seven parts, as if, in the use of the sacred number, "seven," it was intended, by its very structure, to express, to all ages, its profound significance—viz. sufficiency, fulness, completion, *perfection*! Such, indeed, is the sweeping import of the word "destiny." It means a state of things that is complete, perfect. It signifies that this world—with its empires that rise and fall—its marvellous incidents that are enacted by human wisdom, courage, strife and ambition—its generations that are born, that live and die—its joys and sorrows—its shifting seasons and rolling years: this earth, as it now exists, is under a management that is sufficient, perfect!—a management of which it can be said: "A sparrow cannot fall to the ground without notice"—that is, without permission and purpose! Destiny has a "Clock"—"a huge timepiece" which measures off the events in this fixed order of things. On its dial-plate is inscribed this world-wide truth: "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven." By what "Hand" is this "Clock of Destiny" wound up and managed in all its complicated machinery? In other words: What is the superintending power of this fixed order of things? One answer says: "Fatalism makes the pendulum oscillate, fitting cog to cog and wheel to wheel, controlling all the movements of the dial-gnomon." God is here given the go-by, while absolute necessity and fixed, cold, unconscious law are delegated with all power. Fatalism annihilates intelligence and free-will in the world's government. It declares that "Everything from a star to a thought; from the growth of a tree to a spasm of sorrow; from the coronation of a king to the falling of a sparrow is connected with and under the positive control of molecular force." In short, destiny's timepiece is wound up and kept in running order by a "hand"—not divine! The third chapter of Ecclesiastes was written in the interest of the Divine Hand managing the "Clock of Destiny"—in other words, to teach the glorious doctrine of special providence. O ye priests "of science falsely so called," ye prophets of the "Unknowable," ye "wise men" who make law supreme and deify force—let the Hebrew sage teach you a better creed! Yea, ye, doubters, ye of unbelief, as to the doctrine of special providence in things great and small—listen to this: "God doeth!" not fate. His acts "shall be for ever," not of short duration but of eternal import. He is independent of all contingency—the wicked cannot frustrate the Almighty's purposes: "Nothing can be put to it and nothing can be taken from it." His government is for man's highest good—by each swing of the pendulum the Divine Father would move the race nearer to Himself: "And God doeth it that they should fear before Him." He is never surprised—nothing is new to Him, nothing old. He acts in the eternal Now. All things—past, present, future—are ever under His all-seeing eye: "That which hath been is now, and that which is to be hath already been." It is, however, impossible for us now to understand all about the management of this "huge timepiece," which measures off the events great and small, in the fixed course of things. So says the author of my text in verse 11: "No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." But this shortsightedness, on our part, is no reason why we should question the wisdom of what is being done, or, in any way, withhold our confidence and love from God as a Father—who is ever doing for us "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." And, now, in view of the fact that "the Lord reigneth"—that the "Clock of Destiny" is God's machine, ever running in the interest of man's highest good—what should be our daily conduct and highest ambition? Let this third chapter of Ecclesiastes give us, in closing, an exhortation, as it has already imparted to us profound instruction. In ver. 12 let us read that it is our mission here "to do good"—in ver. 13, "to enjoy the good of all our labour," seeing that this is "the gift of God"—in vers. 16, 17, not to fret ourselves because of evil-doers, "for God shall judge the righteous and the wicked"—in vers. 18-21, not to be disheartened or over-mournful because of death, for though "that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts"—all coming from and going to the

same place—"dust": yet "there is a spirit in man that goeth upwards." He is immortal, and hence can say: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Finally, vers. 22, "Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in all his works." Do good and rejoice in that good—this is man's duty! Scatter sunbeams to expel darkness—build up blazing fires to warm and cheer the cold, weary and worn! Be kind—be charitable—save your neighbour from tears, groans, heartaches! Swell the refrain of merry Christmas carols! Ring out the bells of New Year greeting! "Rejoice evermore!" (*A. H. Moment, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. **A time to be born, and a time to die.**—*How to make the most of life* (with chap. vii. 17):—The verse has two parts: "There is a time to be born; and a time to die"; and it seems as if man had as little control over the one as over the other—over the day of his death as over the day of his birth. These are the two milestones between which is included the whole of man's life on earth. Here is no place for free-will. All is blind, remorseless destiny. And yet the correlative text, "Why shouldest thou die before thy time?" seems to imply that life and death are in a man's own power. And in a plain sense this also is true, so that the two are only the opposite poles of one great truth, which in its completeness embraces a whole philosophy of life. That philosophy is summed up in this: That life is a gift of God—a sacred gift—to be wisely used and soberly enjoyed, and not to be trifled with, nor thrown away. But life on earth is not immortal: "There is a time to die." Nor is this a harsh decree. If only the end for which life was given be attained, man may surrender it, at the last, not only without regret, but in perfect peace. The only thing he has to fear is that he be called out of life before his time, with all his plans unfulfilled, his hopes disappointed, and his great destiny unattained. The latter half of our text, "Why shouldest thou die before thy time?" teaches us this practical lesson: That we are to make the most of life by a prudent economy of it—not a petty economy of money (which is often but the smallest element in the total of influences which make up the being that we are), but an economy of life itself, of all the vital forces, of health and reason and the elements of happiness. All this is embraced in the one great word, *Life*. This is the prize which the Creator offers to every being to whom He gives a living body and a reasonable soul. "Why shouldest thou die before thy time?" In one sense no man *can* die before his time, for is not the day of death fixed? Hath not God appointed His bound that he cannot pass? Yet, in another sense, it is quite possible to cut short the term of life. That is the evident meaning here. By a man's "time" is meant the natural limit to which one of his vitality and strength, living a sober, temperate life, might attain. Anything short of that may be ascribed to his own folly or guilt. Thus, all will admit that a man dies before his time who takes his own life, which he has no more right to take than that of his neighbour. Even though the existence that is left to him have to be endured rather than enjoyed a man must stand like a sentinel at his post, keeping watch through the long night hours, and waiting for the breaking of the day. But the wretched suicide is not the only man who is guilty of taking his own life. There are other ways of ending one's existence than by violence. The drunkard. The number of those who thus untimely perish is beyond all counting. Vice has slain its thousands, and drunkenness its ten thousands. And now turn and look at another picture. If it be a shame so to die, on the other hand what a glorious thing it is to live—to enjoy a rational, intelligent, and moral existence! Even as a matter of selfish calculation, the purely intellectual enjoyment of a man of science far transcends the vulgar delights of a life of pleasure. What a life must have been that of Kepler or Galileo! Who would throw away an existence that contains such possibilities of knowledge? Make it, then, your resolve to live a life of the strictest temperance, purity and virtue, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God giveth you. But this is only half the truth of my text. "Why shouldest thou die before thy time?" But at the last "there is a time to die." O God, I thank Thee for that word! "There is a time to die!" And religion, while it condemns the reckless throwing away of life, equally condemns the cowardly clinging to life when duty requires it to be sacrificed. Dear as life is, there are things which are a thousand times dearer—truth, honour, justice, and liberty, one's country and religion; and it may become a duty to sacrifice the lesser interest to the greater. It does not follow that a man dies

before his time because he dies young. "That life is long which answers life's great end;" and though one may finish his course on the very threshold of manhood, that end may be gloriously fulfilled. (*H. M. Field, D.D.*) **A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.**—*The periodicities of the religious world.*—The seasons succeed each other, and each has its own use and purpose. The spring with its fresh loveliness comes first on the stage, and then, after a due interval, follows autumn with its sad decay. The sower takes possession of the field in the bright days of April, and he is the most appropriate figure in the landscape, while he is scattering the seeds of promise over the bare, brown furrows. He departs, and his place is taken by the reapers, who form a pleasant company on the golden harvest field, and gather in the sheaves under the bright smile of the blue September day. The time of planting is associated with all that is fresh and animated and hopeful. But the time of plucking up that which was planted is associated with failure and disappointment, with vanity and death. And Nature makes her work of decay particularly unsightly, in order to force its moral lesson more emphatically upon our notice. We cannot help feeling how disconsolate the apple-tree looks after its rosy-white petals have fallen and when the small green fruit is setting, how dim the much fine gold of the laburnum tresses become in fading, and how the hawthorn blossoms in their withering leave a dirty-brown stain upon the country hedges like the parched bed of a belated snow-wreath that has melted away beneath the summer sun. While we are thus impressively reminded of the periodicity of Nature, the ebb and flow of her seasons and productions, we can apply the lesson to our human affairs. There are periods in human history that are analogous to the season of spring when we sow and plant with a bright enthusiasm and a large hopefulness. Our minds are ardent and vigorous. Everything is fresh and full of interest. It seems as if we had only newly awakened to the beauty and glory of the world. Looking but upon the past we can recall ages of creative genius when man conceived and executed great things in art and literature, when every work had on it the hall-mark of original inspiration. Such an age was that of Pericles in Greece, and of Queen Elizabeth in England. Such periods were times of planting, and they had all the glory and freshness of spring. But they were followed by ages in which a woeful reaction of weariness and decay took place. Rules and precedents were followed instead of the fresh insight, freedom and spontaneity of nature; criticism assumed the function of inspiration; and everywhere might be seen the slavish conventionality of exhausted capacity. They were ages in which whatever intellectual energies men had left to them were expended in plucking up that which nobler ages had planted. The commencement of the Victorian epoch was a period of remarkable creative power, a springtime of exuberant mental fertility. But the close of it seems to be characterized by a kind of listless decay. Like the fruit-tree that has one season been too productive, and must rest till it recover and accumulate fresh stores of vitality, so this age seems to be suffering from the reaction of over-production. The largest proportion of our literature is given up to criticism or imitation. It is a time to pluck up that which was planted. And the same periodicity that distinguishes the intellectual also characterizes the religious world. It has its ages of faith and its ages of doubt; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which was planted. We seem to have reached at the present day a period of listlessness and analytical indifference in regard to religious things. On every side we see, instead of a noble enthusiasm in the highest of all studies, a carping finical criticism on the most sacred subjects. However much we may deplore this state of things, we cannot say that it is absolutely evil. It has, indeed, a good purpose to serve. Winter periods are necessary in the spiritual world as testing times, to find out what is merely superficial and transient, and what is substantial and has in it the elements of endurance. It is a winter desolation to make ready for a spring of revival; and many of its evils are caused by the quickening of new life. The best thing, therefore, to do during the disquietude of a time of plucking up in the religious world is to dwell much in thought upon the ages of faith when men lived heroic lives and died blessed deaths in the heartfelt belief of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The criticism and analysis of the present time can best be counteracted by the synthesis and construction of a nobler time when men created instead of destroyed, built up instead of cast down, planted instead of plucked up the springtime of divine grace. And this synthesis is practically always possible to the meek in spirit to whom God will teach His way. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Vers. 3, 4. **A time to kill, and a time to heal.**—*Spiritual times and seasons.*—The work of grace upon the soul may be divided into two distinct operations of the Spirit of God upon the heart; the one is to break down the creature into nothingness and self-abasement before God; the other is to exalt the crucified Jesus as "God over all, blessed for ever" upon the wreck and ruin of the creature. And these two lessons the blessed Spirit writes with power upon every quickened vessel of mercy.

1. There is, then, "a time to kill"—that is, there is an appointed season in God's eternal counsels when the sentence of death is to be known and felt in the consciences of all His elect. That time cannot be hurried, or delayed. The hands of that clock, of which the will of God is the spring, and His decrees the pendulum, are beyond the reach of human fingers to move on or put back. The killing precedes the healing, and the breaking down goes before the building up; the elect weep before they laugh, and mourn before they dance. In this track does the Holy Spirit move; in this channel do His blessed waters flow. The first "time," then, of which the text speaks is that season when the Holy Ghost takes them in hand in order to kill them. And how does He kill them? By applying with power to their consciences the spirituality of God's holy law, and thus bringing the sentence of death into their souls—the Spirit of God employing the law as a ministration of condemnation to cut up all creature-righteousness.

2. But it is not all killing work. If God kills His people, it is to make them alive (1 Sam. ii. 6); if He wounds them, it is that He may heal; if He brings down, it is that He may lift up. There is, then, "a time to heal." And how is that healing effected? By some sweet discovery of mercy to the soul, by the eyes of the understanding being enlightened to see Jesus, and by the Holy Ghost raising up a measure of faith in the heart whereby Christ is laid hold of, embraced in the affections, testified to by the Spirit, and enthroned within, as "the hope of glory."

3. But we pass on to another time—"a time to break down." This implies that there is a building to be overthrown. What building is this? It is that proud edifice which Satan and the flesh have combined to erect in opposition to God, the Babel which is built up with bricks and lime to reach the topmost heaven. But there is a time in God's hand to break down this Babel which has been set up by the combined efforts of Satan and our own hearts.

4. There is "a time to build up." This building up is wholly and solely in Christ, under the blessed Spirit's operations. But what building up can there be in Christ, except the creature is laid low? What has Jesus as an all-sufficient Saviour to do with one who can stand in his own strength and his own righteousness?

5. But there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." Does a man only weep once in his life? Does not the time of weeping run, more or less, through a Christian's life? Does not mourning run parallel with his existence in this tabernacle of clay? for "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards." Then "a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up," must run parallel with a Christian's life, just as much as "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." But these times and seasons are in the Father's hand; and, "what God has joined together, let no man put asunder." Never talk of healing till you can talk of killing; never think of being built up, until you have been broken down; never expect to laugh, until you have been taught to weep; and never hope to dance, until you have learned to mourn. Such only as are taught of God can enter into the real experience of these things; and into them, sooner or later, each according to his measure, does God the Holy Spirit lead all the ransomed family of Zion. (*J. C. Philpot.*)

A time to weep, and a time to laugh.—*Amusements.*—The play impulse is, I verily believe, as sacred in the Divine intention as the work impulse. Indeed, Dr. Bushnell has undertaken to show how what he calls the state of play is the ultimate state of redeemed and regenerated humanity, up to which it climbs through previous discipline in the working state; and though in his argument he has not actually done so, yet I presume he would regard that prophetic picture of the new heavens and the new earth wherein Zechariah declares that "the streets of Jerusalem shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" as only a poetic description of the heavenly employments of children of a larger growth. For, when we come to look a little deeper than the surface, what do we mean by play? Coming home at the end of the day, weary and worn and fretted, you open the door upon your little one rolling and tumbling upon the floor with a kitten. It is certainly not a very classical nor a very dignified scene, and yet, somehow, your heart straightway

softens to it, and you sit down and watch the romp with a sense of sympathy and refreshment that you have not had through all the dull and plodding day. Why is it? Why, but because after all that is life without effort or care or burden, joy without labour or rivalry or tedium, bounding motion and bubbling glee without anxiety and without remorse! And what is such a life, disengaged from its animal characteristics and ennobled by a spiritual insight, but the true idea of heaven, where, if there be activity, there will be no effort, but where all that we do and are will be the free spontaneous outburst of the overflowing joy and gladness that are in us. I. MERE AMUSEMENT OUGHT NOT TO BE, AND CANNOT HEALTHILY BE, THE END OF ANY LIFE. We speak of child-life as the play period of a human existence. And yet, have you never noticed that even the child cannot play, unless he has climbed up into the sphere of play through the toilsome vestibule of work? We see him careering over the ground in the wild joy of his young freedom, climbing the trees, scaling the hillsides, racing through the fields, or gambolling on the grass, and we say, "what glad surrender to pure impulse!" But do we remember how he has come to that free command of himself, his limbs and lungs and muscles; how he has tottered first of all on his tiny feet, and fallen, and risen, only to fall again; how by slow gradations he has taught his muscles to obey his will, and his feet to do the bidding of his thought, and his hands to grasp and hold the things he reaches after? Not without effort, surely, has he come into that larger freedom of the first play state; and not without work, as his best qualification for the really sacred privilege of amusement, has God meant that any one of us should come to our playing moments!

II. WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES THAT OUGHT TO REGULATE OUR AMUSEMENTS? Those principles are threefold. Our amusements ought to be genuine, innocent and moderate. 1. Let me explain what I mean by a genuine amusement. If amusement has, as we have seen, a definite and recognizable place in every healthful and well-ordered life, then we must at least require of it that it shall honestly serve its purpose—that it shall really and veritably recreate, re-create us. Now, viewed in this light, I did not, *e.g.* call a ball a genuine amusement. Our amusements ought to leave us fresher and brighter than they found us, not jaded and irritable and lack-lustre-eyed when the next day's duties roll back upon us. And therefore, I do not wonder that a great many young persons especially, who seek their amusements (Heaven save the mark!) in such channels, are constrained to "key themselves up" to work by the artificial means of unhealthy stimulants. 2. If amusement is not something outside but inside the sanctions of an earnest and Christian life, then our amusements ought also to be innocent. The concern of one who is deciding the question between amusements that are innocent and those that are not innocent, is with the drama as he actually and ordinarily finds it; and this includes the drama whether classic or tragic or comic, or seminude and spectacular; and if any complain that the Church of God frowns upon innocent amusements, and if it utters no downright condemnation, at least withholds its approval from innocent forms of amusement, let them remember that it is because ordinarily those who have once crossed a certain line in this matter, no matter what may be their professions of decorum or religion, are far too commonly wont to cast all restrictions utterly and absolutely behind them. For there is in fact almost absolutely no pretence of discrimination in these things, and persons of pure lives and unspotted name are seen, in our day, gazing upon spectacles or hearkening to dialogue, which, whether spoken or sung, ought to bring a blush of shame to any decent cheek. 3. But, let us also remember, amusement may be thoroughly innocent in its nature, and yet very easily be excessive or immoderate in its measure. (*Bp. H. C. Potter.*) *A Christian view of recreation*:—Human life is made up of summers and winters—it may be, in most cases, with a larger proportion of winters than summers, but seldom, indeed, without some days of bright sunshine and joyous hope. Each season, too, ought, in the very nature of things, to meet with a fitting response in the experiences of the soul. When the darkness is round about our path, circumstances all adverse, when sorrow saddens the heart, or death impoverishes the life, then is a "time to weep." But when the cloud is lifted, and the brightness of the sunshine once more inspires us with hope and fills us with joy; when our enterprises prosper, and our homes are scenes of love and peaceful happiness; when present success not only yields pleasure, but gives the earnest of a still richer blessing, then is the "time to laugh." Both of these seasons are of God. As He has ordained summer and winter for the earth, so has He ordained that

human life should have these alternating experiences, and in both alike we are to remember that we are His, and even in our lighter hours do all to the glory of God. There are some to be found who think recreation, even of the most harmless character, a waste of time which, if not positively sinful, is, at all events, a sign of spiritual weakness. Reasons in favour of such a course are not difficult to seek. There is the solemn responsibility with which life is invested in virtue of the great work to be done, and the hindrances in face of which it has to be prosecuted. Here, it may be argued, is the battle between good and evil, prosecuted under conditions so unequal that the servants of God must be bound to give all diligence in order to maintain His cause. With temptations so subtle, so numerous, so widespread, and so skilfully adapted to all varieties of taste and circumstance; with such mighty forces all actively engaged for the dishonour of God and ruin of human souls, there cannot be any opening for mere enjoyment. Nay, the very feeling is out of harmony with all the circumstances of the conflict. While souls are perishing, how can we have the heart to be glad, or find the time to enter even into the most refined and elevating pleasures of social life? The first answer to this must surely be that the theory breaks down under the weight of its own conclusions. It is an impossible standard of duty which it endeavours to set up, and it collapses under its own extravagance. Here and there a man may really detach himself from these human interests, and there may be circumstances which mark him out for a special position in which he is absorbed by the one thought of the deliverance of human souls. It may be even that there are exceptional times in which like the prophet Jeremiah the servant of the Lord is ready to cry, "Oh, that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" But this cannot be the normal experience even of the most earnest Christians. All are not prophets; all prophets are not Jeremiah; Jeremiah was not always in a state of mind like this; in short, men must have a different nature before they can attain to this complete suppression of human sympathies and interests. But the moment it ceases to be real and becomes a mere piece of assumed Christian devotion, that moment it loses, not only its power, but everything which gives it a religious quality at all. But there is this further objection to it. It is not proved to be the best method of securing the particular object in view. In the struggle against evil a wise man will surely look round and study the defences by which it is sustained. In the attack on a strong citadel the attention of the skilful strategist is first directed to the outlying forts which guard its approaches. The same law applies to our Christian work. Individual souls are affected by the society to which they belong, and the influence of society must depend largely upon the institutions—including even those which have to do with the amusements of life—which exist in its midst. The perversions which mislead the minds of men have to be got rid of before the truth can reach them. In this work, even in a land which calls itself Christian, there is need for the ploughshare before the ground can be made ready for the scattering of the seed of the kingdom. The argument, then, is twofold. We have to assert the rule of Christ over all the scenes of human life, seeking so to purify its pleasures that they shall not be hindrances to the spiritual life. But we have also to give a true representation of the Christian spirit, and we fail in this if we convey the impression that in our religion there is no time for recreation. Has not our Father given us the capacity for joy, and does He not mean us to profit by it? (*J. G. Rogers, B.A.*)

Ver. 5. A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together.—*Decision and perseverance needed by the Christian:*—Perhaps the primary meaning may refer to the method in which an Eastern husbandman prepares to till his vineyard. These vineyards were often cultivated on the steep sides of the vales, and the traveller wonders to see under what difficult circumstances he toils, gathering up the stones which lie thickly on the ground, and carrying up soil and building up terraces in which to plant the vines. Here the husbandman finds a season wherein he must cast away stones and pebbles, and clear the soil, and another time when it is needful to use these stones in raising up the walls and terraces of his vineyard. 1. If we regard our souls as possible vineyards and gardens, wherein may be grown "the fruits of a good life," to the glory of God, how must we begin? We must cast away every obstacle, we must clear away anything which stands in the way and hinders us from truly serving God. One great obstacle which lies in the way of many is indolence in religious matters.

The old fable described the vampire bat, in tropical countries, as hovering above its victims, and drinking their life-blood, whilst it soothes them to sleep on, by fanning them with its wings all the while. So the devil soothes souls into a fatal sleep. Again, another terrible obstacle is when there exists some favourite sin, some evil habit. We would give up much, but this one thing we cannot bear to part with. Our soul is like a captive bird, fastened by a string—it flies a little way, and then it is pulled back. But the Christian must summon up his courage, and with a strong effort break the chain that binds him down. Paint to yourself a prisoner seeking to escape from a gloomy dungeon. He has climbed up to the window of his cell. If only one bar was removed from the grated aperture, he could escape. Oh, with what determination he would grasp that rusty bar, how he would exert his utmost strength. Freedom, liberty, hopes, all before him, and but one bar between. And so with many a soul—one strong effort, and we might cut away that which holds us back. 2. A different picture now rises before our mind's eye; as we before painted to ourselves the busy peasants casting away the stones to form the good ground for their vineyard, now we think of them "gathering stones"—how they pile them up in terraces, build them up with busy hands. Perhaps it is the surrounding walls, or the foundations of the wine-vat, or the "tower" of those that watch the vineyard, that is being raised. But whatever be the object of those "that gather stones together," to build a wall, or erect a pier, or form a road, there is implied toil and patience. He who "gathers stones" must stoop, and stoop often. He who would grow in the Christian life must be humble, and as he who "gathers stones." Habits of piety, humility, and patient well-doing take much watchfulness and constant prayer ere they can be formed. How slow is the process of "gathering together stones!" Yet it is only by constant daily efforts that we can build up the fabric of the Christian life, stone by stone, effort by effort. (J. W. Hardman, LL.D.)

Ver. 7. **A time to keep silence.**—*Silences*:—There is a proverb which says, Speech is silver, silence is golden. Like all proverbs, this admits of qualification. There is a silence that means cowardice, sulkiness, and stupidity; and there is a speech that is more precious than any gold, triumphant over error and wrong, quickening and beneficent as the sunbeam. Notice two or three kinds of silences. I. There is the silence of **EMOTIONAL FULLNESS**. It is a physiological fact that great emotions choke the utterance. 1. Great painful emotions do this (Matt. xxii. 12). Will not all the wicked who stand at the bar of their Maker at the last day be struck with this silence? Emotions of surprise, remorse, despair, will rush with such tumultuousness upon them as to paralyze all articulating power. 2. Great joyous emotions do this. When the father embraced his prodigal son, his heart was so full of joyous feelings that he could not speak. It has been said that superficial emotions chatter, deep emotions are mute: there are joys that are unutterable. II. There is the silence of **PIOUS RESIGNATION**. It is said that Aaron held his peace, and the psalmist said, "I was dumb and opened not my mouth because Thou didst it." This indeed is a golden silence: it implies unbounded confidence in the character and procedure of our Heavenly Father. It is a loving, loyal acquiescence in the will of Him who is all-loving, all-wise, and all-good. This silence reveals—1. The highest reason. Is there a sublimer philosophy than this? 2. The highest faith. Faith in the immutable realities of love and right. III. There is the silence of **HOLY SELF-RESPECT**. This was the silence which Christ displayed before His judges. He seemed to feel that to speak to such virulently prejudiced creatures would be a degradation. The man who can stand and listen to the language of stolid ignorance, venomous bigotry, and personal insult addressed to him in an offensive spirit, and offer no reply, exerts a far greater power upon the minds of his assailants than he could by words, however forceful. His silence reflects a moral majesty, before which the heart of his assailants will scarcely fail to cower. (*Homilist*.) **A time of war, and a time of peace.**—*The Christian view of war*:—There are those, among the most conscientious of men, who maintain that war is never permissible, that it has always the nature of sin. Among Englishmen the Quakers have clung to the doctrine of non-resistance as one of their most distinctive tenets; among modern thinkers Count Tolstoi has restated it with considerable force. They have based their argument not so much upon the general tenor of Christ's teaching as upon misinterpretations of isolated texts—e.g. "Resist not evil," "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." It is to their honour that they have

been consistent in their interpretation of such passages, often to their own loss, and have applied them both to individual and to national conduct. Yet it is strange that they have not seen how far their argument carries them, and how by exaggerating one counsel of the Gospel they have made other of its precepts of none effect. Toleration of personal injury, to the point of self-effacement, is indeed enjoined upon Christians, but only so far as it does not conflict with other laws of justice and the like. Non-resistance, tolerance of evil and injustice from an individual, may often be most dangerous to society, as an encouragement to crime; and to let an offender go free may be to do him no kindness, but the cruelest of injuries. As with individuals, so with nations. National injustice, greed, insolence, is to be resisted as a danger to humanity. And those who make their appeal to isolated passages of Holy Scripture may be answered by other considerations. To take one only, it may justly be argued that if it were unlawful to wage war, as they assert, it would be unlawful for the Christian to bear arms, and that the soldier's calling would be reprobated in the New Testament. But the exact opposite is the case. The soldier's calling is treated as of equal honour with others, a vocation in which God may be well and truly served. The Christian life is itself compared to a warfare, in which the soldier of Christ is exhorted to fidelity by the example of the Roman soldier. The soldiers who inquire their duty of St. John the Baptist are not told to forsake their calling, but to exercise it with justice and mercy. And from Cornelius, the devout man whose prayers and alms were accepted of God, to St. Martin and General Gordon, a long line of soldier-saints bears eloquent witness to the fact that the grace of God may be looked for, and will bear fruit, in that vocation as in others. We may even go further, and say that war and the military vocation undoubtedly develop in nations and in individuals certain of the simpler virtues. It is often through war, as Mr. Ruskin has told us, that "truth of word and strength of thought" are learnt by nations. "Peace and the vices of civil life only flourish together. We talk of peace and learning, and of peace and plenty, and of peace and civilization; but I found that these were not the words which the muse of history coupled together: and that on her lips the words were—peace, and sensuality—peace, and selfishness—peace, and death." No less marked are its bracing effects upon the individual. "On the whole, the habit of living lightly hearted in daily presence of death, always has had, and always must have, power both in the making and testing of honest men." Many a man by losing himself has found himself, and through the stern discipline of the soldier's life has gained the self-control which otherwise he would have lost. In war men have the opportunity of rising to higher levels of virtue than they would have thought possible of attainment. From Sir Philip Sidney, dying in agony on the field of Zutphen, and refusing the water which another seemed to need more, to the trooper in Matabeleland who gave his horse—and with it his life—for a wounded comrade, there are countless instances of noble unselfishness developed under the stress of sudden decision, sometimes in the most unexpected characters. Nor, if we be wise, shall we complain that the cost is too great. We cannot know that those who have died nobly would have lived nobly. And so we cannot refuse the conclusion that warfare is not necessarily wrong in itself; that it is lawful "for Christian men, at the command of the magistrate, to wear weapons and to serve in the wars"; that war is even in some cases a gain in that it tends to the development of national and individual virtues. But of course when this is conceded we are still very far from admitting that it is ever to be undertaken "with a light heart," as the French declared war upon Prussia. The amount of direct and indirect suffering which it causes, immeasurable as that is, is not the greatest of the evils which war brings inevitably in its train. The racial hatreds which it engenders often linger on for scores of years, smouldering fires which a chance gust of passion may easily fan again into flame. Nor can we regard it in any sense as an appeal to the Divine justice, as our forefathers regarded it. War is infinitely the most wasteful, crudest, and least just way of settling international quarrels. And above all, for all its indirect gains, it is to be avoided by Christian nations to the very limits of forbearance, because it hinders the progress of mankind towards the ideals of peace and brotherhood which the Incarnation revealed. War, however just, is an acknowledgment that Christian methods and Christian love have so far failed to be effective. We inquire, lastly, on what conditions warfare may be pronounced justifiable. St. Thomas Aquinas defines the conditions as three in number—the command of the prince, a just cause, and a good intention. The Christian will not hesitate to justify wars morally safeguarded by regard to these conditions.

And yet for all that may be said in justification of warfare, war will ever remain a thing grievous to the Christian, ranking with the famine and the pestilence as scourges of God. Upon all Christians there is laid the supreme duty of striving continually for peace, and in these days of democracy no one is without his share of responsibility for national acts. Christians will not shrink from just wars; at the same time they will denounce wars of aggression for material gain. They will endeavour to emphasize the overwhelming responsibility of those in whose power it is to declare war, and of those who may influence their decision. They will lose no opportunity of dissociating themselves from those who wantonly disturb the peace of nations, by fostering race-hatreds, magnifying disagreements, offering petty insults, whether in the columns of an intemperate Press, or in any other way. They will promote the principles of arbitration; for though the arbitrators between nations are not backed by force, and cannot compel submission to their decisions, and though long centuries may pass before arbitration can supersede war, yet there is among nations a growing desire to settle differences by that method—an increasing disposition to submit to arbitration, because the justice of the principle is acknowledged. Above all, they will not be ashamed to assert their belief in the efficacy of prayer to the Lord mighty in battle, who is also the Prince of peace, that He would direct aright the counsels of the nations, and would give peace in our time. Who can doubt that wars, in Christendom at least, would soon become rare if all Christians were continually to pray from their inmost heart that God would give to all nations unity, peace, and concord? (*E. H. Day, M.A.*)

Vers. 9-11. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?—*Autumn musings*:—Autumn is a time which has its meaning, as well as its appropriate duties. Its deep suggestiveness is written upon the sombre grandeur of its sunsets, upon the awful death with which it smites the foliage and blasts the flowers, is borne in upon us by the dreariness and waste it spreads around. Its duty of ingathering, of estimating results, is written upon its harvests and fruition. "The end of all things is at hand," it seems to say; for it is the time of retribution and reward. The day of autumn is an anticipative day of judgment, its clouds foreshadowing heavier clouds, and bidding us prepare to meet that God of whom it is said, "Clouds and darkness are round about Him," etc.

I. THE DISQUIETING QUESTION OF AUTUMN. Yet, after all these useful thoughts, there comes to us, as to Ecclesiastes in ver. 9, the question asked in every great age, by every great mind—the question which meets us continually in the life and thought of the present age: "What is the good? What is the real purpose of things? What do they matter?" That is pre-eminently the question of autumn—late autumn, not of the falling corn, but of the falling leaf. Full as our lives may be of interest and labour, there comes to us from time to time the inevitable question, "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?"—since we, too, must fade and fall. The suggestion, however, is not merely that of physical death, but of the death of hope, the defeat of honest purpose, the fruitlessness of unselfish effort. To religious people what is still more unsettling is the failure of religious effort. We witness in our time the decay of certain forms of piety. Among the lumber in the long and dusty gallery of some ancestral hall you come upon an old spinet. You take the quills and strike the keys: the sounds that come forth are unfamiliar, distant; the music is dreamlike, weird; the instrument is spirit-haunted; there is something reproachful in the faint melodiousness of the long untouched wires. So it is with the old hymns, the old forms of piety; for it is never given to one age to reproduce the spirit of another in the self-same forms. "I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith," says Ecclesiastes musingly. Is it all useless? Political enthusiasm, religious ardour, the strenuous labour of the world's workers, the lofty ideals and high imaginings of the world's great thinkers,—are they swept down the stream of time like rotten leaves?

II. Musing on the answer. That is the question which the ancient Jewish thinker to whom we owe the Book of Ecclesiastes is turning over in his mind. He does not answer it; he muses upon it, and suggests consoling considerations. Yes, indeed! God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in travail, to be

"inured to pain.
To hardship, grief, and loss."

But "He hath made everything beautiful in its time: also He hath set the world in their heart." So, with Ecclesiastes, let us rest for a time in this supreme effort of nature to do us pleasure; in the Stoic thought that the world is a Divine system, a cosmos of order and of beauty, and that, according to the ancient faith of Israel, all things were created "very good." Yet we are not quite satisfied. Man is restless among the beauties of the world because his life is larger, deeper than the world's. God "hath made everything beautiful: . . . also He hath set the world in their heart." What German writers call the *Welt-schmerz*—the sorrow of the world—is an ever-present burden to those whose hearts are tenderest and whose characters have reached the highest levels. Hence Wordsworth, who so revelled in the beauties of nature, was ever hearing

"Humanity in fields and groves
Pipe solitary anguish."

What Thomas Hardy calls "the general grimness of the human situation" has been rather increased than lessened by the discovery of our time, that man has reached his present level by means of a terrible struggle, lasting through countless millenniums, and is what he is as much by virtue of the pains he has endured as by the perseverance and courage with which he has set himself to overcome the difficulties of his life. III. THE QUESTION OF AUTUMN ANSWERED. Ecclesiastes can help us no further; for his "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life," probably means little more than "keep up your heart and do your best." Not even St. Paul, not even Christ Himself, answers all our questions; but Christianity does give us the certainty that all is well with those who trust in God and do right, and the last word of wisdom as well as of faith is, "All things work together for good to them that love God."

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

God is with us as He was with our fathers, and our ways of serving Him are as acceptable as theirs, if our hearts are true and our lives pure and earnest. For the changes which pass over society and the Churches are in reality manifestations of the wisdom of God; the touch of His finger gives to them their meaning and beauty; and the devout observer is as much thrilled by their significance and enthralled by their interest as the artistic soul is enraptured by the tints of autumn. Further, Christianity teaches us to look forward, not backward, for the revelation of the real meaning of God's dealings with us. Christ never despaired of humanity, or of His own cause; and why should we? (*W. Burkitt Dalby.*)

Ver. 11. **He hath made everything beautiful in His time.**—*Beauty*:—How rich are the traits and manifestations of man's creative genius! Think of the vast number and diversity of gorgeous and attractive forms, with which descriptive and imaginative talent has enriched the literature of all ages. And the fruits of mental toil in all times, from the rude lyric of the savage to the rounded and polished productions of the most advanced culture, how redolent of beauty,—how thickly studded with gems of the purest lustre and transcending magnificence! Art, too, how endlessly varied in its embodiments of all that is fair, and grand, and glorious! How numberless, also, are the combinations of blended or inter-changing majesty and beauty which rise and are yet to rise in the simple and the complex, the lowly and the lofty forms of architecture—in column, tower, and dome—in cottage, temple, and cathedral! But whence this power in man? What are his creations but copies of the thoughts of God? That they are nothing else is implied in the fundamental canons of literature, art, and taste. Truth to nature is the sole test of beauty. Do we admire the partial copies that man has made? Do we bow down to the genius that can see and hear a little portion of the Divine idea? Shall not, then, our thoughts go up with unspeakably loftier reverence and more fervent adoration to Him who "has made everything beautiful"? Reflect for a moment on beauty as an attribute of the Supreme Intelligence. Reflect on God as the Originator of all that delights the eye and charms the fancy. What an inconceivable wealth of beauty must reside in the mind, which, without a copy, first called forth these numberless hues and shades that relieve each other and melt into each other in the vast whole of nature,—which devised these countless forms of vegetable life, from the wayside flower that blooms to-day and withers to-morrow, to the forest giant that outlasts the rise and fall of nations and of empires,—which meted out the heavens, measured the

courses and arranged the harmonies of the stars, spread the ocean, poured the river, torrent, and waterfall! What an infinity of resources do we behold in the alternate phases of the outward universe, each of which seems too beautiful to be replaced by one of equal loveliness, and yet yields at once its fancied pre-eminence to its successor! The depths of the Divine Intelligence we indeed cannot fathom; but there are some views of practical interest to be derived from these thoughts.

1. First, they suggest one mode of worship, which must always make us better,—that of the devout contemplation of the visible works of God. "To enjoy is to adore." There can be no full and true enjoyment of nature, except by those who see the hand and hear the voice of the Eternal in His works. To enter into the heart of nature is to talk face to face with its Author.

2. The thoughts which I have suggested lend, also, a motive to our converse with the monuments of human art, taste, and genius. The genuine poet or artist stands between us and God's world of beauty, in the same relation in which the seer or the evangelist stands between us and his realm of truth. But most of all does the devout mind love to commune with truth and beauty in those forms of literature, in which they have been blended by Divine inspiration. It finds no poetry so sublime as that of psalmist, prophet, and apostle,—that which connects the image of the heavenly Shepherd with the green pastures and still waters, draws lessons of a paternal Providence from the courses of Orion and Arcturus, names for the rain and for the drops of dew their Father, and resorts to every kingdom of nature, and gathers in materials from every portion of the visible universe, to portray the New Jerusalem, the golden city of our God, the gates within which the sun goes not down, for "the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

3. Again, beauty, though distinct from love, is the minister of love. Its every ray is edged and fringed with mercy. Its every form bears the inscription, "God is love." When it beams upon us from the heavens, it reveals His benignity. When it glows on the earth, or gleams from the ocean, it reflects His smile. When it stretches its many-coloured bow on the cloud or the waterfall, it utters His thoughts of peace. Have not all these scenes a voice of tender sympathy and consolation for the grief-stricken? In a world thus full of beauty, thus suffused by the smile of the Universal Father, there can be no sorrow sent as sorrow. It can be only those whom God loves that he chastens. Not to blight the harvest of human hope and joy, but to bring forth in fresh luxuriance every plant of our Heavenly Father's planting, do the rains descend and the floods come upon the afflicted heart. Not to destroy or hopelessly bow down the soul, but to dispel the suffocating mist of worldliness, to open a clearer, higher range of vision for the inward eye, to make the upper heavens look serene and beautiful, falls the bolt that sends alarm and agony to our homes and hearts. Let us, then, in our sorrows, welcome the revelation of Divine love, with which the heavens are dropping and the earth teeming, which day utters to day and night rehearses to night. (A. P. Peabody.) *Everything beautiful*:—The Creator, when He formed the world, had the loveliness of things before Him as an end and object, as well as the usefulness of things. And so, wherever we walk, we see reflected the love of beauty in the Divine mind. And the more minutely we examine the works of God, the more exquisite is their beauty. How unlike the works of man! Take a finely polished needle, and place it under a powerful microscope, and it becomes a huge, rough bar of steel, with miniature caverns and ravines of black "clinker." Take again some common insect, a wasp, for instance; and under the same microscope it grows into a miracle of sheeny scales of semi-transparent gauze of gold, each scale geometrically perfect. Or take that buttercup and look down into its heart, and you will look into an enchanted fairy chamber of flashing lights that shames all the extravagances of the "Arabian Nights." God loves to have things beautiful: and it is wise for us to foster in ourselves the love of beauty. No doubt business rivalries are so intense and keen that men are obliged to consider chiefly utility. What can I make or get out of it? is the primary question. Bread, not beauty, is their principal concern. Trade is "sowing cities like shells along the shore"; and the things of the mart and the street are in danger of crowding nature and God out of men's minds and freezing their hearts. But let us hope that the fight for the front places in all the callings which is the prevailing ambition at present will never become so severe as to absorb all thought and time, and destroy all care for the cultivation of this joyous side of life. Indeed, the fiercer the struggle for life becomes, the greater the need for the sweet alleviations which admiration of nature brings. Nor can we doubt that

when the Creator lavished, and still lavishes so much beauty in the natural world, He had and has in view the highest usefulness; for surely it is as serviceable a thing to give refreshment and tone and elevation to the soul, as to provide wheat for bread, or wool for clothing. Let us lift our thoughts from the loveliness of nature to Him, who is the Rose of Sharon all glowing with the wealth of heavenly love, and the Lily of the Valley, "holy, harmless, undefiled," and the True Vine laden with ripe clusters for the famishing souls of men—yes, to Him, who is unique in His splendour of "very" Godhead and perfect manhood. One of the most patent wants of our Churches to-day is that of spiritual beauty of character; beauty of spiritual character. Not the surface beauty of morality unvitalized by personal love to the Saviour. This is but the crystal, symmetrical, clean-cut in exactness of outline, cold as the snow, dead as the stone. Our want is the beauty of the living soul, of the holy life. Not any mimicry of it, however successful, however unconscious; not any simulation of its life; not painted blooms and waxen fruit. But actual conformity to the image of "the man Christ Jesus": a life of prayer and self-renouncing faith, of surrender to the rule of our King, and zeal-hearted service. This is the beauty of holiness of which all fair things beneath the sun are faint pictures; and by which Christ is made manifest to men. (*R. C. Cowell.*) *The beauty of the world*.—I. THE BEAUTY OF LIFE'S OUTWARD SCENES AND CIRCUMSTANCES. We need not linger to determine what is the philosophy of beauty; how far it depends on the things we behold, how far on the eyes which behold them, or rather on the soul of intelligence and emotion which looks through the eyes. The beautiful is beautiful in the measure of our discernment; that is true. Still, beauty is not determined exclusively by our perception; that also is true. Beyond what any single individual has seen or has power to see lie a myriad things, the fruit of the Creator's wonderful and multitudinous thoughts. Treasures of beauty fill the depths of the sea, and there are unvisited nooks and corners of the earth thronged with lovely forms. Not only in the broad effects, but in the minute detail, of nature there is to be found beauty. Men need not go into strange lands to learn that "the Lord hath made all things beautiful in His time." Pleasure in the beauty of the world may become a mere lust of the eye, rather than the glow of the soul. An æsthetic taste is not a sanctifying faith. Discerning the beauty crowding earth and heaven, we are to remember that the Lord hath made it. We are to think of Him; see everywhere the signs of His wisdom, the images of His loveliness and tenderness, the outgoing of His glory, the suggestions of His infinity. II. THE ORDERLINESS OF THIS BEAUTY. Everything is beautiful in its appointed time. The fulness and harmony of things is largely an element of beauty. The order, the perfect sequence, of nature's law is as wonderful as the varied beauty of her forms. "Every winter turns to spring." The seed, the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear, each has its beauty. There are here in the world's order and beauty familiar analogies of spiritual things. The complex beauty of a perfected character is not wrought except by preparations and processes. Men come to perfectness in their season. The great Worker works most surely in unbroken order, in grand, calm patience, and brings His work to its perfect issue at the appointed time. III. THE TRANSITORINESS OF THE WORLD'S BEAUTY. All the beauty of outward scene and circumstance is but for a time. This fair world, though it holds us sometimes with the spell of its enchantment, is not our rest; its beauties are flowers upon a pilgrim's path. We pluck fair flowers, but in a little while, such a little while, the soft petals are worn and crumpled and ready to die! The worlds and the treasures that are in them God carries in His hand; but those that love Him He carries in His heart—the dear children of His love; and that love is round about them, a light from heaven, fairer and surer than the beauty of the morning. (*W. S. Davis.*) *Religion and the beautiful*.—I. THERE IS AN ESSENTIAL UNITY IN ALL FORMS OF THE BEAUTIFUL. It will not do to object to art, to embellishment of dress and furniture, and yet to say that in speech and in manners and in moral elements the beautiful is right. For the beautiful is an element that is meant to go out in every part of the mind, and to lend its light and peculiar influence in every direction in which the mind develops itself. Now it is admitted, the world over, by those who object to art in dress, in furniture, or in the embellishment of grounds, that beauty of speech, and manners, and social and moral elements, is right. Now, why is beauty consistent with self-denial and the example of Christ in these things, and inconsistent with self-denial and the example of Christ in those other things? II. THERE IS A MORAL FUNCTION BELONGING TO THE BEAUTIFUL

which redeems it from the objections which men raise against it. It is true that beauty is employed to build up vice. Did you ever stop to analyze that statement, and see what it meant? The moral function of the beautiful is used to lead men to sin; but this fact reveals the power that is in the beautiful to raise the enjoyment of any faculty on which it is employed from lower to higher forms. Beauty always tends upward. If you introduce it to the thinking power, it draws the intellect upward; if you introduce it to the conscience, it draws the conscience upward; if you introduce it into morals, it elevates those morals; if you introduce it into dress, it refines and lifts it up. III. If, then, there is a moral function in the beautiful, ITS FULL BENEFIT CANNOT BE EXPECTED UNTIL IT DEVELOPS ITSELF HARMONIOUSLY IN ALL PARTS OF THE MIND. It must be applied to the understanding, to the moral faculties, to the social elements, to the animal instincts, and to all the relations of physical life in the family and in society. It is not the beautiful in too great a measure that leads to excess of mischief and selfishness. It is because it is cultivated but partially, or only on one side of the mind, that it produces mischiefs. With this statement of the moral function of the beautiful, I proceed to apply it more particularly to the individual and the household. How can a man consent to indulge in the beautiful while the world is lying in wickedness? I say, the world being in wickedness, I am going to educate myself in beauty, that I may be the better fitted to elevate it out of that wickedness. The beautiful is one of the elements with which I am to familiarize myself, in order that I may the more successfully engage in this work. God educates men for labouring in His kingdom on earth by spreading out before them the beauties which He has created in the natural world. The beautiful, therefore, may be made a moral instructor, and it may make the soul of man powerful; so that indulgence in it, instead of being selfish, is a part of one's lawful education. The same argument is applicable to the household. The question arises in the minds of many persons, "How much time ought I to expend for my family, and how much for God?" You split your ship on a rock at the outset, by putting God in one balance and your family in the other. Your family must never be separated from God. Your idea of religion and of consecration must be such that you shall consider everything that is given to your cradle or to your family as being given to God. Now, how much may a man give to build up a family, and make it powerful for God? If it is necessary that a man's children should have shoes and clothes, and he gives them to them, he gives them to God. If it is necessary that they should have intelligence, and he sends them to costly schools, he sends them for God's sake. But remember that you must carry such a heart into this work that every child shall feel that every picture and every book has a moral purpose in it, and realize that there is a life to come, and understand the relations of God's kingdom on earth to immortality. And then every flower that blossoms will have a meaning. But it is said, "How can you reconcile these indulgences with the example of our Saviour? He did not indulge in the beautiful." Our Saviour set the example to us of moral qualities, but not of social conditions. He had not a place to lay His head: do you seriously think that it would be best for every man to be a vagabond? Do you think it would be best for civilization that the family should be broken up, and that men should have no property and no regular occupation, in order that they might follow Christ? Still further, it is asked, "How can we imitate Christ in the self-denial which He practised, and yet indulge in the beautiful?" Nowhere else in the world can a man be more self-denying than in taking a nature thoroughly refined and cultured, and with that nature going to the poor and needy. Christ laid aside the glory that He had before the world was, and came upon earth, and lived without it, and ascended, and retook it; and now, having taken it again, He lives to legislate with all this plenitude; and He is self-denying still, making His life a perpetual living for others. If, then, God has endowed any man with wealth, let him use it for himself, for his children, and for his friends, and so use it for the world. If God has given a man power to read literature in every language, let him read it, that he may be the better able to defend the ignorant and instruct them. If God has given a man the element of beauty, let him employ it, not for the sake of self-indulgence, but that he may lift up, and refine, and civilize those that are low, and rude, and gross. In the hands of all who follow these directions, the elements of the beautiful are entirely in consonance with the Divine will. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *The mission of beauty:*—Beauty is a term of varied and extensive import. Whatever excites the emotion, be it a statue fresh from the chisel of the sculptor, a

flower by the wayside, chronicling some old buried memory, or a glorious sunset among the hills, a speech, a poem, a virtue, a deed or a song, that is beautiful.

I. **BEAUTY AND ITS MISSION AS SEEN IN NATURE.** There is affluence of beauty in the broad, blue heavens and on the green earth; in the stars that look so gently and kindly upon us; in the orchards, groves and forest trees; in the plumage and song of birds; in the modest flower that blooms in the hedge; in the sturdy oak which has wrestled with the storms and the winds of a thousand years; in the tall and stately cedar of Lebanon, in the pendent branches of the willow, sighing like a mourner by the silent stream. There is beauty in the morning dew, shining like diamond points all over field and meadow; in drops of water as they hang like costly pearls on trees and telegraph wires after a refreshing shower. There is beauty in the little rill which bursts away from some sequestered nook in the hill-side, like a truant child, and runs—now glancing out in the light and then hiding itself in entangled shrubbery till it seems to find its playfellows in the babbling brook. There is beauty in the majestic river as it rolls, strengthened by innumerable tributaries, proudly into the broad sea. There is beauty in the alternations of day and night, in the still evening, when the shadows deepen over the plain and the veil of mist rises slowly over the valley, and the sombre woods which skirt the distant horizon grow more indistinct, and the sun sinks to rest, leaving the clouds above all aglow with his setting radiance. There is beauty in the seasons; in the spring arrayed in verdure; in the summer teeming with luxuriance; in autumn loaded with golden harvests. And winter, too, has its charms, covering the earth with its robe of purity and adorning the forests with gems of dazzling and enchanting brilliancy. It is no wonder that Solomon, in his wisdom, should have said, "God hath made everything beautiful in His time," because everything is adapted to some end or use. Nothing is made in vain. Whatever is beautiful in nature has its use, to secure harmony in the great orchestra of all created things, or reflect the superlative glory of the uncreated God.

II. **ARTIFICIAL BEAUTY,** or those forms of beauty which may be regarded as copies of nature—the creations of genius and art. These, too, may exalt our conceptions of the Divine Being, as all the beautiful forms from the chisel of the sculptor, from the pencil of the artist, exist as types or models in the great gallery of Nature, of which God is the Author. Art is the shadow of Nature, the photograph of external beauty, the pictured diagrams of a higher and more exalted finish. Art may be the hand-maid of religion, an auxiliary to worship. The old Hebrew temple, in its form and finish, in its utensils of gold, in its altars of ivory, in its outer and inner courts, was the very perfection of art, and all was designed as an aid to worship and an emblem of heaven. The magnificent cathedrals of the Old World and the costly pictures with which they are adorned have a higher purpose than simply to attract the vulgar eye or awaken a temporary admiration. They are designed as helps, acting through the senses to lead the worshippers on to a proper conception of that uncreated beauty that dwelleth not in temples built with hands.

III. **INTELLECTUAL BEAUTY.** We speak of the canvas or the sculptured marble as uttering "thoughts that breathe and words that burn"; but when we thus figuratively speak, we speak in praise of the creative mind of the artist and the sculptor. These are only the outward and visible expression of the ideal beauty that was in his own thought. Knowledge, genius, wisdom, taste, whenever, wherever perceived are beautiful. Mind is the measure not only, but the chief attraction either of woman or man. A well-stored, a highly-educated mind is to me the most attractive thing in the universe; and to see such a mind at work solving the problems of science, analyzing the most difficult subjects, charming by its eloquence or song, raising the heavy burdens from the groaning heart of humanity, cannot fail to awaken the highest emotions of admiration and of beauty. God, whose intellect is infinite, and always devising for the good of His creatures, must ever be regarded, when properly perceived, as the most beautiful Being in the universe, shedding His light and beauty over all the works of His hands; and we can offer no more appropriate prayer and join with the palmist and say, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us."

IV. **MORAL BEAUTY AND ITS MISSION.** Right is always beautiful; truth, honour, integrity are beautiful; magnanimity, justice and benevolence are as really beautiful as the most lovely of material forms. If we contemplate the act of the Good Samaritan dismounting from his beast at the risk of his own life and affording the needed aid to a wounded Jew, we feel in our inmost soul that compassion is beautiful. There is beauty in purity. If the lily bending on its stem is beautiful to the eye, so is purity, of which the

lily is a favourite and impressive emblem. In an age of general licentiousness, to see a youthful captive break away from the solicitations of his royal mistress is a spectacle that commands admiration of every mind not absolutely brutalized by lust. Illustrations of moral beauty are not wanting in our age and time. The family united in a loving fellowship, where heart responds in cordial sympathy to heart, is certainly one of the most beautiful sights on earth, and the most impressive type of heaven. Thus the Church, as the Bride of Christ, all-glorious within and without, humble yet active, conservative yet aggressive, clad in the seamless robe of a Redeemer's righteousness, adorned with all the graces of the Spirit, and charity crowning the whole, is the very climax of beauty, more gorgeous to behold than all the glory and riches of Solomon. Remember the words of our text, "Everything is beautiful in His time"—beautiful, because useful and answering fully the end of its being; and nothing can be more beautiful than woman intellectually and morally educated and working in her sphere for the benefit of her race. This is the highest type and style of beauty, outliving the physical, surpassing that of art, over which death and the grave have no power. Arrayed in this imperishable robe, the spirit only grows younger as the body decays; and when released from the tenement of clay shall ascend to mingle with forms celestial on a mission still, through endless years of beauty and of love. (*S. D. Burchard, D.D.*) *The Author of beauty:*—I have no very definite conception of what these words mean. I do not intend to use them for purposes of instruction, but for purposes of suggestion and inspiration. This is poetry. The aim of poetry is to exalt the feelings, to kindle the imagination. A statement not sharply defined to thought may yet by suggestion carry and inspire one more energetically and penetratingly than any clearly defined proposition. This text contains several intimations which may prove valuable to us. "He hath made everything beautiful in its time." Here is a distinct announcement that beauty is a prime object in this world, and that beauty is very extensively sought by the Creator. He has not only made beautiful objects, but has made everything beautiful in its own time and manner. We must bear in mind that beauty is a distinct appeal to us over and above all the utilities and economies. A world that met all the needs of its creatures and nothing more would be standing proof that those creatures were simply in the animal order. When you build a stall for a horse, you plan for nothing beyond animal needs—warmth, ventilation, food, cleanliness, rest. Any touch of beauty beyond these is for your own eye. If you added beauty for the eye of your horse, you would thereby recognize in him an æsthetic nature like your own. So a world devoted to grey and angular utilities would be proof positive that we were a race of creatures which needed good housing and feeding and nothing more. But what shall we say of that knot of blue violets in the grass? They do not catch the eye of the grazing ox. The dog leaps over them in pursuit of game, or in wanton play. But when you, the Divine child, come, this utterance from the heart of your Father stops you as imperatively as a command. You drop on your knees beside the exquisite token from the heavens, and with full heart and suffused eyes read His loving thought as from an illuminated missal. Something has been said to you from on high that no other eye or ear on earth can interpret. And when you lift up your eyes upon the green and spacious earth, with its endlessly varied beauties of tint and form and grouping, and over all the deep and wide heavens with their unbearable glory of light and their flying cloud-forms or spaces of fadeless blue, the voice that speaks in your heart of hearts is from the depths within to the depths of God without—deep calling unto deep: "This is my Father's house, my home, the very gate of heaven." Beauty in our world—"Everything made beautiful in its season"—is the divine, omnipresent witness that we are something more than physical beings, fit only for a world of stark utilities and necessities; we are the children of the supreme Intelligence and Imagination and Love. We follow Him with clear eye and responsive heart through the heights and depths of His creative work. Not a curve is added to leaf or petal, not a point of gold-dust on an insect's wing, but is there for your eye and mine, and has answered its purpose when we lift our hearts in grateful recognition to Him who is the eternal fountain and source of beauty. Our text declares that "also He hath set the world in their hearts." I do not care much what the poet's precise thought is here. I get this impression: We are so vitally joined to the world that it somehow gets immense power over us. It somehow gets in there to some central depths of us, with its overshadowing truths and great, overmastering moods. This is why I believe that it is salutary, actually

medicinal, for us to get away from our artificial life as often as possible, and to be alone with the ancient, unperverted powers of the world. I, for one, can testify that no chapters of judgment, no penitential psalms, have ever searched and winnowed my soul like the living, awful presence of the primeval forest. The purity of the vast deep life there, stretched in unaffected sincerity to the heavens; the majesty of the great brotherhood of trees, the tranquillity, the chaste beauty, the solemnity, have unwrapped the soul and penetrated it, till one could only cover the face, as in the Divine presence, and cry, "Unclean, unclean! God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Oh, the awful purity of this great life about us! Crimes and degradation multiply just in proportion as men crowd together and forget the unstained life of the physical world, which, in normal conditions, holds such purifying uplifting influence over us as the life of a mother. The power of Nature has likewise a salutary ministry for us. Have you never felt that it is good for you to have the personal equation reduced to zero?—to have your individuality stripped of all the little conceits, all the factious importance, which by degrees attach to us in our relations to men? You have doubtless felt this wholesome reduction to your original quantity in presence of the power of Nature as nowhere else. We may also well consider how the stability and unchangeableness of Nature hold us to truth. The same great truths from age to age are reiterated in precisely the same terms, until our slow hearts are compelled to learn. When we see men so careful and fearful respecting their little theories and notions one can hardly repress a smile of pity. As if the heavens and the earth were not keeping faith with God, their Creator, and would, sooner or later, bring all our little systems to terms! We make a little scheme of the heavenly bodies, and build a queer little religious doctrine respecting the earth, and read our Bibles and say our prayers accordingly, and fight among ourselves over our petty theory. But the stars hold on their courses; the earth swings in its orbit, turns on its axis. The truth is beaten in and in, age after age, until we get something like a rational astronomy. Then we have to begin to retranslate our Bibles, reconstruct our theologies, and adjust our thinking to the illimitable universe, and enlarge our thoughts of God by the same great measure. The last suggestion of our poet is mystery. "Man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning, even unto the end." And we praise Him for it! For what could equal the misery of living even for a year in an exhausted world! It would be to mind and soul a strait-jacket and a darkened cell. (*J. H. Ecob, D.D.*) *All things beautiful in their season*:—The sentiment of the beautiful is universal. We lavish money, we expend strength, we incur dangers, we submit to inconveniences to gratify it. Now, what is the significance of this? What are the part and power of beauty in human life? Of course, the beautiful—like any other gift of life, like genius or wealth—may be used unspiritually, perverted so as even to minister to sensuousness and sin. In its art-forms no people ever worshipped the beautiful like the Greeks, and few peoples developed greater sensuousness. Every gift is a possibility of corresponding evil; no lights lead astray like lights from heaven. The real question is, whether in the right and purposed use of it, whether as interpreted and used by religious feeling, the beautiful has not a high and potent ministry in life; and whether, therefore, it is not a religious obligation so to use it, to nurture the sense of it, to seek gratifications for it, and to make it a minister of devout thought and feeling. The beautiful is much more than a mere gratification of the senses; although even this were not an unworthy ministry. One of the materialistic theories of our day is, that uses and fitnesses of things are not the result of creative design, but of natural selection, or of practical necessity. Nature produces the eye because man needs to see, and teeth because he needs to eat. But what is the causation of beauty? What principle of natural selection, what necessity of use, produces the plumage of the bird, the pencilling of the leaf? Is not beauty the absolute creation of God, and has it not a special religious ministry? Beauty, if I may reverently say so, is God's taste, God's art, God's manner of workmanship. Beauty is the necessary conception of the Creator's thought, the necessary product of His hand; variety in beauty is the necessary expression of His infinite mind. It is part of the perfection of God's works, part of the perfection of God Himself; like truth, like holiness, like beneficence, like graciousness. We infer, therefore, that beauty is part of our human perfection also; that unbeautiful things are defective things. Beauty is not intended to minister to a mere idle sentiment. It is a minister to our moral nature. It is part of our religious culture and responsibility; so far as we can

control them, we are as responsible for ideas and things of beauty as for ideas and things of truth and purity. In corroboration of all this we might adduce the recognitions and inculcations of the beautiful which we find in Scripture. Even in the physical beauty of nature the writers of the Bible have a rejoicing appreciation which we find in no other ancient literature. It is not difference of race that accounts for it, it is difference of culture. It is the deeper, more pervading sense of God; it is the religious sentiment of the soul. Unlovely passions, morbid tempers, hard goodness, ascetic forms of religious life, are repugnant to the sentiment of the Bible. In everything it inculcates beauty and joy; so that beauty has a moral basis, moral elements enter into it. How, then, does it minister to goodness in practical life? May not we say that there is a natural congruity between beauty and moral goodness? All sin, all wrong, are unbeautiful, even to the instinctive sense. It is vain to ask why. God has so made us. And because we are so made, vice, wrong, moral pollution, can never be made beautiful, can never satisfy our feeling, produce in us complacency and rest. On the other hand, we are equally constrained to deem all good things beautiful. We may not do them; we may not like them; our evil passion may disparage them; but we are compelled to admire them. The truth of things is too strong for even evil passion. Moral feeling will admire what passion dislikes; the most vicious never call goodness hideous. In this way, then, through the constitution that God has given us, through the moral order that He has established, the beautiful is a minister to goodness; the wrong thing that we do does violence to our sense of the beautiful. And the nearer to perfection men get, the more they are affected by the beautiful. In nature, in art, in poetry, in music, in social surroundings, the man of largest culture has the keenest sense of the beautiful; the man whose sense of God is deepest, whose holiness is highest, whose spiritual sensibilities are keenest, has the greatest appreciation of both physical and moral beauty. Nothing excites so much admiration as noble character, and the virtues that constitute it. It follows that the highest attainment of beauty is possible only to the good. What influence character has upon personal beauty! Mere features do not constitute the beauty of a face. An unbeautiful soul will make the finest face repellent. Beautiful expression irradiates the plainest features, so that the sense of plainness shall be altogether lost. Some faces charm you like a picture, hold you spellbound like a talisman. It is the beautiful soul that irradiates them—the purity, the unselfishness, the nobleness, the love. The artistic sense is overpowered by the instinctive moral admiration. The ministries of beauty are manifold. It ministers to goodness. I could not, I think, so love God if His works were repellent by their ugliness, instead of attractive by their beauty. To how much in both mind and heart they appeal! I yearn for a greater knowledge, a closer communion with Him, who adorns with so much beauty even His lowliest works. The religiousness of the Bible is more to us because of its eloquence and imaginative beauty, its glorious Psalms, its exciting and pathetic histories, its sublime prophecies. How the New Jerusalem fascinates and wins us by its pictured glories! Beauty ministers to love. When I look upon the countenance of wife or child, of friend or even stranger, inspired and made beautiful by some noble sentiment of virtue, piety, personal affection, patriotism, philanthropy, self-sacrifice, how easy it is to excite love! Thus beauty is one of the ministries—ordained by God—of religion, virtue, affection, amiability. Beauty, therefore, is to be cultured; as gentleness is, as tenderness is, as unselfishness is. It is a vital part of our being, and cannot be neglected without injury to the rest. Social life is to be filled with amenities; family life is to be made gentle and graceful by courteous manners, by warm sympathies, by varied culture of literature and art, by bright and gladdening pleasures, as well as by rudimentary virtues and pieties. Church life is to be made gracious and joyous, by refined modes of fellowship and service, by culture of worship, and by gentle, loving, helpful charities of feeling and speech. In all relations personal goodness is to be adorned by gracious feeling and by divining love, by "things that are lovely and of good report," by "the gentleness of Christ," by "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," by the crowning graces of the beatitudes. In every possible enumeration and array of the beatitudes of a holy life, "the greatest of these is charity." (*H. Alon, D.D.*) *The beauty of change and glory of permanence*:—I prefer the reading of the margin of the R.V.: "He hath made everything beautiful in its time; also He hath set eternity in their heart." 1. That the world as God has made it, and life as He has ordained it, have the charm of variety. "He hath

made everything beautiful in its time." It is a part of the Divine order of things that there should be seasons; for instance, that there should be seasons of the year. "God made summer," said the inspired writer, but he also said that "God made winter." Apart from the latter assurance, some men might have doubted it. Everybody can accept that. God made light. But it required an inspired assurance to convince men that He also "made darkness, and it was night." Each of these is beautiful in its time; but out of its time it would lose its beauty. You men who go to London find that out in November. You go up in the morning, and at midday you have a night coming on. I have never yet seen a man who has said that anything that brings on night when there should be day is beautiful. In all that there is a sense of incongruity. If there be darkness, let it come at the proper hour: it will then bring soothing and restfulness beneath its sable wings. This teaches us a collateral truth which perhaps we are too apt to overlook. The curse of the world and of life is in its dislocation. Above all, man has lost his position. Now it is wonderful what mischief a little thing can do when it is out of its place. The other day I saw that a beautiful block had been battered. What was the matter? Oh, a little piece of type had been sucked up by the rollers in printing, and drawn to the surface of the block, and the cylinder passed over it, and thus marred its delicate beauty. That bit of type was beautiful in its place. It had a distinct meaning and mission of its own; but once out of its place, it not only lost its own beauty, but marred the beauty of something nobler than itself. If our organism were to play a wrong note, we should all feel it: a cold shudder would go through us. Why? It is true that even that note is in the organ; it has its place in there: but it was not meant to come in just where he in such a case put it; and that would make all the difference between harmony and discord. All the other notes would share its ignominy, and become apparently discordant with it; and even men like myself, who know little or nothing about music, would feel a cold shudder, when we should have felt the glow of response if that note had not come in at the wrong place. Further, the secret of the world's discords is in its sin. When man sinned, he lost his position; he no longer occupied the place God intended him to occupy; and when he fell from his position, the whole creation fell with him. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now." What is it waiting for? "For the manifestation of the sons of God." When man is brought back into his proper place, harmony shall be restored, not before. You see, therefore, the folly of visiting God with rebukes because of the miseries that abound on every hand. God never made these miseries. Everything was beautiful in its time according to the Divine order; but man has leapt out of his place, and when the greatest creature on God's earth has lost his position, what must follow? Astronomers tell us that if one of those worlds that rush along their orbits were to lose its course, it would go on blundering through space and bringing discord with it wherever it went. Supposing such a world had the volition that man has, and wittingly and persistently departed from the course that God intended for it, and brought discord with it, would you find a difficulty in bringing home to the right quarter the responsibility of that discord? 2. That in the midst of life's changes God has endued man with eternal attributes and longings. "He hath set eternity in their heart." When men tell me that man is not immortal by nature, my own nature protests against it. I know that I am to live for ever, for good or ill. There are immortal yearnings in me which tell of powerful affinities for eternity which God has implanted there. It is this consciousness of eternity in man that is the compensating grace for all that would otherwise be distracting and discouraging in change and transiency. But there is also another aspect of this truth. 8. God, in putting eternal yearnings into men's hearts, has made it impossible for them to satisfy themselves with the joys which this world can supply. (*D. Davies.*) **He hath set the world in their heart.—Eternity in man:**—God has set eternity in the heart of man. This explains—I. Its SENSE OF THE EMPTINESS OF ALL MUNDANE THINGS. No more can the world satisfy what is in man than a dewdrop can quench the burning thirst of a lion. Its unbroken and unsilenceable cry after it has received all the world can give, is, "More, more." II. Its CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE UNSTABILITY OF ALL THINGS CONNECTED WITH OUR EARTHLY LIFE. The sense of mutation rests constantly and heavily on the soul. But this sense could not exist if there was not something in us that is unchanged and unchanging. As that rock, which lifts its majestic head above the ocean, and alone remains unmoved amidst the restless waves, and the passing fleets, is the only measure to the voyager of all that

moves on the great world of waters, so the sense of the immutable, which Heaven has planted in our souls, is the standard by which alone we become conscious of the mutation of our earthly life. III. Its YEARNING TO LOOK INTO THE INVISIBLE. Inquiry into the reason of things is a deep and resistless instinct. In the child it is called curiosity, in the man, the philosophic spirit. But the reason of things is behind this sense, it is in the region of the invisible, and the invisible is the eternal. I see not my soul, and that is eternal, and its inquiries are after the eternal. IV. Its CONSTANT ANTICIPATIONS OF THE FUTURE. Its past is gone, however long and eventful it might have been. Gone as a vision of the night. To the future it looks, onward is its anxious glance. It "never is, but always to be blessed." V. Its INEXHAUSTIBILITY BY ITS PRODUCTIONS. The more the fruitful tree produces, the less it will produce in the future, and it will at last exhaust itself by its productions. Not so with the soul. The more fruit it yields, the more fecundant it becomes. The more a man thinks, the more capable he is of thinking; the more he loves, the deeper becomes the fountains of affection within him. VI. Its UNIVERSAL YEARNING FOR A GOD. "Man as a race," says Liddon, "is like those captains of whom we read, more than once, in history, that once having believed a throne to be within their grasp, they never could settle down again quietly as contented subjects. Man as man has a profound, an ineradicable instinct of his splendid destiny. He knows that the objects which meet his eye, that the average words which fall upon his ear, that the common thoughts and purposes and passions which haunt his heart and his brain, are very far indeed from being adequate to his real capacity." He wants God, nothing less than God Himself. VII. Its ABIDING SENSE OF PERSONAL IDENTITY. The old man who has passed through a long life of great changes, and whose bodily frame, too, has been several times exchanged, has, notwithstanding, an ineradicable belief that he is the same person as when a boy at school. He has no doubt of it. Bodies may be lost in bodies, but souls never lost in souls. Why this? It is because there is eternity in us. (*Homilist.*) *Eternity in the heart*:—"He hath set eternity in their heart." Then perhaps if we look carefully we may find it. I look into the primitive heart of man, into the childlike and unsophisticated heart. What do I find? Do I find any traces of eternity? I find an instinct, which, being interpreted, seems to say: "I'm but a stranger here, heaven is my home." "Here we have no continuing city; we seek one to come." "I nightly pitch my moving tent a day's march nearer home." In the heart of man, in Christendom and in savagedom, there is an instinct that time is not our home, that here we are only in tents, that here we sojourn, but do not abide, and the instinct is not born of fear nor of selfishness: the explanation is in my text, "God hath set eternity" in our hearts. Have we any further evidences of this implanting of eternity within us? When I go into my heart and listen, I hear a voice saying to me: "This thou must do; this thou must not do." The voice does not speak in mere suggestion, offering friendly counsel. It speaks like a monarch in tones of command. It tells me that all things are not of one moral colour. Some things are morally black and some morally white, and I have to observe the distinction. Of the black, the voice says: "Thou must not." Of the white, which it calls the right, the voice says: "Thou must!" I ask my fellow-man if he hears the same voice, and he answers: "Yes, it speaks to me." I find that the voice speaks in every life. What is the voice? We call it conscience. But conscience has no birth in time. All the temporal explanations which have been attempted are painfully inadequate and futile. "The voice of the Great Eternal speaks in that mighty tone." That secret voice which speaks to us of the eternal distinction between right and wrong finds its explanation in my text: "God hath set eternity in their hearts." Can we find any further evidence? Look again into the heart of man. May we not say that in every heart there is a strange feeling after God? I know it may be numbed and blunted, but I don't think it can be altogether destroyed. Let me try to illustrate this. You know that hydrogen gas is considerably lighter than the atmosphere that is round about us. When you fill a substance with the gas, say the silk that forms a balloon, it seeks to rise above the heavier atmosphere around, just as a cork rises through water and rests upon its surface. The lighter element tugs and tugs, and seeks to get away into the finer and rarer regions above. Well, it seems as though our God had put into the make-up of a human being ethereal elements, spiritual longings and hungers, which seek to rise above the grossness of flesh and time, to find their home in purer regions beyond. A light gas must reach an atmosphere of its own rarity before it can be at rest.

And these ethereal, spiritual elements within us, these implanted feelings, must rise into their own appropriate atmosphere, into communion with the great Spirit, before they can be at rest. Meanwhile, they tug at us, and we have all felt their tuggings! We have felt some good impulse tugging at us, tugging in the direction of God. When we have been walking with open eyes into gross and deliberate sin, we have felt the tugging of the lighter element within us, the spiritual feeling, seeking to lift us out of our grossness nearer to God. Call it by what name you will, there is something in every heart which makes for God, and will never be satisfied until it gets there. God has put a mouth in our hearts, a spiritual hunger, that He may draw us to seek satisfaction and rest where alone it can be found, in the presence and communion of the Eternal Spirit. "He has put eternity in their heart." Now what are the consequences of this implanting? If eternity has been set within us as part of our very being, what must surely follow? The Eternal within us seeks the Eternal, and nothing but the Eternal will feed it. That mouth in the heart, that hunger of the spirit, can only be fed with one kind of bread, and that the Bread of Life. Now, what kind of efforts are men making to satisfy the eternity in their heart? Along what particular lines are they searching for bread? There was a book published some three or four years ago of extraordinary literary brilliancy and power. It speedily passed into many editions, it was most favourably reviewed, and appeared to make a great impression upon all who read it. I want to read you two or three lines from the preface, in which the author sums up the whole burden of the counsel which he desires to give to his countrymen: "Stick to your work, and when your day is done, amuse and refresh yourselves." And he adds in the next sentence that "this is wholesome doctrine." Wholesome doctrine! What are its ingredients? Two things—*labour and pleasure*. Follow those two and you are all right. But what about the eternity in my heart? I am not unmindful that labour is a glorious means of grace. A man can get rid of many a vicious humour by applying himself to work. But work may be altogether atheistic or temporal, and work that is atheistic or altogether temporal will leave a man full of hunger; it will not feed the eternity that God has set in his heart. If our work is to feed the eternity within us, the thought of the Eternal must be in our work. As it is with work so it is with pleasure. Pleasure of itself cannot feed the soul, but gaiety often goes hand in hand with spiritual leanness. If you take a low thought with you, then the pleasure which gratifies your body will starve your soul. But if you take into your pleasure the thought of the Eternal, then your pleasure is transformed into a soul-feeding joy. The thought of the Eternal in your pleasure feeds the eternity in your heart, but without that thought a life of gaiety is a life of emptiness, and will leave you at last with "leanness for your soul," and with the mouth in your heart still hungering for the bread which has been so long denied. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The world in the soul*:—I. THE WORLD IS IN EVERY MAN'S HEART AS A MENTAL IMAGE. The men of the world whom we have known; the villages, towns, cities, which we have visited; the landscapes we have observed—in truth, all outside of us that have ever come under our notice have stamped their image on the heart. The photographs of all are within. Thus we carry within us all those parts and phases of the world that have ever come within the sweep of our observation. II. THE WORLD IS IN EVERY MAN'S HEART AS A NECESSARY INFLUENCE. So many and so close are the ties with which the Creator has bound us to this world, that it comes into us as a mighty and constantly acting force. There are many affections planted in the heart that must bring the world into it as an active power. There is self-preservation. Our very subsistence so depends upon the cultivation of the fields, the exploration of the minerals, the navigating of the seas, the transactions of the market, and in working, in some way or other, in the outward world, that it necessarily absorbs such an amount of our attention, as to bring it into us as a most powerful force of action. There is social affection. There are boys and girls, men and women, on whom our affections are set—brothers, sisters, husbands, wives, father, mother, friends who are so near to our sympathies, that, without figure, we bring them into us. They live in us, and exert no small amount of influence upon the activities of our life. Had we the philanthropy of Christ, we should bear, as He did, the whole human world upon our hearts. There is the love of beauty. Man's instinct for the beautiful is deep and strong. This instinct not only brings the world near to him, but into him. The craving of the soul for the beautiful in form and colour and the grand in aspect gives this world, which abounds with the beautiful and

sublime, a mighty power in the soul. III. THE WORLD IS IN EVERY MAN'S HEART AS A GREAT REALITY. The world is to every man according to the state of his soul; great or small, according to his conceptions; overspread with sadness or radiant with joy, according to his feelings; a scene of temptation to contaminate, or of discipline to refine, according to the ruling principles of the heart. 1. The character of the material world is to a man what he makes it. The world of the untutored rustic is very different from that of the man of science. What has made the difference—the difference in the state of intellect? The man of science has read and thought and investigated; and as he has done so, the world has grown in magnitude—in splendour, and in interest. Moreover, what a difference there is between the world of a cheerful and that of a gloomy man! 2. The character of the human world is to man what he makes of it. To the selfish all men are selfish; to the dishonest all men are dishonest; to the false all men are false; to the generous all men are generous. 3. The character of the God of the world is to man what he makes it. Polytheism is not confined to heathen lands where idols are made and worshipped. There is a certain kind of polytheism everywhere. The God the man worships is the God he has imaged to himself, and men have different images, according to the state of their own hearts. Hence, even in Christian theology, what different views we have of God! All go to the New Testament for arguments to support their views, and they succeed in getting them, for we can get from that Holy Book what we bring to it. Thus, even the God of the world is according to our hearts. "To the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward." Lessons:—1. The greatness of the human soul. It has the capacity to receive, retain, reflect all outward things. 2. The duty of mental modesty. No man has absolute truths in him. All that he has are opinions formed by himself concerning those truths. 3. The necessity of soul culture. If you want a bright and lovely world—a world that you will enjoy as a paradise, you must endeavour to make the heart right. 4. The nature of the millennial glory. Change the world's heart, fill it with truth, and love, and God, and it will have a new heaven and new earth—a new universe to live in. 5. The need of Divine influence. Who shall make these hearts right? Who shall repair and clean this beclouded mirror? Ah, who? We cannot do it ourselves. Nor can our fellow-men do it for us. This is God's work. It is He who gives a new heart and a new spirit, and with that a new universe. (*Homilist.*) *Eternity*:—The difference between the splendid world of vegetation, with its myriad colours and its ever-changing life; between the animal world, with its studied gradations of form and of development—and man, is this: God hath set eternity in our hearts. All creation around us is satisfied with its sustenance, we alone have a thirst and a hunger for which the circumstances of our life have no meat and drink. In the burning noonday of life's labour man sits—as the Son of Man once sat—by well-sides weary, and while others can slake their thirst with that, he needs a living water; while others go into cities to buy meat, he has need of and finds a sustenance that they know not of. Is not the strange, sad contrast, which is brought out before us here, true? Is not man a striking anomaly? He dwells amid the finite; he longs for the infinite. All the rest of creation can find enough to satisfy its wants—he cannot. He is like the bird that wings its way over the surging waters, seeking rest, and finding none, while the coarser thing can satisfy itself on the floating garbage. The truer and the nobler man is, the more certainly he feels all this, the more keenly he realizes eternity in his heart. There is none of us, however, who do not feel it sometimes. As you gaze on some setting sun, and its burning rays of gold seem to you like the very light of heaven across the glowing hinges of her closing doors—as you stand amid some mountain solitude that rises like heaven's ramparts against the sounds and strifes of earth—as some note of music seems "to come from the soul of the organ and enter into thine"—as some deep sorrow, or some deeper joy falls upon your life—in these, or other kindred experiences, the eternity which God has set in your heart will assert itself; you will feel in your soul the thirst of a life which cannot be satisfied, and which cannot end here. And why? Because God hath set eternity in our hearts. He has given us a hunger which can be satisfied only with the Bread of Life, a thirst which can be quenched only by the living water from the Rock of Ages. Well, granting the universal desire; granting the universal capacity; granting the almost universal conviction that there is such a life, may we not be deceived? That is the triumphant answer of some philosophers. Deceived! By whom? It is God who hath set eternity in our hearts. Do you mean we have been deceived by Him?

Are, we, then, to believe that God sent the noblest, purest, best Teacher that ever visited this earth, and gave Him the moral illumination and power to dispel a thousand errors, and explode a hundred fallacies which ignorance had invented or superstition had nurtured, but left Him so ignorant upon this point—the one universal error—that it was the supreme sustenance of His own life and the very lever by which He did raise the world? Can you believe that? All that is best, truest, noblest in your souls rebels against the thought. O God, we trust Thee! We bow our heads before Thee in reverence for even daring to speak of it. We trust the word of Thy Incarnate Son! O Christ, we know Thy words were true when Thou saidst:—"If it were not so I would have told you." Thou didst not tell us, and it is TRUE! God hath set eternity in our hearts. Are we living worthy of it? Are we living as if we really believed it? The only way of doing so is by clinging close to Him, by dying with Him to all that He died to save us from, and living worthy of that life and immortality which He hath brought from out of the mists of speculation into the light of truth by His Gospel. Instead of the "perhaps" of philosophic speculation, we have, thank God, the "Credo" of Christianity. (T. T. Shore, M.A.) *The hope of immortality*.—1. Let us first take this text as it is given in our old Bible—"He hath set the world in their heart." That is, the Creator hath set the world in the hearts of the children of men. This correspondence between the world without and the mind within is one of the most striking evidences of wisdom and the beneficence of the Creator. You see it in those outworks of the mind—those five senses. Between them and the qualities of the world outside there is a correspondence on which all the activity and movement of life depend. All the senses are inlets by which the forms and the glory of the world pass inwards to be set in the heart of man. But it is when you go a little further into the mind itself that you fully see the beneficence of the Creator. Take, for instance, what seems to be referred to in this verse—the sense of beauty in the mind. Beauty exists in the world in a thousand forms—in the lines of light, in the currents of the wind, in the circle of the moon and of the sun, in the forms of leaves and plants; and so on. But what would it all be if there were not in the mind a sense of beauty corresponding to it? Do you remember that ancient fancy of Plato that all knowledge is reminiscence—i. e. when the shapes of things present themselves to the senses they do not so much convey knowledge into the mind as wake up knowledge that is dormant in the mind. Have you not noticed when you looked for the first time on some glorious landscape that you felt as if you had known it all your life? So when you have met for the first time a fine specimen of human nature you had the impression that you had always been waiting for it. Why was it that Shakespeare, without any classical culture, was able with his Roman play to enter into the very spirit of the ancient world and in all his works to anticipate forms of society and describe how all possible forms of character would act in all possible circumstances? Was it not because, as another great poet has said, "when he came into the world he brought all the world with him"? Or, to put it in other words, God has set the world in his heart. 2. Secondly, let us take this text as it occurs in the margin of the R.V.—"He hath set eternity in their heart." What is the meaning of that? Perhaps the meaning is suggested by the words which immediately follow—"Man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end." Great as is the satisfaction which the beautiful world gives to the mind of man, it is not a complete satisfaction; the questions of the mind are never all answered; the desires of the heart are never all satisfied. It is vaguely the Divine—something above the world, which you would fain be at. Many as are the things in the mind which find their corresponding satisfaction in the world, there is in the mind something deeper which reacheth forth to something above the world—to the Divine, the Infinite, and the Eternal. The whole Book of Ecclesiastes, from which this text is taken, may be said to consist of variations on this theme. It is a description of a splendid nature determined to find out all that the world contains for it, and to tear out of it its secret. From every one of his quests Solomon returned with the same verdict on his lips—"All is vanity and vexation of spirit." And that, in every age, has been the verdict of every living soul that has sought its satisfaction in earthly things. It was the verdict of St. Francis that spring morning when he stood at the gate of Assisi, and looked down upon the smiling plain of Umbria, and yet felt in his own heart nothing but dust and ashes. It was the verdict of St. Augustine when, having lost a dearly-loved friend, he wept, and thought he would "give up the ghost," and could no

longer live in the town from which his friend had been taken away. He had tried friendship, learning, ambition, and honour; he had tried sensual gratification, and yet his heart was sick, unsatisfied, and broken. Yes, but the deep, searching mind of St. Augustine found out exactly what was the reason of his dissatisfaction, and expressed it in that immortal sentence which occurs in the first paragraph of his "Confessions," "Thou hast made each heart for Thyself, and it finds no rest until it rests in Thee." Blessed are they that discover that this is the reason of their disappointment and dissatisfaction. 3. Thirdly, there is one meaning that may be put on the words, "He hath set eternity in their heart"; and it is a very natural meaning—that the Creator has set in the human heart the hope and the desire of immortality. The Creator has put into us a conscience by which we judge the world round about us, but this conscience is very little satisfied with the world as it sees it. The conscience anticipates that in the world the righteous will always be prosperous and the unrighteous confounded. But how little that is the aspect of the world as at present constituted,—on every road the righteous man is bearing his cross amidst persecution and contempt, and the unrighteous lifts high his head while others bend before him. Therefore, the conscience anticipates another state of things where these difficulties will be redressed, where the righteous will be exalted, and where the unrighteous will be humbled. But this is only one of the pathways by which the mind arises to the idea of immortality. There are many others; in short, the Creator has set in the heart of man the desire and hope of immortality, and He has set it very deep. Now it can surely be shown that at a certain state of development the hope of immortality appears; and not only so, but that where this hope appears there sets in a new axis of development. When man realizes that he has before him not one life, but two, that he is not only the child of time, but the heir of eternity, he shoots up in moral stature, and a new dignity overspreads his existence. On the other hand, when, after being there, the hope of immortality perishes, it is as if there were extracted from the atmosphere a health-giving element, so that man becomes small and miserable. The late Professor Romanes, even before he became a Christian, confessed that the disappearance in his mind of the hope of immortality was like the disappearance of the sun from the firmament. It may be argued, indeed, that neither the universality of this belief, nor even of its exalting character, is any conclusive evidence that there actually is a future world corresponding to our desires; and that is quite proved if you take an atheistic view of the world. But if you take a theistic view of the world, I think the existence of the desire is evidence that it will be satisfied. God will not deceive His creatures. When the bird of passage, obeying the instinct which God has set in its heart, spreads its wings for the South, its Creator does not deceive it; there are sunny landscapes awaiting it where it goes. And do you think that, when the human spirit, rising out of selfishness and passion, spreads its wings for an immortal home, there is no paradise there to receive it? (*J. Stalker, D.D.*) *Eternity in man's heart*.—I. WE CANNOT PERSUADE OURSELVES THAT THIS PRESENT STATE OF THINGS IS ALL WITH WHICH WE HAVE TO DO, FOR GOD HATH SET ETERNITY IN OUR HEART. We are lost in the thought of the duration, the magnitude, the grandeur of the material universe. Surely one might say: "We have enough here to occupy and satisfy us"; and yet something within us declares, "This is not all. This is but the outward form; we want the real substance of which all this is but the shadow or the picture. This universe is passing and transient; we seek the permanent and eternal. These things, all of them, are but effects; our mind must, by the very law of its being, press on and up, and cannot rest content till a sufficient cause is found to account for them all." The eternal past and the eternal future are written deeply on the heart. We look back on the past, and we try to trace the long chain of events up to an eternal Creator. The soul looks on to the future, and, at that great Creator's side, it sees itself passing unhurt through "the wreck of ages and the crash of worlds," immortal as its Sire. One of the most valuable manuscripts of the New Testament, known to scholars as MS.C., is a palimpsest. The writing of the sacred text had grown dim or been carelessly washed away, and over it—for parchments were precious in those days—the works of some Syrian saint had been written. The old letters, however, had not been utterly obliterated; they began to peep through, and, by some chemical process, they were again made legible, and have been carefully deciphered. Eternity is written on our hearts by the finger of God; we cannot blot it utterly out. We try to cover it up; but the old writing ever and anon peeps through and

takes us by surprise. I hold in my hand the thread with which to weave my life and destiny; but that thread comes to me out of the past and reaches far beyond me into the future. My life is short; but all eternity has been preparing for it, and it is meant to be a preparation for eternity to come. I am the lord of the world, and yet I feel there is One over me, a great eternal Person, from whom I come and to whom I go. Thus, in the midst of the order and beauty of the universe, man stands expectant, as some one puts it, like Elijah at Horeb, waiting for the still, small voice which will reveal the unseen and eternal. Conscience, reason, and heart are all athirst for God, the living God. II. WE CANNOT REST CONTENT WITH THIS WORLD, FOR GOD HAS SET ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS. You tried to fill your heart and gain content by thinking of the money you had saved, of the pleasures with which your path of life was strewn, of your happy home and loving friends; but it was not satisfied. Doubts, fears, anxious questionings rose up ever and anon, and cast their dark shadow over you. You knew that all these things were transient and uncertain; and even while they lasted they did not fit into your desires and cravings at every point; they gave you much enjoyment, but not a settled peace. When you dared to think you looked forward with dread to loneliness and death and judgment. Eternity was in your heart, and time could not satisfy you. But there came a change. God had mercy on you. He awakened you thoroughly; He brought you to your right mind. Into the sanctuary of your spirit, where eternity is written, you entered reverently, and God was there. He spoke to you by His Word—that Word you had often read so carelessly; and you answered Him in prayer, in confession of sin, in supplication for mercy. Pardon was granted you in Jesus Christ; God's favour was assured you; the earnest of the spirit was given you—eternal life was yours. As you passed out into the common walks and work of life all things seemed new. The world was brighter than it used to be, and yet smaller and more insignificant. Peace was yours, and sweet content. A fountain of joy and hope was welling up within you, which no loss or trial could dry up. III. WE NEED NOT DESPAIR ABOUT HUMANITY, SINCE GOD HAS SET ETERNITY IN MAN'S HEART. Human nature is no sphinx; it is not a deception and a snare. The eye is made for light; and as it opens, lo! the light surrounds it. The appetite craves appropriate food, and, lo! corn appears on the world with man, and will grow wherever he can live. We seek companionship and love; we cannot help it; and, behold! the first thing the little child sees, as it begins to notice, is the lamp of love, held up to lighten his path through a dark and dangerous world. This longing after God and eternity—is there nothing provided to correspond to it? Surely God has not put eternity in man's heart simply to make him unhappy. Whence have I come? Why am I here? Whither am I going? Who is above me? How can I please Him? These questions press upon me. Surely an answer will be provided to them by that God whose I am, and by whom eternity has been set in my heart. At every point the revelation of God answers these desires and questionings. We feel there must be, behind the seen and temporal, another more enduring world; and as we turn to St. John i. we hear that a Visitor has come from it, His mission authenticated by miracles, to bring us the very knowledge that we seek. "The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness." "This, then, is the message that we have heard of Him, and declare unto you—that God is light." "And these things write we unto you that your joy may be full." We feel the world is not eternal; there must be some one, eternal and almighty, somewhere, to account for its existence; and the same apostle points to this very Being who came to teach and help us, and declares that "all things were made by Him." He is the Son of God, Divine, eternal, "the effulgence of God's glory and the very image of His substance" (Heb. i. 3). We want to look into the eternal future, and to know what is in store for us, and, lo! each path of life is seen running to the judgment-seat; but, at that point, the paths divide—some pass downwards into the abode of darkness and woe eternal, where sin, and the misery sin brings, reign supreme; and others pass upwards to the sweet and holy heaven, where 144,000, clad in white robes, follow the Lamb, and serve God day and night for evermore. The most practical question comes last, and is not left unanswered: "How am I to prepare for eternity, so as to escape the woe and share the glory?" It is to answer that question, more than any other, the revelation of God is given. Christ, the Son of God, the Maker of the worlds, took up His people's burden, and bore it to the death; through His sacrifice, which God has accepted, there is life and peace for me. Christ stands out, and says: "I

am the Way." He unbinds our chains; He gives pardon, purity, and peace. I have only to come to Him, to trust Him, to follow Him, and in Him eternal life is mine. (*W. Park, M.A.*) *Eternity in the heart*:—What meaning, what dignity, what surpassing hope and fear should lie in this—that God hath set eternity in your heart! I. IT OUGHT TO CALM YOU. Recall the days of the past week—its toils, anxieties and cares, vexations and disappointments—how did you bear yourself with them? Were you despondent, did you lose self-control, did your blood boil to fever-heat, and were you rebellious? Do you think that such would have been the manner of your life if you had turned your eyes inwardly, and quietly faced that Guest with the unfathomable eyes and awe-inspiring grace—Eternity? Get more intercourse with that awful yet august Guest in your soul—Eternity—it will keep you calm in hours when you would be otherwise grasping at the bolts of Jove. II. IT OUGHT TO INSPIRE YOU. What an impression it should make on mind and heart, when we express in words the destiny which belongs to us all, "I am to live for ever!" The realization of this tremendous thought should give amplitude, probity, strength, and gentleness to our lives—liberate them from ascendancy of petty aims and the discomposedness of trifling worries—expose the immeasurable folly of letting ourselves drift under impulses of irresponsible opinion and unregulated passion; relax the destructive pressure of materialistic thought and secularistic care, and fasten us indissolubly to Him, whose fortress shall survive the crash of worlds, and whose glory shall be the inconceivable felicity of the faithful and triumphant. III. IT OUGHT TO ENNOBLE YOU. Man is, let us say, made up of body and spirit. But there are persons who live in the body only; they do not live in the spirit, and, according to the Bible, that is not living, it is death. Man cannot live with any nobleness unless those high energies are at work whose impetus is originated by the presence in his heart of eternity. (*D. B. Wilkams.*) *Noble discontent*:—I. THE REASON OF MAN'S DISCONTENT. Discontent is an unnatural, strange thing, in a world full to overflowing, as this earth is, of wonders, beauties, and all good things, and with natures fitted as ours are, to our condition in such marvellous wise. Yet has there ever lived a man without deep, serious, frequent discontent? The sensual and frivolous are, probably, supremely satisfied so long as they can turn at their will from one excitement to another; but it is otherwise with all who think, and inquire, and feel the mysteries in which all their questionings end. All allow that the pleasures of mind and soul are loftier and nobler than the pleasures of sense; yet, in the degree in which a man shares them he shares discontent, hankers after something he cannot find: he knows too much for his peace. It is not mere eternity which thoughtful man desires, not even the perpetuity of things as they are; but eternal life worthy of the noble name, and in harmony with his highest nature, in which the good he aspires after shall be attained, and the evil he deplores be removed, and the unseen God be beheld with joy, and served with undecaying energies. II. THE MERCY OF MAN'S DISCONTENT. Is it a paradox to say that we are better for having these unsatisfied cravings? that to be without them would be to sink in the level of creation? Picture some tropical forest, where vegetable and animal life luxuriate to the full, and where the swarms exuberant with life know no discontent. Would you give up your high though unsatisfied yearnings for bright but unreasoning life like theirs? Or, when, in spring, you wander through the fields, burdened with cares, and doubts, and fears about the future, while the birds, in utter freedom from care, are filling the air with song, would you change with them, and part with your hopes of an endless life, your longings for the Father in heaven? Or, if, with unsatisfied desires of this noble kind, you meet with one who cares for nothing higher than the worldly wealth, and ease, and pleasure he enjoys, would you change your noble discontent for his ignoble content with "what perishes in the using"? Remember two things. Our discontent should be of this noble sort—aspiration after worthier, divine life, truth, purity, goodness, God; not, as often, base craving for money, ease, repute; and our longings, being a mercy, a dignity, should be cherished and cultivated. We must let the eternity we crave have its due, and live by faith in the unseen. III. THE REMEDY FOR MAN'S DISCONTENT. We cannot get rid of it till we reach eternity; but it need not remain a painful mystery. Christ has come, and shown us God and immortality; He bids us move cheerfully towards the Father's house, and pursue "the crown of life." And looking on the things unseen and eternal, and pursuing them with faith, and hope, and patience, and courage, our discontent will be forgotten, first in effort, then in victory. (*T. M. Herbert, M.A.*) *Eternity*

in the heart:—I. ETERNITY IS SET IN EVERY HUMAN HEART. The expression may be either a declaration of the actual immortality of the soul, or it may mean, as I rather suppose it to do, the consciousness of eternity which is part of human nature. The former idea is no doubt closely connected with the latter, and would here yield an appropriate sense. "In our embers is something that doth live." Whatsoever befalls the hairs that get grey and thin, and the hands that become wrinkled and palsied, and the heart that is worn out by much beating, and the blood that clogs and clots at last, and the filmy eye, and all the corruptible frame; yet, as the heathen said, "I shall not all die," but deep within this transient clay-house, that must crack and fall and be resolved into the elements out of which it was built up, there dwells an immortal guest, an undying personal self. In the heart, the inmost spiritual being of every man, eternity, in this sense of the word, does dwell. But, probably, the other interpretation of these words is the truer,—that the Preacher is here asserting, not that the heart or spirit is immortal, but that, whether it is or no, in the heart is planted the thought, the consciousness of eternity—and the longing after it. The little child taught by some grandmother Lois, in a cottage, knows what she means when she tells him "you will live for ever," though both scholar and teacher would be puzzled to put it into other words. When we say eternity flows round this bank and shoal of time—men know what we mean. Heart answers to heart—and in each heart lies that solemn thought—for ever! That eternity which is set in our hearts is not merely the thought of ever-during Being, or of an everlasting order of things to which we are in some way related. But there are connected with it other ideas besides those of mere duration. Men know what perfection means. They understand the meaning of perfect goodness; they have the notion of infinite wisdom and boundless love. These thoughts are the material of all poetry, the thread from which the imagination creates all her wondrous tapestries. By the make of our spirits, by the possibilities that dawn dim before us, by the thoughts "whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality,"—by all these and a thousand other signs and facts in every human life we say—"God has set eternity in their hearts!" II. THE DISPROPORTIONATE BETWEEN THIS OUR NATURE AND THE WORLD IN WHICH WE DWELL. Every other creature presents the most accurate correspondence between nature and circumstances, powers and occupations. Man alone is like some poor land-bird blown out to sea and floating half-drowned with clinging plumage on an ocean where the dove "finds no rest for the sole of her foot," or like some creature that loves to glance in the sunlight but is plunged into the deepest recesses of a dark mine. In the midst of a universe marked by the nicest adaptations of creatures to their habitation, man alone, the head of them all, presents the unheard-of anomaly that he is surrounded by conditions which do not fit his whole nature, which are not adequate for all his powers, on which he cannot feed and nurture his whole being. Is this present life enough for you? Sometimes you fancy it is. "This world not enough for me!" you say—"yes! it is, only let me get a little more of it, and keep what I get, and I shall be all right." So then—"a little more" is wanted, is it? And that "little more" will always be wanted, and besides it, the guarantee of permanence will always be wanted, and failing these, there will ever be a hunger that nothing can fill which belongs to earth. A great botanist made what he called "a floral clock" to mark the hour of the day by the opening and closing of flowers. It was a graceful and yet a pathetic thought. One after another they spread their petals, and their varying colours glow in the light. But one after another they wearily shut their cups, and the night falls, and the latest of them folds itself together and all are hidden away in the dark. So our joys and treasures—were they sufficient did they last, cannot last. After a summer's day comes a summer's night, and after a brief space of them comes winter, when all are killed and the leafless trees stand silent. III. THE POSSIBLE SATISFYING OF OUR SOULS. The Preacher in his day learned that it was possible to satisfy the hunger for eternity which had once seemed to him a questionable blessing. Standing at the centre, he saw order instead of chaos, and when he had come back, after all his search, to the old simple faith of peasants and children in Judah, to fear God and keep His commandments, he understood why God had set eternity in man's heart, and then flung him out, as if in mockery, amidst the stormy waves of the changeful ocean of time. And we, who have a further word from God, may have a fuller and yet more blessed conviction, built upon our own happy experience, if we choose, that it is possible for us to have that deep thirst slaked, that longing

appeased. We have Christ to trust to and to love. As in mysterious and transcendent union the Divine takes into itself the human in that person of Jesus, and Eternity is blended with Time; we, trusting Him and yielding our hearts to Him, receive into our poor lives an incorruptible soed, and for us the soul-satisfying realities that abide for ever mingle with and are reached through the shadows that pass away. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The child of eternity*.—Here, indeed, is a bit of revelation. This man sees, at this instant, the real reason of the unrest of humanity, the real reason of the endless strife, the unquenchable thirst, the unsatisfied endeavours of himself and his fellow-men. "Do you know," says the great French preacher Lamennais, "what it is that makes man the most suffering of creatures? It is that he has one foot in the finite and the other in the infinite, and that he is torn asunder, not by four horses, as in the terrible old times, but between two worlds." If the Infinite God, the Creator, is a Personality, His children, who derive their personality from Him, must be sharers of His infinite attributes, and must, therefore, have wants, wishes, hopes, aspirations, needs which are limitless. If man possesses such a nature as this, whose capacities are simply boundless, if God hath set eternity in his heart, his conduct here on the earth will give some indication of this momentous fact. Perhaps the great phenomenon of human progress is one sign of it. The race appears to be always going forward. The further the race goes in the path of spiritual and moral attainment, the larger is the prospect and the promise of future growth. To the other animals no such progress seems to be possible. The writer of Ecclesiastes argues that man is no better than the beasts; he could scarcely have noted the capacity for progress which man possesses in such a marked degree, and which the beasts do not possess. Here is a sign of that divine endowment which we are considering. Viewed on its intellectual and spiritual side, the human race gives no hint of a term of existence. If anything is clear in the study of moral forces it is that the life of the spirit is steadily progressive. Stagnation and decay may indeed overtake tribes and peoples, but only when they forsake the ideals of humanity and turn aside to the worship of that which is beneath them. And the destruction visited upon these will show at length to the blundering generations the way of life. The race profits by the retributions of nations and people who persist in disobeying the organic law of humanity. It is a costly kind of tuition, but it seems to be the only effectual kind. Under its instruction the race seems to be slowly learning the way of life. And the evidence is strong that that way is an upward way. The case is clearer when we study the development of the individual soul. Here there is no sign of a term. In knowledge, for example, in mental power, is there any such thing as a fixed limit? Is not every advance in knowledge accompanied, not only by an increase in the power of knowing, but also by an increase in the desire to know? Even more obvious is man's kinship with the infinite when we consider his moral and spiritual nature. Here, surely, are possibilities that are boundless. The ideals which present themselves to human thought are not subject to quantitative measurement. Limit there is none; to think of one would be immoral. "Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." That is the lowest standard that any man can fix. He will fall far short of it, but he can aim at nothing lower. And not only is this divine endowment seen in the boundless possibilities of good which open before the heroic and aspiring soul, it is seen not less in the perversions of character with which we are too familiar. Ponder the story of human ambition as it is outlined in such a life as that of Xerxes, or Alexander, or Napoleon, as it is displayed in such stupendous monuments of egoism as Babylon or Nineveh must have been, as the Pyramids of Egypt exhibit to us until this day. It is not toward royal palaces or mortuary piles that the insatiable spirit of man is directed in this age so much as toward bank accounts and accumulations of capital. The growth of a plutocracy in this democratic age—what a spectacle it is! How do you explain this towering greed which heaps millions on millions, which compasses land and sea to add to accumulations that can never be used? A friend of mine who is prospering, so far as this world's goods are concerned, but who is freely using his gains in what he esteems to be humane and helpful ministries, and who is fully resolved not to die a rich man, told me not long ago that for several months he had lost no opportunity of inquiring of men whom he met who were getting rich rapidly why they were doing it. "What is your reason for heaping up money?" he asks them. "What do you want so much for?" "And I tell you the truth," he said to me, "when I say that not one of them gave me an

answer that was really intelligible; not one gave an explanation that I could feel satisfied his own reason. Most of them had something to say about their families; but when I pushed the question whether they thought it really a good thing for children to leave them large amounts of wealth, they could never answer confidently. It was perfectly evident to me, in every case, that these men were driven on by an unreasoning craving, a kind of craze, that they wanted it, mainly, just for the sake of having it. And I found it very difficult to make most of them think that anybody could be actuated by any other motive. When I said to them, 'I am not in business simply or mainly for the sake of making money; if there was nothing in it but just piling one dollar on top of another it would have no interest for me,' they looked at me in blank amazement." To my mind we have here an appalling example of the perversions of the highest powers. What makes men capable of this limitless ambition and greed is the endowment which they have received as the children of God. It is because "He hath set eternity in their hearts" that they have the power to compass the world in their insatiable desires. And yet how manifestly this is a case of perversion! It is the direction of infinite powers to finite ends. And the restlessness and misery of the world are largely due to this one fact: that men into whose hearts God has set eternity are striving to fill themselves with the gains of time. For this immortal hunger there is a satisfying portion even here. For God is in His world, my friends; He is always here; He is the one ever-present, inescapable Fact, the foundation of every reality with which we deal. How does He reveal Himself? One may find many answers, all inadequate, for He whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain cannot be expressed in any phrase that we can fashion. But we may say that we know Him in this world as Truth and Beauty and Love. And the soul that delights in truth, that rejoices in beauty, that lives for love, has entered into life. For the eternity that is in our hearts this is the provision. These are the elements of that knowledge of God with which Jesus seeks to lead those who will follow Him. This is what He is pointing to when He says, "He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (W. Gladden, D.D.)

No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.—The Divine Worker and the human student:—I. GOD IS EVER WORKING. 1. In nature. That same power which created our world with all its variety of life and phenomena is constantly exerted in sustaining and governing the same; that same hand which first marshalled the hosts of heaven is ever engaged preserving the regularity of their movements in their vast orbits. 2. In providence. In the raising up and the removal of the wise and great, in the rise and fall of empires, we see His agency originating, or guiding, or overruling events. 3. In redemption. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." By His Holy Spirit, and by various Christian ministries, He is ever working for the salvation of men from sin. II. MAN IS ENGAGED IN ENDEAVOURING TO UNDERSTAND THE WORK OF GOD. He seeks to "find out the work that God maketh." Man is inquisitive as to God's work in the physical creation; the astronomer, the geologist, the naturalist, the physiologist, and others endeavour to penetrate into the mystery of the Divine work in the material realms. The psychologist seeks to "understand the work that God maketh" in the realm of mind and heart. Man also scrutinizes the work of God in providence and in redemption. This is right. Reverently prosecuted, this study of "the work that God maketh" is most quickening, inspiring, and saving in its influence on the student. III. MAN IS UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND FULLY THE WORK OF GOD. 1. Man can understand the work of God in part. He can "find out"—(1) That the perfection of God's work in man has been marred, destroyed. (2) That by his own unaided efforts man is utterly unable to recover his lost perfection. (3) That God has provided a glorious Restorer in Jesus Christ. (4) That we need guidance and help in the walk and work of life. (5) That infallible guidance and inexhaustible strength are given to those who seek them from God. Comp. Prov. iii. 4, 5; Deut. xxxiii. 25; 2 Cor. xii. 9. (6) That there is a state of being beyond this present and visible one, in which our state and position will be determined by the character which we form here and now. Here also there are mysteries, but the great facts are very clearly revealed. 2. Man cannot understand the work of God fully. This is true as regards the material realm. Every part of nature still has her mysteries to man. Nor are we able to understand fully God's work in providence. There are chapters in the history of the human race which are inscrutable enigmas to us when we

consider them in relation to His control of human affairs. Even in our own lives there are painful mysteries, *e. g.* privations, bereavements, afflictions, etc. Our very being is a mystery to us. We cannot understand much; we are speedily bewildered with difficulties, and troubled with what are to us dark and sad anomalies; but let us rejoice in the fact that God "maketh everything beautiful in its time"; the deformity, and sin, and sorrow are not of His making. Let us rejoice, too, that He will work on until order is developed out of the moral chaos of this world, and the sin-cursed earth blossoms into an Eden of unfading beauty. (*W. Jones.*)

Ver. 12. **I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.**—*Doing good and rejoicing*:—Solomon proposes two things to our practice, if we intend to live happily and comfortably in this world. First, that we do good; and, secondly, that we rejoice. I must invert the order in which the words stand in the text, because doing good is the reason why we rejoice; and to be sure there can be no true joy or comfort in possessing or using any worldly blessings, unless we can satisfy ourselves that we have done good with them. Doing good is a work of that known excellency in itself, yielding such sweetness and complacency in the practice of it, is so agreeable to the consent and opinion of all mankind in general, and so well pleasing and acceptable with God Himself, the grand Exemplar of doing good, that they must entirely have lost the principles of good nature, of improved reason, and revealed religion, who take care for none but themselves, regard not how it fares with others, so they may live in ease and plenty. Doing good is a public benefit, a great advantage to the world, and to the common state of mankind. Doing good, lastly, is a work of so large and comprehensive an extent, that high and low, rich and poor, learned or unlearned, may improve those talents God hath been pleased to entrust them with to His honour, and to the good of others; so that for me to go about to tell you what it is to do good, and wherein it consists, would be an endless task. However, superseding the most common acceptance of the phrase, of doing good by charity, and giving of alms, I shall reduce it to doing good to the benefit and advantage of the public; a subject no way unseasonable at all times, but more especially in these. 1. Men may do good by being diligent and industrious in their proper callings and particular employments, thereby rendering themselves very profitable members of a commonwealth. If we consult history, we shall find that the best men have all along been the most industrious in their respective places and offices; the worthy patriarchs, the holy prophets, the blessed apostles have been very exemplary and eminent in their doings for the service of God, and the benefit of mankind; nay, the angels are ever on the wing, in a readiness to receive and go upon God's commands. 2. Men in public authority may do good by being careful, diligent and conscientious in the faithful discharge of those trusts and offices unto which they are called. That man who has a heart to act according to his duty is a public blessing, a man of great courage and resolution, aiming at nothing more than the glory of God and the public good; being always disposed in all his dealings to have a principal regard to the rules of his duty, and the dictates of his conscience, without being swayed by any appetite or passion, by any sinister respect to his own private interest, to the commission of any unworthy or base action, but acteth from good principles, and aims at good ends, without partiality, or distinguishing between public or private; can satisfy himself in his own conscience, and justify to all the world that his designs are truly good, and that whatever he doth, he doth all to the glory of God, and to the benefit of those over whom he presides. This is a reason why our Heavenly Father in His dispensations entrusts some with greater outward advantages than others, that they may have fairer opportunities of doing good. They are set up in the world as burning lights and visible examples to others, to recommend goodness to the minds and consciences of men by their own practice and conversation. I come now to the consequence of doing good, "for a man to rejoice." By rejoicing, here we mean a constant habit of joy and cheerfulness, being always contented and well pleased, always free from those anxieties and uncomfortable reflections which render the life of man miserable and uneasy; virtue and innocence, a behaving ourselves so in the world that our consciences shall not reproach us. It is in vain to think of any true joy or peace without doing good. How pleasant and comfortable is it to us while we live, that sensible impression of delight which accompanies the duty at present, is proportionable to the necessity

and strict injunction laid upon us to perform it; there is a sweet complacency in doing good, and being kind to those that want, for if even the bare wishes and desires of doing good, when out of our power, afford the well-wisher some degree of peace and content, and we can satisfy ourselves with the sincerity of our designs and purposes, then certainly when we can bring those wishes and desires to good effect, there cannot but be a spring of joy and pleasure arising in the soul, such an overflowing of the spirits as is not to be expressed in terms or words, and no one can fully understand it, but they that have been ravished with it. Our Saviour, we may observe throughout the Gospel, went about doing good; He coveted to spend His beams, rejoiced to spread His healing wings over every place He came to. And what delight do we find when we imitate Him! What inward peace and serenity of mind doth it raise, when love fills the heart, and stretches out the hand, when we carry about us the mercies of the Lord, are sent from the mercy-seat with comfort and relief to them that want both. How are we ourselves filled with joy and gladness, having had the honour and privilege of being in God's stead to our brother at time of need; neither is this joy and satisfaction peculiar only to charity and relieving the poor and needy, but to all other actions and designs of doing good, upon what account soever, especially to those which are done for the public, for the honour and prosperity of Church and State. It is a favour that God gives us opportunities as well as abilities of doing good, and He hath allowed us to reap the profit and pleasure which redound from such good actions as long as we live; He seldom fails in this world amply to repay what good we do by outward blessings in the ordinary dispensations of His providence either one way or other, or it may be to our children after us. But it ends not here; this world lasts but a while, and we have souls that must live for ever. If, therefore, men have any kindness for them, if they mean not to undo them to all eternity, it is absolutely necessary that they should do good; let us then be all persuaded to labour and study to do good; let us be daily giving evidences to the public of our good dispositions towards it. (*W. Baldwin, M.A.*) *Life enjoyed and improved*.—All our temporal possessions are only valuable as they are expended upon ourselves or others; either as they aid our own comfort or advance the welfare of our fellow-creatures. Let me then call upon you—I. To REJOICE IN THEM. 1. Let me begin with two cautions. (1) The first regards justice. See that what you enjoy is your own. "Owe no man anything." It was well said by Lord Mansfield, that "for one cruel creditor, there were a hundred cruel debtors." (2) The second regards moderation. You can never suppose that God requires, or even allows, intemperance. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." 2. After having cautioned you, allow me to admonish. If you would rejoice in the good things which God gives you under the sun—(1) Cherish a grateful sensibility. Some receive all their mercies like the beasts that perish. The animal only is gratified in them. (2) Guard against habitual discontent. To possess is not to enjoy. Many possess much and enjoy nothing. (3) Shun avaricious and distrustful anxiety. (4) Entertain no harsh and superstitious views of religion. (5) Seek after a knowledge of your reconciliation with God. II. To do GOOD. 1. What good can those things enable us to do?—It is of three kinds. (1) They enable us to do religious good. This is the chief. (2) They enable us also to do intellectual good. (3) They enable us to do corporeal good: by which we mean, that which immediately regards the body, though the mind will also derive comfort from it. 2. In what manner are we to do it? (1) Immediately, and with diligence. (2) Extensively, and with impartiality. (3) Perseveringly, and without declension. 3. Why we should be concerned to accomplish it. (1) Because the bounties of Providence were conferred upon us for this very purpose. (2) Because God hath commanded it. (3) Gratitude requires it. (4) Profit requires it. What is it that attaches one man so powerfully to another, and gives him a resource in the tears, the prayers, the attentions of his fellow-creatures in the day of evil? (5) Pleasure requires it. If you are strangers to the pleasures of benevolence, you are to be pitied; for you are strangers to the most pure, the most durable, the most delicious, the most satisfactory, the most God-like, pleasures to be enjoyed on this side heaven. (*IV. Jay.*)

Ver. 14. I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever.—*The eternity and perfection of the Divine purposes and doings*.—Most important and consolatory truth is contained in these words. In it the Preacher seems to find refuge from

the perplexity and uncertainty of human things; on it he seems to rest that conclusion of practical wisdom which he draws from the consideration of the vanities of human life; that it is the duty, and for the happiness of man, thankfully and confidently to enjoy the good which he possesses, as bestowed at once, and secured by the merciful and unfailing providence of God. In this truth he seems to have found a rock, on which he might set his feet securely, being delivered by the light of Divine wisdom out of the unsteady and intricate paths of human short-sightedness and folly. I. The very NATURE OF MAN is transient and imperfect, much more THE WORKS in which he is engaged. Frail are they, and fugitive, mutable and perishable, uncertain and insecure, never continuing in one stay. This is the very property of a dependent and finite creature, who cannot set up a will of his own, or execute a work in opposition to the will, and exempt from the control of that Supreme Power who gave him his being, and to whom he is necessarily subject. But beside this essential insufficiency in man as a mere creature, sin has marred his limited powers, and induced corruptness, as well as imperfectness into all his works. II. Consider, in opposition to this picture of man, THE NATURE AND WORKS OF GOD; more particularly as they have relation to, and affect mankind. 1. "Whatsoever God doeth it shall be for ever." (1) Because there is no change of purpose in God. (2) Every singular decree of His will, and every several act of His power, humanly separated out of this great unity, "is, in truth, for ever," and hath in it a perpetuity, being joined on, indissolubly and eternally, to that one all-involving and everlasting design. (3) It shall stand; because no created and superior power can interfere to overthrow it. 2. But the purposes and works of God in relation to man are also perfect. They are entire, complete, and of finished excellence. 3. But especially, whatsoever He doeth in the covenant of His mercy, and in the salvation provided for man in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ "shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it." (1) It is eternal, unfailing, and unchangeable in Christ, by whom it hath been executed and accomplished. (2) This salvation is also eternal in God's purpose and decree of mercy. (3) This salvation is also eternal in the work of grace and sanctification. (4) But, moreover, His salvation is perfect in itself, complete, entire, wanting nothing, neither requiring nor admitting any addition, but providing all that is needful for every sinner's recovery to everlasting life. It is a full and free salvation. III. THE END AND MOTIVE WHICH GOD HATH IN HIS DOINGS, eternal and perfect as they are, is, that men may fear Him. Oh! what a holy and heavenly blending of gracious influences and sweet emotions is included in this godly fear; humble and awful reverence, bowing before the supreme greatness and goodness of the Lord God omnipotent; meek, and confiding trust, resting on His power and mercy, pledged, and engaged, and manifestly operating in behalf of fallen man; lively gratitude for surpassing grace, and redemption at once free and unfailing; pure and true love to infinite excellence of omnipotence and benevolence. This is sanctified, this is acceptable fear; this is that fear in which holiness must be perfected. (J. O. Parr, M.A.)

Ver. 15. *That which hath been is now.*—*The impotency of time; or, the eternally permanent amidst the constantly fluctuating:*—"Impotency of time!" Why, time is anything but impotent! Is not its history a record of stupendous achievements? Are not the whole scene of our observation and sphere of our knowledge covered with tokens of its power? "Time impotent," indeed! Its hand is on all things, and all things yield to its touch; it is the mighty sea that bears all things to our shore; and, anon, bears all away. Albeit, contrary though it may seem to our common ideas and feeling, a little thinking on the subject will convince us that the power of time is seeming, rather than real; and that there are high and practical senses in which it may be regarded as impotent. Time has not done much, notwithstanding all; "for that which hath been is now." This language will apply—I. TO ALL THE ELEMENTS OF MATERIAL EXISTENCE. The forms of the material world are constantly changing. Whole islands emerge from the ocean, whilst broad acres, once tilled by busy man, are entombed beneath its waves. The herbs, and flowers, and trees of the plantal realm, and the million tribes of air, and earth, and sea, belonging to the animal dominion, have changed many a thousand times since the days of Noah, and are changing every hour. But the elements of which the first types of all were formed are the same. Time, through all its mighty revolutions, cannot destroy an atom. The language of the text applies—II. TO ALL THE SPIRITS OF MANKIND. Argument, we think, is

not wanting to prove that all the human souls that ever have "been, are now." On what do I base the conviction, that all the souls that ever have lived, are living still, and will live for ever? Purely on the testimony of Christ and His apostles. In the nature of the case there is but one way of knowing how long any creature is to live, and that is, by ascertaining what is the will of the necessary existing one in relation to Him. If He has willed that man shall live a year—however constitutionally strong—he shall live a year and no more; or if He has willed that he shall live for ever—however constitutionally weak—he shall live for ever. To know the limits of any being's existence, I must know the will of God respecting it. All depends on His will. But has He revealed this in relation to human existence? He has. Christ comes forth to testify of this will; and He tells us, in language most unmistakable, that God has willed that man's existence shall have no termination (Matt. x. 28; Luke xvi. 19, etc.; xx. 38; John v. 24; viii. 51; xii. 24-28; xiv. 2, 3; 2 Cor. v. 1-10; 2 Tim. i. 10; 1 Thess. iv. 18; Phil. i. 23; 1 Peter iv. 6).

III. To ALL THE GENERAL TYPES OF HUMAN CHARACTER. The same types reappear in all times. Your Herods and Hamans, your Athenians and Pharisees—indeed, every character in the Bible, and every character in history, seem to be living again in every age.

IV. To ALL THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. The forms of God's dealings with humanity have passed through various changes. There was once simple Patriarchalism; then came gorgeous Judaism; and now we have spiritual Christianity; but the same principles are seen in each and all. Because of this unalterableness, the physical philosopher can prophesy of things to come centuries hence; he can tell to the hour when an eclipse shall take place, when the tide shall overflow its boundary, and when another comet shall sweep the horizon; and because of this, the moral philosopher, too, can predict with an unerring certainty, that if minds continue under the influence of certain principles of depravity, most terrible storms of anguish await them; but if under the influence of holy truth, their path shall be as the shining light, "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." And because of this, moreover, the good people who rightly appreciate the influences of the last economy, can appreciate in full the heart-language of the good people who rightly appreciated the influences of the first. Asaph can express his feelings in the language of Job, and Paul in the language of David, and the good of this age in the language of either or all.

V. To THE GRAND DESIGN OF ALL THINGS. What is the great design of all things? On the assumption that the author of all is moral mind—distinguished by rectitude and love, and that all intelligent beings are His offspring—is it not lawful to conclude that the grand design in all must be the holy development of creature minds in gratitude, reverence, love, and assimilation to Himself? What we might thus, *a priori*, infer, all the facts of nature, history, consciousness, and the Bible contribute to establish.

VI. To THE RECOLLECTIONS OF THE HUMAN MEMORY. Every sentence and every verse of providential history are written on the disembodied souls of the generations that are gone. The history of man is recorded, not in books, but in souls; and will be seen and studied in the great eternity.

VII. To ALL THE CONDITIONS OF MAN'S WELL-BEING. Look at the condition of man's physical well-being. Is it not true that on wholesome food, fresh air, and proper exercise the health of the human body has ever depended? Look at man's intellectual well-being. Is it not true that on observation, comparison, research, and reflection the progress of the human mind has ever been suspended? Look at his spiritual well-being. Have not repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ been always the necessary condition of human salvation? In relation to all these things we may say, with the greatest truth, that "that which hath been is now." It has ever been thus, that the man who violated the physical laws of his being has lost his health and sunk to the grave; it has always been, that he who neglected the conditions of intellectual improvement has never risen beyond the level of the brute; and it has always been, that he who did not "repent" has perished; and that he who did not believe has been damned. (*Homiliæ*.) *Stability amidst change*:—This apothegm is not to be taken without some limitation. It intends not to assert that there is absolutely no change, no variety, no progress or improvement in any direction, from time to time; but it sentimentiously expresses the truth, or truths, that over all change there presides a law of permanence; that amidst all variety there exists a standard of uniformity; that much which seems to be new is in fact old; that the main features of the past are reproduced in the present, and will be again reproduced in the future;

that the great principles of human nature and of the Divine government remain the same in all ages. In this view of the text, it gravely opposes its wisdom to those manifestations, now of vanity, and now of discontent, which are evinced in the disparagement and rejection of what has hitherto been received, cherished and revered. We often hear that the world has outgrown such and such opinions, habits or modes of action. Occasionally the assertion is made considerably, and is true. It is made concerning cruelties, superstitions, and puerilities which the world ought to outgrow, and which a part of the world has partly outgrown, as any observer may see. But the trouble and annoyance is that the same assertion is used by half-sighted and confident men to signify the supposed triumph of their own fancies, and with regard to things which the world ought not to outgrow, and has not in reality outgrown, because they are good and durable in themselves. No sooner do a few individuals learn to neglect and despise certain religious forms, than they declare that the world has outgrown them. We do not outgrow a thing, in the true sense of becoming too wise for it, simply because we neglect and forget it in a season of indifference, or cast it away from us in a time of strife and excitement. The whole French nation once thought that they had outgrown religion, when in fact they had only renounced it, and renounced a great good; and they never acted so madly as during that period of delusion. We are often told that the world is outgrowing, or has outgrown, forms. How far is this true? Only to a limited extent. All life and all nature and all art are full of forms, are hardly anything but forms. In every form there is a spirit, which is its life. Sometimes the spirit departs from it, and then it dies. Sometimes the form which envelops the spirit is made too cumbrous by superfluous foldings, and then the form must be reduced, in order that the spirit may have breath. But the spirit survives, in the same form renewed, or in some other. In some instances the spirit may act without a form, or in a form so reserved as to be imperceptible to common eyes. Masses for the dead are not outwardly celebrated by ourselves. But the spirit of that form is the desire springing from irrepressible affection to do something by the way of intercession for the departed souls of those whom we have loved. It may be our doctrine that the state of those souls is now fixed and unchangeable, but it is our feeling that something may yet be done for them by earnest supplication; and there must be many a one who, though he would not think of asking for a requiem from the Church, yet puts up his own prayers for his own dead in the silent church of his own bosom. It is evident that there are forms which, by their spirit, are so connected with our eternal affections that, however they may be varied, they can never be outgrown. Meanwhile, let us be satisfied that the essential things remain, and will remain, and that the world cannot outgrow them. Religion remains; for the nature of man requires it. Faith in Christ remains; for He is the Mediator between God and man, revealing the will of God, and manifesting the glory of the Father; and man must go to Him for the words of eternal life. The Bible remains; for it is spread through the world, and guarded by its own sanctity and man's gratitude. Prayer remains, for man must speak to his Maker, and the language of his communion is prayer. And things which appear to some less essential and permanent than these, will still remain. Not only will religion remain in spirit, but in external form; for man has senses as well as a soul. Forms may be modified, but form will remain. Ordinances will remain; for religion demands manifestation; and especially will those two ordinances remain, which the Saviour enjoined, and which the Church from the very first has continued. Music will accompany worship, and elevate piety, while man has an ear for harmony. Churches will be reared with the best graces of architecture, while man has an eye for fitness, proportion, and beauty. Let us not fear the occasional outcries of destructiveness, or be troubled by the whispered fears of timidity. The things which we love and have reason to love, and which have helped us and made our solace, will not be outgrown. If they have engaged love, true and pure love, they are worthy and lasting. If they have touched and opened the inmost fountains of feeling, they are real and durable. Let us not fear for them nor distrust them, but be true to them, and they will be true to us. (*F. W. P. Greenwood, D.D.*) **God requireth that which is past.**—*Life an organic unity.*—We may render the clause more literally and intelligently: "God taketh account, maketh inquisition, for that which has fled away." No part of life is isolated, but each period is connected with what has gone before and with what comes after; all are combined to make a vital, organic whole, so that in judging of the present we are really judging the

past, as in the day of final adjudication the acts of the bygone years will come up for approval or condemnation before the Judge of all the earth. We are to-day what we are by means of the past, and the future is conditioned on the present. Life evolves itself out of the present; as the stream at the mouth bears a constant relation to all the streams that have watered the hills, so age is related to youth. As the crest of foliage lifted by the trees bears its relation to the root, so does life's flower and fruitage stand related to early years of culture and of growth. We know this. When we are censured or reproved we know that it is not the present alone that is judged, but the past. Knowledge is not extemporaneous. It is not a sudden acquisition, any more than a ship, or palace, or a city with its splendid mansions, spacious avenues or extended commerce, are extemporized by nations. We sometimes listen to one in conversation and are tempted to credit him with intuitive sagacity, with native wisdom, whereas his rich and ready speech pours its golden opulence only as molten metal gushes out from the open furnace when it has felt the purifying fires within. Research and experiment, successes and failures, have wrought together to make his knowledge accurate, compact, available. So in art, the painter is not what he is by mere spontaneous, involuntary impulse. Study, practice, patient and protracted toil have given him skill. So the poet, the musician, the advocate, the physician or the orator is what he is to-day only by virtue of the past. The past has been the arena of toilsful struggles, and it is that which is judged. Sometimes it has been too brief for adequate preparation, and failure follows. Again, in the customs by which our life is governed or inspired or limited we see the same principle at work. By resistance or by yielding to various influences brought to bear upon us we come to be what we are, strong against temptation or weak before its alluring power. Paul's retirement in Arabia was a part of his training. Every contest and conquest taught him. As he bore the chain on his hand he learned patience. As he looked on the soldiers that guarded him, or on the household of the emperor, or as he contemplated the crown which he himself would wear in heaven, he learned more of himself and his Saviour. The fanaticism of Pharisee, the scepticism of philosopher, and the bigotry of the Jew all taught him. In that one moment when he lifted up his last prayer before he suffered was reflected a lifetime of noble consecration and self-discipline. In the special states of mind which control our judgment the same fact reappears. One person is habitually gloomy, another gay and frivolous. Thus life comes out of the past. Its habits and states of feeling to-day reflect the habits of other years. Here is the philosophy of history. It is not a series of isolated events, a concatenation of unpropheied occurrences, but a continuous unity. The theme teaches us the solemnity of life.

(*R. S. Storrs, D.D.*) *Review of life*:—I. A REVIEW OF PAST MEANS AND PRIVILEGES. By these, I mean your having been born in a land of vision where the Saviour of the world is known. I mean, your having had the Word of life, not only to read, but also to hear. I mean, your having had ministers to call you to repentance, to warn you of your danger, to beseech you in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God. I mean, the various ordinances of the sanctuary, and all the helps to seriousness and devotion which the goodness of God has afforded you. What influence have all these had upon your minds? Are you crucified to the world? Are you denying yourselves, and taking up your cross, and following the Saviour? Are your affections more spiritual, your principles more powerful, your minds more enlightened? II. A REVIEW OF PAST MERCIES. How many times has He lulled you to sleep in His arms; fed you at His table; clothed you from His wardrobe! How often has He supplied your wants, and wiped away tears from your eyes! When brought low, has He not helped you? When in jeopardy, has He not defended you? When sickness has alarmed your fears, has He not led you back from the gates of the grave? When accidents have been ready to destroy, have not "all your bones said, who is a God like unto Thee?" If we had indulged a person year after year all through life, should we not require him to think of it; to be sensible of our kindness, and to behave towards us in a manner becoming his obligations? There is nothing perhaps we feel more painfully than the ungrateful reception of the favours we bestow: and a very few instances of unthankfulness are sufficient to induce us to discontinue our benefits. What, then, does God think of us? III. A REVIEW OF OUR PAST SORROWS AND DISTRESSES. It is an awful thing to come out of trouble; for it always leaves us better or worse than it finds us. We should therefore ask with peculiar concern—"What benefit have I derived from such a visitation of Divine Providence? The rod

spoke—did I hear its message? The physician has been employed—is my dispenser even beyond the reach of medicine? I have lost the life of my friend—and have I lost his death too? My relation has entered the joy of his Lord—I have one reason for loving earth less, and do I love it more? one reason for loving heaven more, and do I love it less?" IV. A REVIEW OF PAST SINS. Many of these have grown out of our privileges, our mercies, and our trials. They have been attended with singular aggravations. They are more in number than the hairs of our head. In many things we offend all. This review is painful—but it is useful, it is necessary. It will lead us to admire the longsuffering of God, in bearing with us year after year. It will be a call to repentance. It will humble us. It will promote charity. We shall be tender towards others, in proportion as we deal honestly and severely with ourselves. It will be a spur to diligence. You have much lost time to redeem, and much lost ground to recover. (*W. Jay.*) *Past years returning*:—We say in popular language of a departed year, that it is gone. But in truth it is not gone. Nothing in it is lost—lost to itself, to the universe, or to any who have lived through it. "God requireth that which is past." I. The law of MEMORY shows that God requires the past. All that ever hath been, so far as humanity is concerned, is now living in the memory of all the individual men that ever lived. Memory has now its resurrections. Scarcely an hour departs, in which some grave does not open, and the ghost of some long-buried event does not start up to life. As ocean prints her undulations on the shore, memory prints our actions and events on the soul—a tablet, this, not, however, like sand; but like eternal adamant. II. The law of moral CAUSATION shows that God requires the past. There is nothing living on which you can fix your eyes that is not to-day the effect of all the causes and influences that have been operating on it from the beginning of its existence. This is true of the globe itself. Its condition to-day is the result of all the forces that have been acting upon it through the most distant periods of geological calculation. This is true of the intellect. The state of my intellect at this hour is the result of all the thoughts that have ever coursed their way through my soul. This law holds true in relation to character. Nothing that man does ever dies: no act terminates in itself, it makes an everlasting impression, it becomes an element in the moral existence of its author, it sends its vibrations along the lines of the endless future. III. The law of CONSCIENCE shows that God requires the past. Conscience, both in the savage and the sage, foreshadows the scene of coming retribution. It has heard the trumpet blast; it has seen the Judge enthroned, the prisoner arraigned, the books opened, the witnesses examined; has heard the sentence pronounced, and marked the final delivery of the culprit into the everlasting custody of justice. The structure of the human eye does not more clearly imply the existence of light, than the forebodings of a guilty conscience the existence of future retribution. (*Homilist.*) *God requireth that which is past*:—In what senses does God require the past? I. God requires that which is past in the way of NATURAL LAW. 1. The matter of the past God requires to-day. The mighty primeval forests which reared their lofty heads and waved their huge branches, and the earth's elements which rolled in fiery flood ages before the human era, God requireth now in this age of advanced civilization, and they answer the requirement, the one by furnishing coal, the other by supplying granite and metals for the use of man. And as of the remote past, so of the nearer. The leaves which a day or two back we saw chased hither and thither by the spirit of the wind will contribute their due portion to the vegetation of the coming year. 2. What is thus true of nature is true also of society. The year has been what it has because of what it has received from the past, and in turn it will hand down to the coming years its vast inheritance of the past increased with its own individual contribution. 3. As also by natural law God requires the evil and the good that are past. You see a nation as Greece, or as Spain, once so great, now without physical energy or moral vigour; it is the judgment exacted or required by natural law for the vices and follies of the fathers and forefathers. You see certain weakly or diseased children; the wickedness of the generation before them is therein required of them. The excesses of the youth by natural law God will sooner or later require in the man's disordered physical system, or in his undermined constitution succumbing to some disease. But it is more true of the good than of the evil that God requireth the past. Has Abraham's faith perished? Has Jacob's wrestling prayer died? Have David's psalms and prophets' word, and, above all, have the truth and grace of the good Lord Himself wrought so long ago perished?

Our mighty dead are with us in the saintlier lives, in the freer thought, in the ampler work of the Church to-day. No; the past is not gone. Time does not triumph over us. By natural laws God preserves the past. God requireth that which is past. In requiring, however, the past through natural law, there is no appeal to the human will. II. We pass now to the sphere of will, and say that a second chief way in which God requireth that which is past is by means of THE MORAL LAW. Here God appeals to man to render somewhat suitable to his past. Here, ere the requirement of God can be met, man must consent and co-operate. 1. In this sphere God requireth that which is past by requiring thankfulness for past mercies. No state of heart is so happy as that of thankfulness, as no state is so conducive to the right use of God's gifts. Be ye thankful. 2. But while we have received mercies many, who, as he looks over this year, is not conscious of sin? and for the sin which is past God requireth penitence. 3. But God has given us time and place here, and has so constituted our life that it puts us through a wise discipline; and for this discipline of the past God requireth character and service. Have we fashioned the limbs of the moral man—honesty, sincerity, justice, honourableness—into greater strength and beauty? Have we produced any of the finer lines of gentleness, lowliness, meekness, devoutness, which are so glorious in our Divine model? III. God requires the past in the way of FUTURE JUDGMENT. God, at the judgment, will require that. The modern mode of conceiving of past time differs from the ancient mode. We think of past time as something left behind us; the ancients thought of past time as something gone before them. *Tempus fugit* (time flies) was the common expression of classic thought; the notion being that time was ever moving forward, requiring therefore prompt action to use it, and suggesting that when past it had fled not behind but before us. In like manner in Arabic philosophy, and in the Koran, authorities inform us that past deeds are conceived of not as left behind but as gone on before, waiting in yonder great future to confront their doers. It is this conception of past time that the original of our text presents. And this view is just. The moral feeling of all races anticipates judgment to come. Though pride and unbelief will beat down the feeling, yet, naturally, the bad man instinctively dreads the future, and the good man instinctively hopes. There is a judgment-hall within us where conscience sits; her judgments, however, are often slighted, drowned sometimes in the clamour of a rabble of worldly considerations; in such circumstances she anticipates and appeals to the future judgment to confirm and enforce her despised judgment. The unrepented evil will be known and declared. That undiscovered lie, that secret immorality, that unknown fraud, that godlessness of the heart, that enmity of the mind, that unbelief of the spirit; all will stand clearly revealed, and judgment just will be passed. We cannot deceive Him the Omniscient, nor elude Him the Omnipresent. There is no escape from that supreme judgment. From the sentence of that judgment what vast issues will flow! Eternal life or the second death! Heaven or Gehenna! Let us, then, prepare for that judgment by requiring from ourselves our past. (*A. Goodrich, D.D.*) *The indelibility of the past*:—I. The fact that there is a sense in which the past is never done away with, will appear at once, from many considerations, to any one who reflects upon the subject. There is nothing which we are more likely to forget than the truth which St. Paul expressed when he said, "A man cannot live unto himself." To go no farther, every man must have some influence upon his immediate relatives. The parent has some influence upon his children. But it is not only as regard others—important and awful though that be—that "that which hath been is now." II. Even if all the injury we may have done to others by a course of which we have now repented, still the past will leave its marks upon ourselves; marks which no repentance will blot out. Just as there are dangerous wounds which, long after they have been healed, leave a tenderness in the part which they affected, or, at all events, leave a scar which never can be removed; just as there are diseases which leave behind them a delicacy, or of which, even after they are thoroughly eradicated, there remain in the robust frame the everlasting marks; so a course of sin, even when it does not—and I believe this is the exception—even when it does not cause a permanent delicacy, still leaves behind it the marks of its once putrefying wounds and bruises and sores, long after they have been healed by the Great Physician. We have been saved from death, but great and unceasing care is henceforth absolutely necessary. Our sickness is over, but our countenance is changed. Mortification has been checked by the timely amputation of a limb; we are in full health, but

we never get the limb back again. There are, no doubt, those who, by God's grace, attain, as nearly as possible, to the character of those who had never yielded themselves deliberately to courses of sin or carelessness. There are prodigals who are not only forgiven and received with readiness and joy, but in whom the traces of wantonness and degradation or selfishness have become almost, if not altogether, imperceptible; between whom and the son who had "ever been with his father" no man can observe the difference. Still, even to such, the past is not a blank. It cannot but be that the gloomy recollection will often cross his mind of those who have passed away now from his influence, and whom he once influenced for evil; and who will say that as such a memory blends with the anticipation of the time when they shall meet again, and suggests, as it will suggest, the judgment of the Great Day—who will say that the past of the pardoned and accepted penitent is not painfully required of him? (*J. C. Coghlan, D.D.*) *The permanence of the past:*—In God's great universe there is no absolute past. Time and space are the same. They have no true reality, but are mere modes of contemplation—conditions by which objects are rendered perceptible to us. Before God, endowed with the powers which we lack, the whole history of the universe appears immediately and at once. The extension of time and the extension of space cannot be distinguished from one another. The relations of past and future disappear; they form one magnificent whole. He fills at once the boundless infinitude of His being. He is the Alpha at the same time that He is the Omega. With Him beginning and ending coalesce and enclose everything intermediate. I. GOD REQUIRETH THE PAST THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE. What are our sciences but memories of the past? Astronomy is the memory of the universe; geology is the memory of the earth; history is the memory of the human race. There is nothing forgotten or left behind. The past is brought forward into the present, and out of the past the future grows. Each material form bears in itself the record of its past history; each ray of light carries the picture of that from which it has come. Owing to the wonderful improvement that has taken place in the construction and study of the spectroscope, we are learning more and more to read the secrets, not only of the present, but also of the past history of the stars. The astronomer can not only calculate their future movements, but also recall their former phenomena. Then what a faithful testimony has our own earth kept of the changes through which it has passed! The geologist, from the unmistakable signs which he sees in the rocks, can reconstruct in imagination the seas and shores that vanished untold ages ago. Memory is not a faculty peculiar to mind, it exists in each nerve-centre, whether of sensation or motion, as is proved by the fact that each nerve-centre can be educated to respond to impressions. It is a property of every tissue of the body. The scar of a wound is the recollection by the tissue of the injury which it has received; and the marks of the small-pox are an evidence that the whole system remembers the attack of the disease. There is such a thing, too, as ancestral memory; and the hereditary traits and peculiarities which successive generations exhibit testify to its permanence. Many of the strange instincts, mysterious associations, and shadowy recollections for whose origin in our own experience we cannot account, and which Wordsworth in his famous "Ode" alludes to as intimations of a Divine home recently left, may be traces in us of the memory of our forefathers which we have inherited. What are the phenomena of rejuvenescence in plants but a reminding—a grasping anew amid the old withered decaying forms of life of the ideal or type—a going back to the first fair condition? Nature never forgets. Nothing perishes without leaving a record of it behind. The past history of the universe is not only preserved in the memory of God, but is also inscribed upon its own tablets. II. GOD REQUIRETH THE PAST FOR OUR PRESENT CONSOLATION. He takes up all we have left behind in the plenitude of His existence. The friends who have gone from us live in Him; the days that are no more are revived in Him. He is intimately acquainted, not only with our present thoughts, but also with the whole of our past experience. The images of the past that haunt our own minds are ineffaceably impressed upon His also. In converse with Him, in whom thus all our life is hid, upon whose mind the whole picture of our existence is mirrored, we feel that, though lonely, we are not alone—though the perishing creatures of a day, we are living even now in eternity. III. GOD REQUIRETH THE PAST FOR ITS RESTORATION. As the context indicates, it is a law of the Divine manifestation, a mode of the Divine working in every department, that the past should be brought forward into the present, the old reproduced in the new. In

nature and religion the progressive and the conservative elements are combined. Each new stratum of rock is formed out of the ruin of the previous strata. In man himself the characteristics of each age are carried along with him through every advancing stage of life, and the child-heart may be retained in extreme old age. In the history of nations the past overshadows and forms the present, and the modifications which existing institutions undergo are based upon the solid advantages of old institutions; while "freedom broadens slowly down from precedent to precedent." In like manner in Scripture every advancing event is marked by new powers and destined for higher ends; but with these are always essentially recapitulated all things that have been previously employed. The system of truth contained in the successive dispensations of religion is one and the same. God, in His house not made with hands, is not doing as we do when our household goods are old and worn out and we replace them by things altogether new. He is not continually refurnishing the earth. He is causing the same flowers and trees and streams to appear season after season. He never wearies of repeating the old familiar things. He keeps age after age, generation after generation, year after year, the same old home-feeling in His earth for us. And is not this a strong argument that He will keep the old home-feeling for us in heaven; that we shall find ourselves beyond the river of death in the midst of all the former familiar things of our life, just as when we get out of the winter gloom and desolation of any year, we find ourselves in the midst of all that made the former springs and summers so sweet and precious to us? I love to think of heaven as a recollection, and to believe that the kingdom of God in its highest sense is the restitution of all things. Wasted, toiling humanity, after the great circumnavigation of human history is over, will return to its early purity and glory. The tree of life will bloom again, and the river of life will flow through the paradise regained. The New Jerusalem will descend from God out of heaven, "not in the unearthly splendours of an unknown apocalypse, but as a lark descends from the skies to the nest she had dwelt and loved in." IV. But closely connected with the brightness of such thoughts as these is the shadow of the solemn one that GOD REQUIRETH THE PAST FOR JUDGMENT. The stars of heaven witness and retain the scenes and events of our earth. The pictures of all secret deeds that have ever been done really and actually exist, glancing by the vibration of light farther and farther in the universe. We are continually endowing the inanimate earth with our own consciousness, impressing our own moral history upon the objects around us; and these objects react upon us in recalling that history. The sky and the earth are thus books of remembrance that witness against us, and God will open them on the great day. "He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth beneath, that He may judge His people." In ourselves, too, there are indelible records of our former history. The whole past of our lives is with us in the present, and accompanies us into the future; and whatever we have done or suffered or been has entered into our deeper being, and we have only to go there to find it. Memory is indestructible. We cannot undo the past and begin afresh. We have to take the past as the starting-point and determining element of the future. We are what the past has made us; and the memory of former things is indelible. But the Gospel reminds us that what cannot be obliterated may be transmuted by Divine grace. In Christ Jesus we may become new creatures; and in the eternal life that we begin, in union with Him, all old things, so far as there is any condemning power in them, pass away, and all things in the transfiguring light of heavenly love become new. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*) *Overhauling the past:*—There is in law what they call a release. If you have an incumbrance upon your property, by the payment of a certain sum of money on your part the person to whom you are obligated gives you a document freeing your property from any incumbrance. That is a release. Well, when a man becomes a Christian, for and in consideration of what Christ has paid in his behalf, God grants him a full release, and all his old sins go down into the very depths of the ocean, never to be brought up again, neither in the crises of this world nor in the Day of Judgment; but until that arrangement is made, "God requireth that which is past." There are in our lives, however insignificant, a multitude of events for which we must give account. 1. In the first place, God will require of us all our past unrecognized blessings. Ob, God has been very good to you. Have you been good to God? "God requireth that which is past." More than that, He saw you dying, and sent an angel to redeem you. Did He? No. He sent His only Son. Why? To heal your wounds, and to wipe away your tears, and

to carry your burdens, and to die your death, and to save your soul; and for these last ten or twenty years He has been asking of you one little thing, and that is that you would let Him just stand inside the door of your heart. Oh, have you done it? 2. Again, God will require of you, and does require of you, the warnings that were unheeded all your life. Did any of you have narrow escapes? He has made a record of them, and "He requires that which is past." So God will require of you all the warnings that came to you through sickness. So, also, God will require of you all those warnings that came to you through the sudden decease of your friends. I suppose that there have been thirty or forty startling providences in your life, when you were impressed with the fact—more or less impressed with it—that life was uncertain, and that at any moment eternity might move in upon your soul. How did you feel about it? Did you put the warnings that God gave you to any practical application, or has it been proved that there is no power in God's providences to move and arouse and arrest your soul? There are three points at which "God requires that which is past." (1) One is now. God is saying to you so loudly you cannot stop your ears against it: "O man, where is thy father's God? O man, where are thy dying mother's entreaties? O man, where have you spent your nights since you have been in town? O man, if you should die in your seat to-night, where would you go to? O man, how long will you live?" (2) There is another point at which God makes requisition, and that is the last hour we live on earth. What are the voices of the past saying to that unrepentant man as he is going out of life? Those voices are saying to him: "What about those Sabbath-breaking rides? What about those words blasphemous or unclean? What about those malpractices in trade? What about those million bad thoughts during your life, of envy, or hatred, or lust, or pride? Come to resurrection all ye days, and months, and years; come to resurrection." And they come. What is God doing with that dying man? He is "requiring that which is past." (3) There is one other point at which God will make requisition—that is, in the great final day. Without a single exception, all the unforgiven sins of our past life will come up before us, and before an assembled universe we will be questioned about them. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The past*:—It is by no means an uncouth thing for a traveller passing through a certain country to make his pauses and to reflect upon the path he has already travelled, and to map out before him the path he has to travel, and to decide in his own mind upon the course he shall take most calculated to bring him with safety to his journey's end. He doubtless recalls some of the scenes he has passed through, whether of stirring interest or otherwise. And while doing this he is impressed with a consciousness of enlarged experience; and if he is not a fool he will make this experience serve him for his advantage in the future. Even so with the Christian traveller, he has his pauses in the journey of life. He brings before his mind the memory of the past when he comes to the close of an old year, and looks onward to the beginning of a new one. It becomes us all to examine ourselves, to trace back our past lives, and to look forward to the future, for the very reason assigned to us by the words of Solomon, "God requireth that which is past." 1. We find the text borne out according to the requirements of the natural world around us. Nothing of the past is absolutely lost, but, in some form or other, ever connected with the passing present. 2. We often speak of forgetting a thing, as if by its banishment from the memory it were lost, gone, and perished. But there is nothing forgotten: for "God requireth that which is past." "The winds travel on their course, and seem to sweep past us, but they do a work which never perishes. The waves flow high, and seem to steal away, but each wave contributes a donation to the business of creation which never perishes. The sun rises, and shines, and sinks away again, but leaves behind him an alms-offering to the charities of fruition and of sustenance which never perishes. Men are born, and live, and toil, and die, and are by men forgotten; but their work never perishes." 3. Consider these words as they refer to our individual influence upon others. 4. The text reminds us all of the impossibility of escaping from our responsibilities. 5. The text, while thus binding the past, present and future together in Deity, acts as an excellent monition for our future guidance. It tells us that the past can be improved upon, and, while gone beyond our reach and never to return to us again, we can nevertheless seize the passing moment, and so, from its warning, enter with renewed courage and with renewed hope upon the scenes of life lying before us, untravelled and unknown. (*W. D. Horwood.*)

Ver. 17. **God shall judge the righteous and the wicked.**—*The reasonableness and equity of a future judgment.*—I. IT IS REASONABLE AND EQUAL THAT THERE SHOULD BE A FUTURE JUDGMENT. 1. Seeing all men come hither without any knowledge or choice, having their life, as it were, obtruded on them; and seeing ordinarily (according to the general complaints of men) the pains of this life do overbalance its pleasures; so that it seemeth, in regard to what men find here, a punishment to be born; it seemeth also thence equal that men should be put into a capacity, on their good behaviour in this troublesome state, of a better state hereafter, in compensation for what they endure here; otherwise God might seem not to have dealt fairly with His creatures. 2. Seeing man is endowed with a free choice and power over his actions, and thence by a good or bad use thereof is capable of deserving well or ill, it is just that a respective difference be made, according to due estimation; and that men answerably should be proceeded with either here or hereafter, reaping the fruits of what they voluntarily did sow. 3. Seeing there is a natural subordination of man to God, as of a creature to his Maker, as of a subject or servant to his lord, as of a client or dependant to his patron, protector, and benefactor, whence correspondent obligations do result; it is just that men should be accountable for the performance, and for the violation or neglect of them. 4. Seeing also there are natural relations of men to one another, and frequent transactions between them, founding several duties of humanity and justice; the which may be observed or transgressed; so that some men shall do, and others suffer much injury, without any possible redress from elsewhere, it is fit that a reference of such cases should be made to the common Patron of right, and that by Him they should be so decided, that due amends should be made to one party, and fit correction inflicted on the other. 5. Whereas also there are many secret good actions, many inward good dispositions, good wishes, and good purposes, unto which here no honour, no profit, no pleasure, no sort of benefit is annexed, or indeed well can be (they being indiscernible to men), there are likewise many bad practices and designs concealed or disguised, so as necessarily to pass away without any check, any disgrace, any damage or chastisement here, it is most equal that hereafter both these kinds should be disclosed, and obtain answerable recompense. 6. There are also persons whom, although committing grievous wrong, oppression, and other heinous misdemeanours, offensive to God and man, yet, by reason of the inviolable sacredness of their authority, or because of their uncontrollable power, no justice here can reach, nor punishment can touch; who therefore should be reserved to the impartial and irresistible judgment of God. 7. On these and the like accounts, equity requireth that a judgment should pass on the deeds of men; and thereto the common opinions of men and the private dictates of each man's conscience do attest. 8. Every man also having committed any notable misdemeanour (repugnant to piety, justice, or sobriety), doth naturally accuse himself for it, doth in his heart sentence himself to deserve punishment, and doth stand possessed with a dread thereof; so, even unwillingly, avouching the equity of a judgment, and by a forcible instinct presaging it to come. II. IT IS FURTHER, ON DIVERS ACCOUNTS, REQUISITE AND NEEDFUL THAT MEN SHOULD HAVE AN APPREHENSION CONCERNING SUCH A JUDGMENT APPOINTED BY GOD, AND CONSEQUENTLY THAT SUCH AN ONE SHOULD REALLY BE. 1. It is needful to engage men on the practice of any virtue, and to restrain them from any vice; for that indeed without it, no consideration of reason, no provision of law here, can be much available to those purposes. 2. The same supposition is also needful for the welfare of human society; the which, without the practice of justice, fidelity, and other virtues, can hardly subsist; without which practice indeed a body of men would be worse than a company of wolves or foxes; and vain it were to think that it can anywhere stand without conscience; and conscience, without fear checking, or hope spurring it on, can be no more than a name: all societies, therefore, we may see, have been fain to call in the notion of a future judgment to the aid of justice and support of fidelity; obliging men to bind their testimonies by oaths, and plight their truth by sacraments; implying a dread of that Divine judgment to which they solemnly do then appeal and make themselves accountable. 3. But, further, the persuasion concerning a future judgment is, on peculiar accounts, most requisite to the support of religion and defence of piety. It is certain that no authority, on whatever reason or equity grounded, if it do not present competent encouragements to obedient subjects, if it do not hold forth an armed hand, menacing chastisement to the refractory, will signify anything, or be able to sustain the respect due to it; so it is generally; and so it is even in

regard to God, the sovereign King and Governor of the world, as piety doth suppose Him: His authority will never be maintained, His laws will never be obeyed, the duties towards Him will never be minded, without influence on the hopes and fears of men; they will not yield to Him any reverence, they will nowise regard His commands, if they may not from their respect and obedience expect good benefit, if they dread not a sore vengeance for their rebellion or neglect; nothing to them will seem more fond than to serve Him who doth not well requite for the performance, than to revere Him, who doth not soundly punish for the neglect of His service. Forasmuch also as piety doth require duties somewhat high and hard, as much crossing the natural inclinations and desires of men, it peculiarly, for the overruling such aversion, doth need answerably great encouragements to the practice, and deterrents from the transgression of what it requireth; on which score it may also further appear that temporal judgments and recompenses here are not sufficient to procure a due obedience to the laws of piety; for how indeed can he, that for the sake of piety doth undergo disgrace, loss, or pain, expect to be satisfied here? What other benefits can he presume on beside those which he doth presently forfeit? (*Isaac Barrow, D.D.*)

Vers. 19-24. **For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts.—Man and beast:**—It is difficult to determine the exact object of Ecclesiastes in instituting this comparison: partly because the Hebrew is capable, in one or two places, of different translations; and partly because it is possible to take very different views of the connection between the two things which Ecclesiastes had "said in his heart." One view which may be taken of this connection is that Ecclesiastes, having recorded his conviction that the righteous God will yet judge between the righteous and the wicked, goes on to record how he had speculated as to the reason why God does not always execute this judgment here and now. It had occurred to him that the reason of this might be to "prove" or "test" men, and to show them that, in and of "themselves," they were liable to degenerate into a mere animal life. There is for man both probation and self-revelation in the fact that God does not visit all wickedness with immediate and manifest punishment. If a man thrusts his hand into the fire it is at once burnt: the suffering follows immediately on the action, and the man is not likely to do the same thing again. Now, if all violations of the moral law were followed likewise by such immediate and manifest consequences, there might be a test of human prudence, but there would scarcely be any test of human virtue. If, for example, every man who should commit an act of dishonesty were—at once and without fail—to be stricken with paralysis, there would be no more virtue in honesty than there is now in keeping one's hand out of the fire. But the fact that God often postpones the manifest punishment of iniquity, and allows wicked men sometimes even to trample upon the righteous with apparent impunity, affords a test of moral character, and leaves room for the exercise of virtues which are the result, not of mere prudence, but of an actual allegiance to God and righteousness. And this kind of probation, to which men are subjected, becomes an instrument of self-revelation. Men see how much of the animal there is in their nature. The spirit of man, indeed, "goeth upward" at death; and the spirit of the beast "goeth downward to the earth": but "who knoweth" the exact difference between the two? The difference of destination does not make itself manifest to the senses. To all outward appearance the dissolution of the man and of the beast is exactly the same kind of thing; the human being does not appear to have any pre-eminence in this respect over the mere animal. Now, all these circumstances and appearances put men to the proof; they test men as to whether they will allow themselves to sink down into a mere animal, selfish life, or whether they will follow those Divine inspirations which link them to God, beckon them to righteousness, and point them to immortality. But there is another and very different view which may be taken of the passage. According to this view, Ecclesiastes is here recording a mood of materialistic scepticism through which he had passed. The two things which he had "said in his heart" were like the "two voices" of Tennyson's poem—voices conflicting with one another for the mastery, and plunging the soul for a time into doubt and perplexity (ver. 21, R.V.). Supposing this, then, to be the real drift of the passage before us, we surely need not be surprised that Ecclesiastes, in presence of the problems of life, should have passed through some such mood of materialistic scepticism. But it would seem that Ecclesiastes did not remain permanently in this sceptical attitude. We may

regard him as here telling his readers what he had "said in his heart" about man and beast: he is not necessarily endorsing it at the time when he writes this book. On the contrary, it would appear from other passages that he was now clinging to the assurance that God would yet judge between righteous and wicked men, and that the spirit of man does not perish at death. Now, if Ecclesiastes could thus, with the light he had, arrive at the final conviction that the human spirit survives the dissolution of the body, surely we, in the fuller light of the Christian revelation, may well overcome the chilling doubts which may sometimes creep in upon our souls. Events, indeed, sometimes occur in the providence of God, which utterly baffle our understanding, and which seem almost to deal with men as if they were mere animals. Catastrophes happen, in which men seem to be taken as if they were "fishes of the sea." The most brilliant thinker suddenly meets with a blow on the head which robs him, for a time, of all power of thought. Such things as these may stagger us. But we recover faith when we look to Jesus Christ as the Light of the World, and the Revealer of the Father. He who gave His Son to die for us, and who has led us to trust in His own fatherly love will not let us go down into nothingness. He who "died for us and rose again" has shown Himself to be the conqueror of death; and, "because He lives, we shall live also." Glorifying in His character and cross, and receiving into our hearts somewhat of His own spirit, we become conscious of thoughts, motives, and aspirations which raise us above our mere animal nature and contain within themselves the earnest of immortality. (T. C. Finlayson.)

Ver. 22. **There is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works.**—*Worldliness: the Epicurean gospel.*—These words seem to mean that a man had better get all he can, and then enjoy what he has gathered, for that is his share of the world's good things, and as life is short it is best to spend it as pleasantly as possible. The advice has been often given; it will, I expect, be often given again. We are familiar with it in many forms. Seize the passing day and make it a day of enjoyment. Beauty and brightness, wine and song—make the most of them while you can, for neither you nor they will be long here. This is the sum of many men's idea of life. Whether gross or refined in its outward forms, the idea remains essentially the same. We sometimes speak of it as an Epicurean view, naming it from the Greek philosopher Epicurus. Not that it originated with him, for it is older far; as old, in fact, as human nature. But Epicurus reduced it to a system, gave it form and logical consistency, so as to make it a philosophy. He, too, presented it under its least repulsive features, for he seems to have been personally an estimable man. But nothing, not even genius, can redeem such a mode of thought from reproach, for it is altogether earthly and of the senses. It makes much of the animal element in our nature; it lives intoxicated with the outward and visible. Yet, for this very reason it has always been popular both in theory and practice, especially in practice. Great numbers have an intense love for the pleasures of sense, though they would shrink from confessing even to themselves how great a part of their lives these pleasures occupy. But if men have any touch of cultivation, they cannot be content to live the life of unmixed animalism. A sense of dignity, always awakened by thought, protests and rebels. They must take their pleasure with something to qualify its grossness. I know no better type of the class of which I am thinking than King Charles II. No one can compliment the purity of the pleasures in which he indulged. And yet the man of cultivation and refinement flashes out from the very midst of those scenes of revelry. There is an urbanity, a kindness, a moderation even, which are not without their charms. He never went to the extremes which injure health and inspire disgust. He was a lover, too, of art and science. If the king spent the evening in banqueting, as he did, he passed the earlier parts of the day in chemical experiments, and other forms of scientific research. Easy in temper, good-natured, self-indulgent, indolent; such is the man. The type of character is common, and it is common partly because it is so popular. Men of such nature are considered "good fellows," and treated with boundless indulgence. But these light-hearted men, who seem not so much to sin as to be unconscious of responsibility, are really the poison of social life. They are corrupt and corrupting to others. Of them it is by emphasis true, "One sinner destroyeth much good." King Charles lulled the nation into a lazy, voluptuous sleep, the ruin of liberty and progress. And those who, in more private life, repeat his character, will shrink into the shame and remorse of perdition when

they are brought face to face with the generous impulses they have blighted, the aspirations they have checked, and the opening faith and love they have destroyed. Worldliness, however, is a larger fact, and one more widely spread than the conscious pursuit of pleasure. There are men whose lives are most "respectable," men at any rate laborious and earnest, whose course is guided at bottom by the Epicurean theory of action. They have a god and a worship whose rites and ceremonies are most exacting. Their deity is money. They worship the power of gold. They hold with Napoleon, that not only every thing but every man has his price, and that there is no door which will not open to a golden key. No doubt there are many facts which suggest such a view and seem to give it support. Money will do many things. It will bring houses, and land, and luxuries. It will secure almost unbounded social influence. And yet there is a limit to its potency. Money is not almighty. Its powers are hedged about by strict limitations. It cannot greatly alter you. The essential self of every man is beyond its sway. Neither can money alter the permanent conditions of well-being. That vice leads to sickness and death, to feebleness of thought and deadened petrification of feeling, is a fact which no money can touch. There is a form of worldliness which is even more strange than the love of money. It shows itself in an eager desire for what is called social position. Social display and pretensions are starving bodies and souls, and often plunging men into the vortex of fraudulent crime. Position in society is a good thing, no doubt, but it is not worth having at the price of honour and self-respect. These are different forms assumed by the gospel of worldliness. In a very intelligible sense it is "good news," a veritable gospel to the outward or sensuous man; it has the promise of the life that now is. And we need not deny that the promise is redeemed. Give yourself to the world, and the world will probably give itself to you. You may, if you go heartily for it, have pleasure, or wealth, or social honour. Will you, then, accept this gospel of the worldly life? I do not know. Many of you, I am afraid, will. But to me it seems open to the gravest objections. My intellect and my feelings rise in protest against it. Shall I try and tell you why? First, it is a selfish good which is offered to us after all. Worldliness must be selfish, for it is clear that the pursuit of pleasure only becomes possible when we centre our thoughts on self. How will this affect me? is the one question which every event suggests to thought. Accordingly in its more vulgar forms the worldly life disgusts us by a selfishness which is "naked and not ashamed." It recommends us coarsely to "take care of number one," as though "number one" were not, as it is, about the most worthless thing in the universe of being. Or it sings most untunefully about "a little pelf to provide for yourself," with a mean-spirited glorying in its purblind limitation of view. The same spirit, in its more refined forms, speaks with contempt of the "herd," and wraps itself in a mantle of supercilious pride. Yet a selfish life is essentially a life of misery. By one of those moral paradoxes which are so strange, and yet so beautiful, the only way to happiness is to give up seeking for it and to seek for something better and higher. "Go teach the orphan boy to read, or teach the orphan girl to sew;" forget your narrow, restless self; let your heart flow out in sympathy with others, and you have taken one step toward inward peace. He who has no love for others will one day cry in vain for others to love him. For love is life, and those who live without it are dead while they live. I object, further, to the gospel of worldliness that it fails to bring satisfaction to those who follow its rules. This is singularly true. The most discontented, unresting class of men in the world are those who give themselves to the pursuit of pleasure on system. As they grow older, they almost always become cynics, as we say—that is, they sneer and snarl at everything and everybody. The emptiness, the vanity, the sham is in the worldling's heart, and he sees other things through the mist of his own thoughts. Depend upon it there is no satisfaction to be had for men in mere pleasure-hunting. And I will tell you why. There is that in our souls which is related to the Infinite and Eternal. We are thirsting after the water of life, though we know it not. The aching void in the worldling's heart is an indirect testimony to the nobleness of his nature. The prodigal would fain have stayed his hunger with the husks that the swine did eat, but a man cannot live on swine's food, and that precisely because he is a man. Oh, sirs, there standeth One among you whom ye know not. His face is so marred more than any man, and His form than the sons of men. And yet, oh, blessed Lord, to whom shall we go but unto Thee? Thou, Thou only, hast the words of eternal life. I object, finally, to the gospel of the world as being irre-

ligious. Religion, or the sense of a boundless destiny, is a fact in the nature of man. It is the mightiest fact in his history also. It has built temples, woven oracles, invented ceremonies, animated heroisms, and written itself in a thousand ways upon all human things. You may try to put it down, but it will be too strong for you. What happens when a power or faculty of our nature is forcibly suppressed? I will tell you; men go mad. The oppressed tendency, like the volcanic fires of the earth, smoulders underground till it gathers ungovernable force, and then bursts forth scattering devastation and death. So it is with man's religious nature. Every attempt to keep it down, however it may succeed for a time, only brings it out in the long run in violent and perverted forms. Men try to live on this world and cannot, and then they take to revolution and bloodshed, with the worship of some abstraction of liberty or equality, or else they descend into spiritual idiocy, and finish by turning tables, and finding mighty revelations in raps upon the floor. The superstition of the day is in near relation to its worldliness. I know only one deliverance from either, and that, thank God, is a deliverance from both. It is found in rational spiritual religion, or, as the apostle expresses it, "repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." (*J. F. Stevenson, LL.B.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VER. 1. So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun.—*The nature and wickedness of oppression:*—There is scarce any sin against which more is said in the Word of God, or which is more reproachful to a man and to a Christian, or more mischievous to society, than oppression. Yet I fear it is a sin which more persons are guilty of, and more suffer by, than is generally known. I. CONSIDER WHAT OPPRESSION IS, AND THE MOST STRIKING INSTANCES IN WHICH MEN ARE GUILTY OF IT. 1. It is dealing unjustly or unkindly by a person over whose time, goods, trade, or business the oppressor hath power. It is principally the vice of rich men and superiors, who have power over their workmen, servants, tenants, and other inferiors. But it is not confined to them. The poor often meet with very bad, if not the worst, treatment from those who in station and fortune are very little above them. It is oppression, when men impose what terms they please upon others in commerce and dealings, without regarding what is just and right; when they oblige others to sell their goods under their real value, because they are in necessity; or to give more for a commodity than it is worth, because they cannot do without it. Selling bad and damaged goods to persons who dare not refuse to take them, and yet must lose by them, or not sell them again for a reasonable profit, is another instance of this vice. If a person makes a relation, a neighbour, or dependant, pay dearer for what he buys than his other customers, because he is under particular obligations to buy of him, he is an oppressor. Taking exorbitant interest for money lent, or exchange of bills and cash, on account of men's necessities, is extortion and oppression. Where a person, or a combination of persons, engross the whole of any commodity which is to be sold, in order to make an excessive gain of it, or to injure other tradesmen in the same way of business, this is oppression. Again, to be rigorous in exacting debts or other rights to the very utmost farthing, where poverty, sickness, losses, dear seasons, or a large family render men incapable of paying what they owe; to allow them no time to satisfy their creditors; or to strip them of their all; this is cruelly oppressive. Obliging persons, over whom men have power, to vote or act against their consciences; persecuting, reviling, or even bantering, men for their religious sentiments and worship, is dreadful oppression. In the black list of oppressors must likewise be ranged parents, masters and mistresses of families and schools, who behave cruelly and severely to their children, servants, and scholars. There is likewise great oppression in a haughty, insolent, overbearing way of speaking to inferiors, which is very grating and hurtful to any sensible mind. II. THE GREAT EVIL AND WICKEDNESS OF IT. 1. It proceeds from a very bad disposition of mind. The principal source of it is covetousness; an inordinate love of the world (*Jer. xxii. 17*). In some persons the practice of this sin proceeds

from pride; to show their authority over others, and to keep them in awe. Hence they treat their inferiors as if they were of a lower species, and not worthy of common justice. This shows a base, ignoble mind (Ps. lxxiii. 6-8). In some, it is owing to luxury and extravagance. They are dressed with the spoils of the poor; and their fine houses, equipages, and entertainments are supported by the properties and comforts of others. It is sometimes owing to sloth; because, like drones in the hive, they will not work, they prey upon the labours of the industrious. It is very often owing to resentment, malice, and ill-nature. 2. Oppression is a high ingratitude and affront to the righteous God. It is ingratitude to Him, because He giveth men all their wealth and power over others, and He doth this, not that they may oppress, but protect, relieve, and serve others, and be a blessing to them. It must, therefore, be horrid ingratitude to abuse and pervert these favours to their injury. But what renders it worse is, that He hath bestowed upon men spiritual blessings and Christian privileges, and, therefore, to oppress and injure them must be proportionably wicked. Further, He hath placed men in different circumstances in life; "made both the rich and the poor." He hath allotted to men such conditions here that they need one another's assistance. The rich want the labour of the poor, as the poor want the money of the rich; and God expects that they should help one another, and so contribute to the general happiness. To oppress the poor, then, is defeating the wise and kind design of God's providence. 3. It is detestable inhumanity and cruelty to the oppressed. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast." What then must we think of those who are oppressive and cruel to their fellow-men, but that they are utterly void of justice, goodness, and humanity, that they are monsters and not men? 4. It is directly contrary to the design of the Gospel; which is to promote righteousness, love, peace, and happiness upon earth, as well as to secure the eternal salvation of mankind. 5. It will sink men into everlasting ruin. God is a just and righteous Being, and at the judgment-day "He will render to every one according to his works." The Lord seeth and remembereth all the oppression that is done under the sun, and He will at length reckon with those who have done it. APPLICATION. 1. I shall address oppressors; those whose consciences tell them, as in the sight of God, that they have been guilty of this sin in the instances above mentioned or any other. I exhort you, sirs, to hearken to the voice of conscience as the voice of God; to submit to its reproofs; and to be humbled deeply before God for your injustice and cruelty to men. 2. Let me address the oppressed. It may perhaps be the case of some of you, and I would endeavour to be your comforter. Acknowledge the justice of the Lord in what you suffer from the hand of men. Though they are unrighteous, He is righteous, for you have sinned; and He may choose this method of afflicting you, to lead you to repentance, to exercise your virtues, and make your hearts better. Let me exhort you to guard against a spirit of malice and revenge. Remember that their oppressing you will be no excuse for injustice to them. That "it is no harm to bite the biter" is a very wicked maxim. It is better to suffer many wrongs than to do one. Yea, it is our duty to render good for evil. 8. I would address those who can appeal to a heart-searching God that they are guiltless of this sin. I would exhort you to guard against the love of money, which is the chief root of this evil. To prevent your becoming oppressors, go not to the utmost bounds of things lawful. Keep on the safe side. Be not only just, but honourable, generous, and charitable, and "abstain from the very appearance of evil." Let me exhort you, likewise, to be comforters of the oppressed. (*Job Orton, D.D.*) *Woman's work and overwork*.—It was considered honourable for women to toil in olden times. Alexander the Great stood in his palace showing garments made by his own mother. The finest tapestries at Bayeux were made by the queen of William the Conqueror. Augustus, the Emperor, would not wear any garments except those that were fashioned by some member of his royal family. So let the toilers everywhere be respected! The greatest blessing that could have happened to our first parents was being turned out of Eden after they had done wrong. Ashbel Green, at fourscore years, when asked why he kept on working, said: "I do so to keep out of mischief." We see that a man who has a large amount of money to start with has no chance. Of the thousand prosperous and honourable men that you know, nine hundred and ninety-nine had to work vigorously at the beginning. But I am now to tell you that industry is just as important for a woman's safety and happiness. The little girls of our families must be started with that idea. The curse of our American society is that

our young women are taught that the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, tenth, fiftieth, thousandth thing in their life is to get somebody to take care of them. Instead of that, the first lesson should be how under God they may take care of themselves. Madame de Stael said: "It is not these writings that I am proud of, but the fact that I have facility in ten occupations, in any one of which I could make a livelihood." Though you live in an elegant residence and fare sumptuously every day, let your daughters feel it is a disgrace to them not to know how to work. I denounce the idea prevalent in society that though our young women may embroider slippers and crochet and make mats for lamps to stand on without disgrace, the idea of doing anything for a livelihood is dishonourable. It is a shame for a young woman belonging to a large family to be inefficient when the father toils his life away for her support. It is a shame for a daughter to be idle while her mother toils at the wash-tub. No woman, any more than a man, has a right to occupy a place in this world unless she pays a rent for it. Society is to be reconstructed on the subject of woman's toil. A vast majority of those who would have woman industrious shut her up to a few kinds of work. My judgment in this matter is that a woman has a right to do anything she can do well. There should be no department of merchandise, mechanism, art, or science barred against her. If Miss Hosmer has genius for sculpture, give her a chisel. If Rosa Bonheur has a fondness for delineating animals, let her make "The Horse Fair." If Miss Mitchell will study astronomy, let her mount the starry ladder. If Lydia will be a merchant, let her sell purple. It is said, if woman is given such opportunities she will occupy places that might be taken by men. I say, if she have more skill and adaptedness for any position than a man has, let her have it! She has as much right to her bread, to her apparel, and to her home as men have. But it is said that her nature is so delicate that she is unfitted for exhausting toil. I ask in the name of all past history what toil on earth is more severe, exhausting, and tremendous than that toil of the needle to which for ages she has been subjected? Oh, the meanness, the despicability of men who begrudge a woman the right of work anywhere in any honourable calling! I go still further and say that women should have equal compensation with men. By what principle of justice is it that women in many of our cities get only two-thirds as much pay as men and in many cases only half? Here is the gigantic injustice—that for work equally well, if not better, done, women receive far less compensation than men. Years ago one Sabbath night, in the vestibule of this church, after service, a woman fell in convulsions. The doctor said she needed medicine not so much as something to eat. As she began to revive, in her delirium she said, gaspingly: "Eight cents! Eight cents! Eight cents! I wish I could get it done, I am so tired. I wish I could get some sleep, but I must get it done. Eight cents! Eight cents! Eight cents!" We found afterwards that she was making garments for eight cents apiece, and she could make but three of them in a day. Hear it! Three times eight are twenty-four. Hear it, men and women who have comfortable homes. How are these evils to be eradicated? Some say: "Give woman the ballot." What effect such ballot might have on other questions I am not here to discuss; but what would be the effect of female suffrage on women's wages? I do not believe that women will ever get justice by woman's ballot. Indeed, women oppress women as much as men do. Do not women, as much as men, beat down to the lowest figure the woman who sews for them? Woman will never get justice done her from woman's ballot. Neither will she get it from man's ballot. How then? God will rise up for her. God has more resources than we know of. The flaming sword that hung at Eden's gate when woman was driven out will cleave with its terrible edge her oppressors. But there is something for women to do. Let young people prepare to excel in spheres of work, and they will be able after a while to get larger wages. If it be shown that a woman can, in a store, sell more goods in a year than a man, she will soon be able not only to ask, but to demand more wages, and to demand them successfully. Unskilled and incompetent labour must take what is given; skilled and competent labour will eventually make its own standard. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *They had no comforter.—No comforter:*—It is the glory of the Gospel that it is not only a religion of conversion, but a religion of consolation. It ministers peace, and makes even the human side of life capable of deep and abiding joy. The promise has been fulfilled, and the soul bears witness that He is true who says, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." I. THE LATENT PAIN. This pain does not leap forth at once. It

is a kind of hidden fire: a sort of slumbering force. Students of life should think deeply on this, that pain lies hidden in pleasure. The strangest fact in life is that the measure of joy is often the measure of sorrow. The height of gain is the length of the shadow of loss. The keener our affection, the more bitter our anguish when bereavement comes. The more ardent our pursuit, the more depressing the disappointment in missing the goal. In Jesus Christ our Lord He has offered us a renewed nature and a restful heart. He has given us a Saviour and a Comforter. We need no more. If the latent pain leaps forth, we have an anodyne for sorrow, a perfect absolution for sin, a balm for broken hearts, a brother born for adversity, and beyond the present the glories of immortal life. At our peril we put Christ away. Out in the wide fields of human search we come upon no footprints of another Saviour. II. **THE CHARLATAN COMFORTERS.** Yes! there are comforters. We find that men will put the poppy in the pillow when there is no peace in the heart. They seek comfort. Sometimes in quiet retreats, where the scenes of the city life do not haunt them, Nature's floral groves and woodland shadows constitute a veil to hide the weird forms of guilt and shame and sorrow to be met with in crowded centres of life. But past life will there come back to memory, and unforgiven sin will there send its sharp dagger to the heart. Or it may be that freedom from necessity brings comfort, and that superfluity has made the old days of care and struggle only a memory! Now at all events there are no sleepless nights, no battles amid daily anxiety for daily bread, and we sit under the restful shadow of trees planted long ago! Then, too, much looks like comfort, which comes from ease of circumstance, when the couch is of down, and no spectre of anxiety crosses the earthly threshold. But even then there are deep necessities of the soul, if we are dead to things divine. III. **THE FULNESS OF CHRIST.** I do not mean merely Divine perfectness in the quantity of sympathy, but, if I may say so, in the quality of it. Nothing is more wonderful than the way in which the weary soul finds sympathy in the Saviour. There is a revelation of grace in Christ which makes Him the complement of each man's nature. Sorrows differ; doubts differ; needs differ; tastes differ; and even the wounds inflicted by bereavement differ. But Christ searches us, and knows us all. And what sweet response comes from hearts that have trusted in Him, as they unite in testifying, "His grace is sufficient for us!" How patiently Christians suffer! How trustfully they rest! How cheerfully they toil! How hopefully they die! IV. **THE MISSING GOOD.** No comforter! Then who will show us any good? For we cannot unmake ourselves. There is the connection of comfort with conscience. Divine redemption still, as of old, is a necessity of the human heart. Then there is the connection of comfort with character. We are made new creatures in Christ Jesus. We have new motives, new aims, new desires, new sympathies, new relationship to God. Our life is hid with Christ in God—the blessed God: and then peace flows like a river through the heart. This is life eternal. Then there is the connection of comfort with influence. That man has no comforter who realizes that the influence of his life is an infection of evil, an impulse to the lower life. Even if he possess genius, it may be but an added force for harm. But the Christian has this comfort, though no minstrel sings the story of his chivalry, though no sculptured marble tells the tale of his renown—yet he liveth to the Lord, he dieth to the Lord. The world of holy influence will be the richer for his being! (W. M. Statham.)

Ver. 2. **Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.**—*The applause of the dead regulated, vindicated and improved:*—Scripture itself sets us an example of applauding the virtues of the departed; but I think that in our funeral sermons, in our obituaries and on our sepulchres, there is much which needs to be regulated. I. It must be **QUALIFIED.** 1. We are not to praise the dead with indiscriminate eulogy; for there is such a thing as confounding moral distinctions, as smiling alike on vice and virtue. 2. We are not to praise the dead with exaggerated panegyric. For it should never be forgotten, that however the grace of God has formed the subject of it to excellence, he was still the possessor of remaining moral infirmities. 3. We are not to praise the dead in a spirit of discontent with life. 4. We are not to praise the dead in the exercise of gratified envy. 5. We ought not to praise the dead in the spirit of relative pride. 6. In one word—we should not praise the dead without a humble and grateful recollection that all their gifts and virtues proceeded from God. Let the survivor not glory in the erudition, in the riches,

in the wealth or virtue of the deceased, but let him glory only in the Lord. II. This eulogy is to be JUSTIFIED. It may be so by a variety of reasons. 1. There is that of Scripture precedent. It speaks, in high terms, of the distinguished faith of Abraham, the patience of Job, the meekness of Moses, the devotion of the man after God's own heart, the wisdom of a Solomon, the magnanimity of a Daniel, the fortitude of a Stephen, the humanity of a Dorcas. 2. This procedure may also be sanctioned on the ground of utility. How often does the perusal of the memoirs of eminent persons excite desires in the hearts of survivors to imbibе their sentiments, to catch their spirit, and to imitate their example. 3. The principal grounds on which we are justified in praising the pious dead are connected with themselves, as—(1) The blessedness of their condition on which they have at once entered. (2) The developed excellences of their character. (3) The usefulness of their course. For much of this as may have been apparent while they were yet alive, much more is very often discerned after their decease. Then are discerned in their diaries and records what were the sacred principles on which they acted, and how they were constrained by the love of Christ to live not unto themselves, but to Him who died for them and rose again. Not till the crisis of death, too, has much of the usefulness of the Christian minister been made apparent. III. The sentiment in the text is to be IMPROVED. If the question be asked—in what way shall I praise departed ministers? I answer—1. By repenting of the treatment you often showed them while they were alive. 2. By recalling to serious reflection the important subjects of their ministry. 3. By an imitation of the excellencies with which they were clothed. 4. By meditating on your joint responsibility with them at the bar of God. 5. By a devout application to the great Head of the Church to raise up men of similar and surpassing qualifications to carry on the interests of religion in the Church and in the world. (*J. Clayton.*) *Praising the dead more than the living:*—I. It is COMMON. We see it in the political, ecclesiastical, and domestic sphere. So it has become a proverb, that the best men must die ever to have their virtues recognized. Why is this? 1. The dead are no longer competitors. 2. Social love buries their defects. In all, the great Father of Love has put a deep fountain of sympathy. Death unseals it, melts it, and causes it to flow forth in such copious streams as drown all the imperfections of the departed. II. It is IMMORAL. 1. It is not right. Virtue should be recognized and honoured wherever seen; and more so in the duties and struggles of life than in the reminiscences of departed worth. 2. It is not generous. That husband is mean and despicable who ignores the virtues of a noble wife while living. 3. It is unreal. To praise virtues in a man when dead, which were ever unnoticed when living, is hypocritical. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 4-8. Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour.—*An old portrait of modern men:*—Here is a portrait, drawn by a man who lived thousands of years ago, of three distinct types of character that you find everywhere about you. I. Here is a man working for the good of society (ver. 4). Thank God! there have ever been such men—generous, disinterested, broad-hearted, God-inspired men—men who are doing the "right work." They are the "salt" of the State; remove them, and all is putrescence. How are these men treated by society? Here is the answer. "For this a man is envied of his neighbour." It has ever been so. Cain envied Abel, Korah envied Moses, Saul envied David, the Sanhedrim envied Christ, the Judaic teachers envied Paul. To see society envying such men is a sore "vexation" to all true hearts. What do the existence and treatment of these men show? 1. The great kindness of Heaven in sending such men into every age. What would become of an age without such men in it? The ignorant would have no schools, the afflicted no hospitals, the indigent no poor-laws and charities, the people no righteous laws and no temples for worship. 2. The rightful acknowledgments of most useful services are not to be expected on earth. How did the world treat Moses, Jeremiah, the apostles, and the Holy Christ? Yonder, not here, is the reward for truly right labour. 8. The moral state of society is both unwise and unrighteous. How unwise to treat men who do the "right work" amongst them with envy! For its own good it should cheer them on in their philanthropic efforts. How unrighteous too! These men have a claim to its gratitude, sympathy, and co-operation. II. Here is a man UTTERLY WORTHLESS in society (vers. 5, 6). 1. He exhausts his own property. The indolent man evermore "eats his own flesh"; that is, exhausts his own personal

strength, mental, moral, physical, for the want of proper exertion. 2. He wrongly estimates his own happiness. "Better is an handful with quietness than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit." In one sense this is true (Prov. xv. 16). But this is not the sense in which the lazy man regards it. By quietness he meant quiescence, non-exertion, lounging, folding the hands, and sleeping life away. Now, this character abounds in our age and land. These characters are not only a curse to themselves, dying with ennui, but a curse to society; they are clogs upon the wheel of industry; they are social thieves; they eat what others have produced. III. Here is a man **AVARICIOUSLY MAKING USE OF** society (ver. 8). 1. The man he sketches worked entirely for himself. Self-gratification, self-aggrandizement, self the centre and circumference of all his activities. 2. The man he sketches worked unremittingly for himself. "Yet is there no end of all his labour." Always at it—morning, noon, and night; it was the one thing he did. 3. The man he sketches worked insatiably for himself. "Neither is his eye satisfied with riches." The passion of avarice has been called the great sepulchre of all the passions. Unlike other tombs, however, it is enlarged by repletion and strengthened by age. An avaricious man is like Tantalus, up to the chin in water, yet always thirsty. Avarice seems to me to be the ruling passion of the age. (*Homilist.*) *Envy*:—Here Solomon discloses to us one of the most remarkable among the many sources of human misery; remarkable, because it springs not out of failure, but out of success; and so it is one which lies deeper than any of the ills wrought by the uncertainty of life, or by the caprice of fortune. It is a true and striking instance of the vanity of human affairs, when a man spends a lifetime in the pursuit of wealth, and meets only with poverty and ruin; or dies as soon as he has obtained it, and "leaves his riches to other." The same reflection is forced upon us when the student, who has denied himself everything for years in the pursuit of science, is struck down by death just as he is about to reap the reward of his labours, and all his knowledge rendered useless. But there is one deep aggravation of human misery which does not lie thus upon the surface. With all these failures, a few do succeed, and for these there is a special burden which they must inevitably bear; there is one adversity born of their prosperity; one calamity to which their very happiness subjects them: and that is—*Envy*. Not only the envy of the world, but the envy of their neighbours, and the alienation of their friends, is often the portion of the successful; and isolation of soul is the doom of the great. This Solomon declares to be the lot of all travail, and justly adds: "This is also vanity and vexation of spirit." But not only does this venomous principle, one of the blackest traits in our fallen nature, come in to poison the enjoyment of every fortune made, and every position gained among men: there is a more truly Satanic development of the passion than even this: viz. envy at the success of goodness; a malicious displeasure when one who has shown long, unwearied industry in an honourable calling, and lived a life of devotion to the glory of God, and the good of man, obtains the just fruit of his labours; the promise of godliness in the life that now is. "Again, I considered all travail, and every 'right work,' that for this a man is envied of his neighbour." And yet this is what we see in every department of life. We see it, for example, in the venomous spite with which low natures regard a good man, just because he is better than themselves; disliking him because, whenever they are in his presence, they feel their own vileness and worthlessness as they never feel it at any other time. The life of the true Christian is one unflinching reproach to the world. His ingenuous truthfulness and sincerity witnesses against the world's falsehood and hollowness; the Christian's noble self-devotedness against its self-love; his steadfast adherence to the cause of righteousness, against the cowardly looseness of the world's principles; the Christian's high hopes and lofty aspirations against the worldling's low desires and grovelling aims. "For every right work," he is "envied of his neighbour." No age, nor position, nor character, is exempt from the poisoned shafts of envy. Is there a godly school-boy? Such a one will generally be a mark for the ridicule, and the petty persecution, of the lower-minded of his playmates. They will watch him, as Satan observed Job, for some little fault which they may exaggerate and rejoice over. They will place temptations in his path, and strive, in every way, to bring him down to the same level with themselves. And that is but the prophecy of what awaits him in after life. The godly servant or workman, who regards the interest of his employer as his own, and serves "not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but with singleness of

heart, fearing God," will always be exposed to the envy, the detraction, and the slander of his idle and unprincipled fellows, whose sole aim is, by mutual agreement, to do the smallest possible amount of work for the largest possible amount of pay. And the same evil principle besets the Christian everywhere, extending upwards through all the strata of society. (*H. E. Nolloth, B.D.*) *How the success of others should affect us*:—Instead of the success of others being a matter of envy, it should be used as an example of promise to us, inducing us to go and do likewise. The life of the great man teaches us that we also, being brother to him, may become, in a measure, great. There is wealth, too, to be had, without robbing any man of what he has. It is always to be found in economy and work. For long enough this doctrine was hid, even from the wise and prudent. Even yet we try to find it anywhere but in honest labour—in gold mines, or in speculation, or in gambling—and we may chance to find it laid up in some of these; but it has all come from industry originally, and, in most places, it can be got there in a fair measure still. At any rate, it cannot be got in idleness. We may cherish envy of him who has succeeded, and fold our hands till it eats into the very marrow of our bones, but we shall be no nearer the attainment of fortune than when we commenced the operation. (*J. Bennet.*)

Ver. 6. Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.—*Quality better than quantity*:—The "quietness" here spoken of is not the inactivity of sloth, but that restfulness of spirit which an industrious man may enjoy when his industry is pervaded by a cheerful contentment. Now, here is one of those maxims with which Ecclesiastes sought to comfort the hearts and to direct the conduct of his countrymen. Many of them might be disposed to murmur because the times were adverse to their acquisition of wealth. But he wishes them to remember that, even if the times had been more prosperous, they themselves would not necessarily have been more happy. He directs their attention away from quantity to quality of possession. One man may get more real satisfaction out of a little than another man gets out of much. Two handfuls are not necessarily better than one. It depends on what is in the hands. One handful of grain is better than two handfuls of chaff. It depends also on what kind of man has the handful or handfuls. Happiness, in its degree and quality, varies with the man who enjoys, as well as with the means of enjoyment. Yea, and even the same man may possibly get more satisfaction out of one handful than out of two handfuls of the same thing. It depends on whether the additional handful does not bring with it something else as well. In human life it often happens that a plus involves a minus; a gain in one direction means a loss in another. This, indeed, is no argument for "folding the hands" in sloth or indifference; for there is no weariness like the weariness of idleness, and there is no more prolific source of cares than carelessness. But it is an argument against that spirit of envious rivalry and selfish, restless ambition, which lessens the capacity, in the very act of increasing the means, of enjoyment. This maxim of Ecclesiastes is well worth pondering. It is pitched in the same key as the maxim of the Apostle Paul: "Godliness with contentment is great gain"; and it reminds us of the still more inclusive maxim of our Lord Himself: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (*T. O. Finlayson.*)

Vers. 9-12. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour.—*The necessity and benefits of religious society*:—I. PROVE THE TRUTH OF THE WISE MAN'S ASSERTION, that, "two are better than one, and that in reference to society in general, and religious societies in particular." And how can this be done better than by showing that it is absolutely necessary for the welfare both of the bodies and souls of men? Indeed, if we look upon man as he came out of the hands of his Maker, we imagine him to be perfect, entire, lacking nothing. But God, whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, saw something still wanting to make Adam happy. And what was that? Why, an help meet for him. And if this were the case of man before the fall; if a help was meet for him in a state of perfection; surely since the fall, when we come naked and helpless out of our mother's womb, when our wants increase with our years, and we can scarcely subsist a day without the mutual assistance of each other, well may we say, "It is not good for man to be alone." Society, then, we see, is absolutely necessary in respect to our bodily and personal wants. If we carry our view farther, and

consider mankind as divided into different cities, countries, and nations, the necessity of it will appear yet more evident. For how can communities be kept up, or commerce carried on, without society? Many other instances might be given of the necessity of society in reference to our bodily, personal, and national wants. But what are all these when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, in comparison of the infinite greater need of it with respect to the soul? Let us suppose ourselves in some degree to have tasted the good word of life, and to have felt the powers of the world to come, influencing and moulding our souls into a religious frame; to be fully and heartily convinced that we are soldiers listed under the banner of Christ, and to have proclaimed open war, at our baptism, against the world, the flesh, and the devil; and have, perhaps, frequently renewed our obligations so to do by partaking of the Lord's Supper; that we are surrounded with millions of foes without, and infested with a legion of enemies within; that we are commanded to shine as lights in the world in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; that we are travelling to a long eternity, and need all imaginable helps to show, and encourage us in, our way thither. Let us, I say, reflect on all this, and then how shall each of us cry out, "Brethren, what a necessary thing it is to meet together in religious societies!" The primitive Christians were fully sensible of this, and therefore we find them continually keeping up communion with each other (Acts ii. 42; iv. 23; ix. 19; xii. 12). And it is reported of the Christians in after ages that they used to assemble together before daylight to sing a psalm to Christ as God. So precious was the communion of saints in those days.

II. SOME REASONS WHY "TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE," ESPECIALLY IN RELIGIOUS SOCIETY. 1. As man in his present condition cannot always stand upright, but by reason of the frailty of his nature cannot but fall; one eminent reason why two are better than one, or, in other words, one great advantage of religious society is, "that when they fall, the one will lift up his fellow." 2. It is an observation no less true than common, that kindled coals if placed asunder soon go out, but if heaped together quicken and enliven each other, and afford a lasting heat. The same will hold good in the case now before us. If Christians kindled by the grace of God unite, they will quicken and enliven each other; but if they separate and keep asunder, no marvel if they soon grow cool or tepid. If two or three meet together in Christ's name, they will have heat: but how can one be warm alone? 3. Hitherto we have considered the advantages of religious societies as a great preservative against falling into sin and lukewarmness, and that too from our own corruptions. But what says the wise son of Sirach? "My son, when thou goest to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation;" and that not only from inward, but outward foes; particularly from those two grand adversaries, the world and the devil: for no sooner will thine eye be bent heavenward, but the former will be immediately diverting it another way, telling thee thou needest not be singular in order to be religious; that you may be a Christian without going so much out of the common road. But see here the advantage of religious company; for supposing thou findest thyself thus surrounded on every side, and unable to withstand such horrid (though seemingly friendly) counsels, haste away to thy companions, and they will teach thee a truer and better lesson; they will tell thee that thou must be singular if thou wilt be religious; and that it is as impossible for a Christian, as for a city set upon a hill, to be hidden: that if thou wilt be an almost Christian (and as good be none at all) thou mayest live in the same idle, indifferent manner as thou seest most other people do; but if thou wilt be not only almost, but altogether a Christian, they will inform thee thou must go a great deal farther: that thou must not only faintly seek, but "earnestly strive to enter in at the strait gate": that there is but one way now to heaven, as formerly, even through the narrow passage of a sound conversion: and that in order to bring about this mighty work, thou must undergo a constant but necessary discipline of fasting, watching, and prayer. And, therefore, the only reason why those friends give thee such advice is, because they are not willing to take so much pains themselves; or, as our Saviour told Peter on a like occasion, because they savour not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.

III. THE SEVERAL DUTIES INCIDENT ON EVERY MEMBER OF A RELIGIOUS SOCIETY AS SUCH. 1. Mutual reproof. 2. Mutual exhortation. 3. Mutual assisting and defending each other. (*G. Whitefield, M.A.*) *Two better than one*.—An axiom like this needs no discussion. No man is at his best alone. Some powers are dormant and practically useless to the individual. Competition is one form of stimulus. It may act through our selfishness. We desire to surpass

another, to do better or acquire more and so meet oppositions and antagonisms with resoluteness. As iron sharpeneth iron, so intellects may be whetted and made keener by mental attrition. The axe does not sharpen itself on itself, but by a stone. So are human minds improved by these emulative endeavours. But love is a better discipline than competition. It is akin to the regenerative power of God. Two friends walk in loving unity and fellowship. They aim to enlarge their faculties of observation. The two see more objects than one pair of eyes could possibly see, perhaps threefold or tenfold, for in the friendly effort, each to excel, their individual faculties are more vigilant than if each were alone. In church life these principles of development constantly obtain. Some come to the place of worship and instruction with the true hunger of the soul. They not only help the preacher, who may represent the original unit by their added sympathy, but enlarge their own spiritual appreciation of truth. Failure to co-operate in church work is crippling. It is like putting the minus sign before a quantity. You cripple not only a finger by removing a joint, but embarrass the whole hand. The entire grip is gone for ever. Paralyze the little muscles that play over a pulley moving the eyelid and the lid drops over the eye. So the weakest member of a church may help or hinder the integrity and efficiency of the whole body of Christ. As indifference is deadening and disheartening, whether in religious or political enterprise, when people are slack, dubious and apathetic, so co-operation stimulates and the heart of the toiler rises with courage and hope. It may be objected that one loses his individuality. But no one is strictly independent. Material forces are adjusted to each other, as the centripetal and centrifugal, day and night, attraction and repulsion, muscular flexion and extension. Souls have their orbits as well as planets. These may be contracted or enlarged according to the influences exerted. No man liveth to himself or is independent of shrinking or quickening influences. If you come steadily and devoutly to the sanctuary, you secure a blessing to yourself and you help God to convert men. So, too, in the last place, in Christian companionship, two are better than one. For if one fall by the way the other may lift him to his feet. Thus the crosses and losses of life become more tolerable, and the unity and harmony of earthly fellowship become prophetic of the unbroken and perfected felicities of heaven. (*C. R. Barnes.*)

Ver. 12. **A threefold cord is not quickly broken.**—*A threefold cord*:—I have read somewhere that the ancient Thebans had in their army a band of men who were pledged to friendship and fellowship with each other. They were therefore almost irresistible; they held together by a union caused by a living principle that suffused and inspired them all, therefore when the enemy came upon them it was like the sea breaking on the unmovable strand. If we as church members and fellow-Christians are thus one in heart, we shall be irresistible. A common Saviour claims our common love. We have been cleansed in the same precious fountain, we have all eaten of the Bread that came down from heaven, and drunk of the Spiritual Rock that follows us. Let us hold more closely together than over—pastors, officers, people, for “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” “A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Do we not know this from sad experience? I. **IT WAS BY SUCH CORDS AS THESE THAT WE WERE ORIGINALLY HELD IN BONDAGE.** I do not know how many threads were in them, how many strands they contained. Not three, perhaps, but thirty, nay, thirty thousand evil influences were dragging us down and holding us fast. All I do know is that they were not quickly broken. It took God's dear Son to break them, the Father's love, and the Spirit's power, and our own faith and repentance, begotten in our hearts from above. Satan knows the power of unity if we do not. “The world, the flesh, and the devil,” a terrible trio, were in league against us. It was the cords of this triple enemy that held us fast. They were threefold cords, and they were not easily broken. Sin is of various shapes and sorts. There are three words in God's Book descriptive of sin, and I think I may apply them to the threefold cord. There is iniquity, that which is out of plumb, or off the line, or out of the level. There is sin, the missing of the mark, the going beyond by the arrow, or the falling short of the target. There is also transgression, breaking through God's settled rules, passing beyond the bounds that He has fixed, making landmarks of our own instead of regarding God's. Each of these may be regarded as a strand in the cord of sin, and all of us were held thereby. “A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” It took years of straining, and tugging,

and pulling by a hand Omnipotent to break these cords in pieces. Thank God! it is done, and that they can never be spliced again, nor ever cast about us as they were originally. II. IT WAS BY SUCH CORDS AS THESE—cords that are not quickly broken, threefold cords, THAT WE WERE DELIVERED FROM THE POWER OF SIN. The form of the metaphor changes a little as we use it now. We were in a horrible pit by reason of sin. Sin always sinks us, and we were dropping deeper and deeper into it, and into the mire that was at the bottom of it. How have we got up? There was no ladder placed for us to climb; we did not cut notches in the pit-side by our own unaided strength, and so help ourselves up to light and liberty. No; God had pity on us. He, in the person of His Son, came to the pit's mouth and looked down with the eyes of love upon us. Christ's love, Christ's death, resurrection and ascension into heaven—these are as another threefold cord. As soon as our eyes were opened and we saw this rope swinging, as it were, in front of us, God gave us strength to leap to it, and He did the rest; nay, He did that, for we had not believed unless the Spirit had prompted faith. He drew us with the cords of love, and with the bands of a man. III. IT IS BY SUCH CORDS AS THESE, threefold cords, cords that are not quickly broken, THAT WE ARE NOW HELD CAPTIVE. By creation, the claim of which we understand better than ever now; by regeneration, into the mystery of which they and we are being daily further led; by consecration, both on God's part and our own, we are His and His for ever. These cords bind us to the horns of the altar. "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love." I think this is another threefold cord by which we are bound; bound to one another, bound to the cross of Christ, bound to this blessed book, and bound to heaven. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *A threefold cord*:—I. HAVE A THREEFOLD CORD IN YOUR RELIGION. Religion for young folks as well as old. Is yours twofold or threefold? Let us see. There is God—one. And you—two. Is that all? Explain how some people have no more. This not a nice religion. Can't get near God. Can't know Him. Bring in Christ, and you have the threefold cord. Then this cord will stand the strain. That is a strong religion. When temptations come down hard on you, it will hold and save you. II. HAVE A THREEFOLD CORD IN YOUR DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS. Story of youth at sea. Ordered, during a storm, to go up and put the rigging right. Momentary hesitation of boy, and then darted down to his cabin. Appeared again immediately, ascended mast, put rigging right, and came down. Asked by officer, "What made you run below?" "For prayer, sir: father always told me no time was ever lost in prayer." "And what is that under your jacket?" "My Bible, sir. My mother gave it to me when leaving home. I thought if I were drowned, I would like to have it with me." Now here was a nice threefold cord—Prayer, the Bible, and Courage. I wish you had it. You may have, likely will have, many a hard bit in your life. But if you weave these three together into a cord, and hold on by it, you are safe. III. HAVE A THREEFOLD CORD IN YOUR FRIENDSHIPS. There is an old saying among folks, that "Two are good company, but three are none." And they expect us to believe that! We want no friendship that is only twofold. Have you any friendship without Jesus? He is the third strand of the cord. If there be anybody who wants you to go roads where Jesus can't go with you, give up that company at once. We should want no friendship where our Saviour can't be one. (*J. F. Dempster.*)

Vers. 13-16. Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.—*On the advantages of Christian knowledge to the lower orders of society*:—There is no topic on which the Bible maintains a more lucid and entire consistency of sentiment than the superiority of moral over all physical and all external distinctions. One very animating inference to be drawn from our text is, how much may be made of humanity. Did a king come to take up his residence amongst us—did he shed a grandeur over our city by the presence of his court, and give the impulse of his expenditure to the trade of its population—it were not easy to rate the value and the magnitude which such an event would have on the estimation of a common understanding, or the degree of personal importance which would attach to him who stood a lofty object in the eye of admiring townsmen. And yet it is possible, out of the raw and ragged materials of an obscurest lane, to rear an individual of more inherent worth than him who thus draws the gaze of the world upon his person. By the act of training in wisdom's ways the most tattered and neglected boy who runs upon our pavements do we present the community with that which, in wisdom's estimation, is of

greater price than this gorgeous inhabitant of a palace. Even without looking beyond the confines of our present world, the virtue of humble life will bear to be advantageously contrasted with all the pride and glory of an elevated condition. The man who, though among the poorest of them all, has a wisdom and a weight of character which makes him the oracle of his neighbourhood—the man who, vested with no other authority than the meek authority of worth, carries in his presence a power to shame and to overawe the profligacy that is around him—the venerable father, from whose lowly tenement the voice of psalms is heard to ascend with the offering up of every evening sacrifice—the Christian sage, who, exercised among life's severest hardships, looks calmly onward to heaven, and trains the footsteps of his children in the way that leads to it—the eldest of a well-ordered family, bearing their duteous and honourable part in the contest with its difficulties and its trials—all these offer to our notice such elements of moral respectability as do exist among the lowest orders of human society, and elements, too, which admit of being multiplied far beyond the reach of any present calculation. But, to attain a just estimate of the superiority of the poor man who has wisdom, over the rich man who has it not, we must enter into the calculation of eternity—we must look to wisdom in its true essence, as consisting of religion, as having the fear of God for its beginning, and the rule of God for its way, and the favour of God for its full and satisfying termination—we must compute how speedily it is, that, on the wings of time, the season of every paltry distinction between them must at length pass away; how soon death will strip the one of his rags, and the other of his pageantry, and send them in utter nakedness to the dust; how soon judgment will summon them from their graves, and place them in outward equality before the Great Disposer of their future lot, and their future place, through ages which never end; how in that situation the accidental distinctions of life will be rendered void, and personal distinctions will be all that shall avail them; how, when examined by the secrets of the inner man, and the deeds done in their body, the treasure of heaven shall be adjudged only to him whose heart was set upon it in this world; and how tremendously the account between them will be turned, when it shall be found of the one, that he must perish for lack of knowledge, and of the other, that he has the wisdom which is unto salvation. And let me just state that the great instrument for thus elevating the poor is that Gospel of Jesus Christ, which may be preached unto the poor. It is the doctrine of His Cross finding an easier admission into their hearts than it does through those barriers of human pride and human resistance, which are often reared on the basis of literature. Let the testimony of God be simply taken in, that on His own Son He has laid the iniquities of us all—and from this point does the humble scholar of Christianity pass into light, and enlargement, and progressive holiness. (*T. Chalmers, D.D.*) *The old king and the youth*:—It has been thought that Ecclesiastes must here be referring to some well-known event of his own times: but, if this be the case, the event has not yet been identified. Perhaps he is simply presenting an imaginary but possible case, for which there had been quite sufficient basis in many a political revolution. In those old kingdoms and empires it was always possible that even a beggar or prisoner might rise to the throne, whilst the monarch who had been born to the crown might, in his old age, perhaps through his own folly, become a poor man in his own kingdom. Such was the instability of the most exalted of earthly positions. And Ecclesiastes sketches the picture of the young upstart—a usurper wise and skilful enough to make himself the leader of a successful revolution, and to place himself in the stead of the old monarch. So great is the popularity of this usurper that he becomes the idol of the hour: millions flock around his standard, and place him on the throne. But even this popularity is, in turn, an evanescent thing; “those who come after him” (the people of a younger generation) “shall not rejoice in him.” He, too, has only his day. It may be that, even during his lifetime, he loses the popular favour: and, at the best, he soon passes away in death, and is speedily forgotten. Thus the glory and fame even of monarchy itself is also “vanity and feeding on wind.” It would not be difficult to find many a “historical parallel” to this picture. One of the most striking has occurred within the memory of some of us. When Louis Philippe, the aged King of France, who would not be admonished by the signs of the times, had at length to flee from his own kingdom in 1848, Louis Napoleon, who, not long before, had been for five years a prisoner in the fortress of Ham, appeared in Paris, and, throwing himself into the midst of political affairs, gradually became more and

more popular, until in due time he became President of the Republic, and ultimately Emperor of France. We know how he was worshipped by the masses of the French people, how there was "no end of all the people" who flocked around him in their enthusiasm. And we know how, after many years of royal splendour, the collapse came suddenly at last, and how, after the defeat at Sedan, the nation, almost as one man, turned round and kicked the idol they had worshipped. Even one of our own poets had hailed him as "Emperor evermore!" But where is all his "glory" now? Surely "vanity of vanities" might well be inscribed on the tomb of Napoleon III. And, indeed, the career of many a man who has been borne along into high position on the wave of popular enthusiasm furnishes a most salutary lesson as to the real value of mere earthly fame and greatness. (T. C. Finlayson.)

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1-12. Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.—Reverence and fidelity:—This passage is a series of cautions against irreverence and insincerity in worship, against discouragement because of political wrongs, and against the passion for, and misuse of, great riches. Distrust in God underlies all these evils. Humble faith in and reliance upon Him, in the contrast, mark the wise man. **Note—I. ONE'S PROPER BEARING IN THE LORD'S HOUSE** (vers. 1-7). 1. In the first three verses carelessness and loose speech are condemned in all who come into the presence chamber of the Almighty. So it is when subjects appear before any sovereign to do him honour or make request. Exact address and studied phrase are required. The free and easy spirit which will not regard these is expelled hastily and with great indignation. Earthly dignities are but a faint type of the heavenly. The soul which faintly realizes this will come before Him with "few words," if he be a Sinaitic worshipper; "in fulness of faith" and "with boldness," if he be a Christian believer. 2. In the further admonition, hasty and ill-considered pledges are forbidden. Impetuous promising is the worst kind of trifling, and the Church or person who incites another to it only works him harm. We are in agreement with the Mosaic legislation regarding such impiety, "If thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee." Sin lies, not in the refusal to make a partial and ill-considered pledge to God, but in not heeding that first of all His commands, "Give me thine heart." Cordial assent to this requirement makes one an accepted worshipper, whose acts and words do not conflict when he appears before God. Thoughtless, giddy, garrulous lips here are an abomination unto Him. One might better be dreaming and know it. **II. THE DUTY OF RELYING UPON THE DIVINE JUSTICE** (vers. 8, 9). The victims of tyranny and wrong have not ceased wailing. We hear their pitiful cries in every era of the world's history. **III. THE DELUSIVE CHARACTER OF WEALTH** (vers. 10-12). To denounce riches generally is as though one inveighed against the air: all men breathe it. All men just as naturally long for these material treasures. But our lungs are fitted to receive only a certain volume; we cannot use more. We cannot store it for consumption, enjoying it all the more that others have not as much. And the like is true of these earthly possessions. Beyond the mere provision for food, and raiment, and shelter, and our varied tastes, they have no power to minister, though piled high and broad as the pyramids. "He cannot reach to feel them," as the philosopher says. Yet the deceit is universal, that the more one can amass the nearer he will come to perfect contentment. He will not believe that he chases thus only a shadow—that it is as far from his embrace when he counts his millions as when he had only units. He may as well expect to quench his thirst by drinking of the ocean. (De Witt S. Clark.) **Reverence and fidelity:**—With chapter five begins a series of proverbial sayings somewhat like those of the Book of Proverbs, but showing more internal connection. These represent some of the experimental knowledge which had come to the heart in its chase after many things. We may use them, as we do the Proverbs, as condensations of wisdom, each having a completeness in itself. **I. WORSHIP** (vers. 1-7). 1. The proper manner of worship is here suggested to us. It must be with a full intention of the heart and not merely with the outward symbols. Always in worship, even when it is most freed of external props, there is the opportunity for a

lack of right intention, and, therefore, a lack of meaning to God as well as to men. Worship must always be interpreted by the condition of heart of the worshipper. (1) Thought is necessary to due worship (ver. 1). It would be a good thing for every one of us if we would ask ourselves as we pass through the portals of God's house, "Do I really mean to worship God this hour?" If we cannot say yes, would it not be better for us not to enter? (2) Deliberateness is necessary to acceptable worship (ver. 2). To be rash with our mouth, to rattle off a formula, however well constructed, without weighing the meaning, this is not to please God. (3) Brevity is a virtue in worshipful utterance. God is high above us; we are here in a position that should make us most deeply respectful towards Him. We should use well-weighed words before Him, and well-weighed words are few. The touching prayers of the Bible—the publican's, Christ's on the cross, Saul's at his conversion—were brief. 2. Vows formed a considerable element in the old Jewish worship, and are more or less recognized in the New Testament. We promise to do certain things: to be faithful to Christ and His Church, to love our fellow-Christians, to obey those who are over us in Christ, etc. These are vows, pledges given to God, and they should be kept as scrupulously as we would keep a business obligation signed with our own hand. II. A difficult passage concerning STATE-CRAFT follows. The State may be mismanaged, but it is wisest to make the best of it. "If thou seest oppression of the poor and violation of justice and righteousness in the government of a province, be not astonished at the matter. Such perversion of state-craft is not confined to the petty officials whose deeds you know. Clear up to the top of the Government it is apt to be the same. For there is a high one over a high one watching, and higher persons over them, and all are pretty much alike" (ver. 8). "But the advantage of a land in every way is a king devoted to the field" (ver. 9). The idea here is that the old simple agricultural form of government was the best for the people of that day. The general meaning is that good government comes from having rulers who are not rapacious for their own aggrandizement, but have the interests of the country at heart. III. The matter of RICHES, which requires such special thought to-day, when riches come easily and to many, was not without its importance in the olden time. 1. Wealth then as now was unsatisfying (ver. 10). It held out promises which it had no power to fulfil. It said to men, "Be rich and you will be happy." They became rich, but they were not happy. The soul is made to crave the most ethereal kind of food; but the rich man tries to satisfy it with coarse things. It is made to hunger for the things of heaven; he thrusts upon it the things of earth. 2. Here also is emphasized the thought that the increase of wealth is not satisfying (ver. 11). 3. And then comes the old lesson, which many a rich man has confessed to be true, but which those who are not rich find it very hard to believe true, that labour with contentment is better than wealthy idleness (ver. 12). Many a successful millionaire has confessed that his happiest hours were in the beginning of his career, when he felt that he must work hard for his wife and babies, and when he returned home at night with a sweet sense of contented fatigue that never comes now in his anxious days of great prosperity. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Behaviour in church*:—I. THAT YOU SHOULD ENTER THE SCENE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP WITH DEVOUT PREPARATION. "Keep thy foot," etc. The man whom Solomon addresses is supposed to be on his way to the house of God. The character of a man's step is often an index to the state of his soul. There is the slow step of the dull brain and the quick step of the intensely active; there is the step of the proud and the step of the humble, the thoughtless and the reflective. The soul reveals itself in the gait, beats out its own character in the tread. 1. Realize the scene you are entering. It is "the house of God." Whom are you to meet? "The high and holy One," etc. Draw not hither thoughtlessly. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet," etc. (Ex. iii. 5). "How dreadful is this place!" etc. (Gen. xxviii. 16, 17). Do not rush hither. 2. Realize the solemnity of the purpose. It is to meet with the Mighty Creator of the universe, whom you have offended and insulted. It is to confess to Him, and to implore His forgiveness. II. THAT YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO THE INSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC WORSHIP WITH DEEP ATTENTION. Having entered the house of God, it is your duty to be more "ready to hear, than to offer the sacrifice of fools." 1. You should attend with profound carefulness to the services of God's house, that you may avoid a great evil,—that of "offering the sacrifice of fools." Mere bodily sacrifices are the sacrifice of fools (Ezek. xxxiii. 31). Lip services are the sacrifice of fools (Isa. xxix. 13). The hypocritical services are the sacrifices of fools (Luke xviii. 11, 12).

What are the sacrifices that God will accept? (Ps. li. 17; Isa. lxvi. 2). 2. You should attend with profound carefulness to the services of God's house that your mind may be in a right state to receive true good. "Be more ready to hear," etc. (1) Be ready to hear teachably. Let the soul be open as the parched garden in summer to the gentle showers. (2) Be ready to hear earnestly. Wonderful things are propounded in the house of God; things vitally connected with your everlasting well-being. (3) Be ready to hear practically. All the truths are to be appropriated, embodied, and brought out in life. III. THAT YOU SHOULD ATTEND TO THE ENGAGEMENTS OF PUBLIC WORSHIP WITH PROFOUND REVERENCE. "Be not rash with thy mouth," etc. Let thy words be in harmony with thy real state of soul; and see that thy state of soul is truthful and right. There seem to be two reasons here against rapid verbosity in worship. 1. The vast disparity between the worshipper and the object he addresses. "For God is in heaven," etc. Duly realize His presence and greatness, and you will become all but speechless before Him. Isaiah did so (Isa. vi. 1-6). 2. The fearful tendency of an empty soul to an unmeaning verbosity (ver. 8). (*Homilist*.) **A dream cometh through the multitude of business.**—*The prayer and the dream*:—There is an analogy instituted between voluminous prayer and the voluminous dream. The dream arises out of the various transactions of business, and the fool's prayer springs from the variety of his vocabulary. Confusion is the characteristic of both. They are produced by external influences. The soul as a directing rational power is asleep. Dim memories of things mingle in a wild phantasmagoria before the closed portals of the sense of the dreamer. It is just so with the worshipping word-monger. The nature and character of God, the promises, Scripture language, are floating before the closed vision of the pietistic dreamer, and his prayers are a jumble of disjointed things. This will always be the case with him who gives himself up to the external influences. But as it is better to dream than to be dead, so it is always better to pray, even disjointedly and wildly, than to be without that breath of the spiritual life. The mere enthusiast, guided by no reason in his devotions, may be brought under its direction; but how shall mere reason become enthusiastic? We answer, by the action of the Spirit of God on the soul. What we need is this Spirit. We can prophesy to the dry bones, and clothe them with flesh; but the Spirit of God is needed that they may stand up and become an army of God. "Come, O breath, and breathe on those slain, that they may live," is to be our prayer. When we have got the answer to that petition, we shall be living, loving, active Christians. (*J. Bennet*.)

Vers. 4, 5. **When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it.**—*Of remembering and keeping our vows*:—One of the greatest inconveniences to which men are exposed in the various transactions of life, one of the greatest hindrances in their performance of duty, is forgetfulness: and this may be owing, partly to a defective constitution of mind, more frequently to habits of inattention and wilful neglect. A benefactor confers upon us a distinguished favour: we feel deeply sensible of the obligation, and sure that it must always be remembered; we venture to pledge ourselves that such will be the case; our own interest is greatly concerned that it should be so; the continued good-will and kindness of our friend depend upon it: and yet, when the benefit is past, and not seldom even while it is enjoyed, we are led to bestow scarcely a thought upon the hand from which our bounty has been supplied. None of us will deny our obligations to God for the blessings of His providence and the riches of His grace; and probably there are few of us, who have not been at some time or other so powerfully affected by a consideration of the Lord's dealings with us, as to have entered into some resolutions before Him, and made some promises of honouring and serving Him. But how soon have these hopeful convictions lost their power; how soon has the enemy, who was watching all the while with jealousy over them, "caught away that which was sown in their heart," and scattered it to the winds. The gains and pleasures, the corrupt indulgences, the fashionable follies of the world, have rushed in like a flood, and swept from them the very recollection of their promised change. If we could have kept a register of our thoughts and purposes, no doubt we should find, upon consulting it, that we had repeatedly, in the course of our lives, made our resolutions, and avowed our purposes in the sight of Heaven, to walk more humbly and faithfully with our God, and to live for eternity. And though we have long ago dismissed these matters from our minds, and no longer trouble ourselves either with the promised obligations, or our forgetfulness of

them, yet are they standing before God in living characters, which no time can efface or alter. The sentiments, and affections, and conduct, which we saw necessary for us years ago, continue to be equally necessary, though they are no longer felt; our feelings may be changed and gone, but there is no change in duty: whatever it was wise and good for us to promise, that we are now as much bound to perform, as we were when the promise was originally made; and God will demand it at our hands. There is one momentous occasion of our lives to which most of us may carry back our thoughts with peculiar advantage; one occasion on which we certainly did, in the most open, and solemn, and unqualified manner, pledge ourselves to God in the presence of His Church and people; and that was when we took upon ourselves the vows and promises, which were made for us at our baptism, when we were confirmed. This is a transaction and a service upon which we ought to dwell with great solemnity and frequency. It is incumbent on me to say a word to those who are about to take upon themselves the promises and vows made at their baptism. Let the matter be well weighed: let it be soberly considered that they are going to give a promise and a pledge to the God of truth; to declare that they are fully sensible of the engagement which has been made for them, and are willing to take it wholly upon themselves; to declare that, for the remainder of their days, they will walk worthily, by the help of the Lord, of that new and holy state into which they were baptized. Now, that this is a most serious, important, and awful engagement, no one, who is come to years of discretion, can fail to perceive. Let all them be assured, that if this solemn vow be earnestly made and faithfully kept, God will be their friend, and "He will save them"; if this solemn vow be trifled with and broken, God will punish such mockery, and will become their enemy, and they may perish everlastingly. Certainly we may say, in this case, if in any, "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay." (*J. Slade, M.A.*) *The vow*:—The vow is a form of prayer. It is a prayer with an obligation. The worshipper wants something, and, either that he may get it or that he may show his gratitude, he resolves to do a certain thing. In the Old Testament economy the vow was a common form of worship. There was something in it suited to those lower and feeble views of God which obtained in the infancy of the Church. The chief objection to it is, that it lays a man under a bond to do what should always spring from love; that it is likely to be put as a full satisfaction for the religious obligations of the Christian, which yet include the whole life and being; and that there is in it an assumption that, if we do not make the vow, the obligation on our part is not incurred; whereas this is not so, for I may say that whatever is lawful for us to vow is always right for us to do, even if we had not made the vow. Rashness and inconsiderateness should not lead us to make any vow, either which we cannot keep, which we will not keep, or which it would be unlawful for us to keep, for such, translated into our language, is no doubt the essential meaning of those words—"Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel,"—that is, the messenger of God, the minister, the priest, who was cognizant of the making of the vow,—"that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?" We are cautioned here not only against rash vows, but against unconsidered and voluminous prayers. Be not rash nor hasty: let thy words be few. Our Saviour cautioned against vain repetitions. Several gross vices in prayer are here indicated. First, voluminous prayer is to be guarded against—the utterance of the same request in many forms, as though God should be affected with the variety and quantity of speech! This, when done as a duty, is an evil; when done for pretence, is a hypocrisy. When we go to God, we should go with some petition which we want granted. We should know what it is; and if we have many petitions, we should have them arranged in proper order, and we should express them simply. There is much prayer without desire; and if God would grant many petitions which are offered up, many a worshipper would be greatly amazed and sadly disappointed. Take for instance our prayers for a new nature, for spiritual-mindedness. Well, we are afraid that there are prayers lying at the back of these petitions giving them the negative. The petitioners do not think there is not a good and a benefit in these things, but they do not want them for themselves, at least not now. A new nature is just what they do not want, but a little more indulgence of the old. They are as full of worldly-mindedness as they can be, and do not wish to have it destroyed. What then? Should we cease to offer up such prayers? No! But what we should do is this: try to get such views of the nature of

things sought to be got rid of as shall lead to earnestness in our petitions against them, and to get such views of the blessings prayed for as shall lead us really to desire them. We require to study, that our prayers be of the right kind—that they be not mere verbiage; and, as in going before men for any favour, our words should be few, and well ordered. About the exercise of prayer there are great difficulties, which can only be surmounted by previous study, by constant watchfulness, and by a simple reliance on the Spirit of God, as the source from whom all our inspirations flow. (*J. Bennet.*)

Vers. 10, 11. **He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver.**—*The unsatisfactoriness of material wealth.*—I. That as GOODS INCREASE, DESIRE INCREASES. This is not the case universally. There are men whose property is daily increasing, but whose desires are not increasing. The answer, as to who these men are, is suggested by the text. They are those who have not set their affections upon money. Love of silver leads to dissatisfaction with silver. Love of abundance leads to dissatisfaction with increase. He who loves silver wants gold. He who loves gold wants land. "Man never is, but always to be blessed," if he look for blessedness only to earth. As bodily hunger cannot be satisfied by fine scenery which appeals to the eye; as thirst cannot be quenched by the strains of even the sweetest music; and as what ministers to mental growth will not, directly at least, tend to physical development; so neither can the soul thrive upon food other than its own. God made man for Himself, and away from God, there is for man no abiding, no solid satisfaction. II. THAT EXPENDITURE KEEPS PACE WITH INCOME. Wants are born of "goods." These increase and so do those who eat them. Further, wealth has its duties as well as its advantages; and if its possessor be a Christian he will recognize those duties. The practical recognition of them proves this, that "when goods are increased they are increased that eat them." III. That the LOVE of wealth is VANITY. "This also is vanity." To love wealth "is vanity"; because love of wealth makes men cold, unsympathetic, and morally unmanly, causes them to live from circumference to centre, instead of from centre to circumference. On the contrary he who lives for others lives a radiating life, realizes that all are brethren. To love wealth is vanity, because whilst there is an excitement in the pursuit of wealth there is no true enjoyment in its possession. A soul centred upon worldly wealth, like the daughter of the horse-leech, cries, "Give! give!" We cannot serve God and mammon (*J. S. Swan.*) *The vanity of riches.*—This passage describes the vanity of riches. With the enjoyments of frugal industry it contrasts the woes of wealth. Looking up from that condition on which Solomon looked down, it may help to reconcile us to our lot, if we remember how the most opulent of princes envied it. 1. In all grades of society human subsistence is very much the same. Even princes are not fed with ambrosia, nor do poets subsist on asphodel. Bread and water, the produce of the flocks and the herds, and a few homely vegetables, form the staple of his food who can lay the globe under tribute; and these essentials of healthful existence are within the attainment of ordinary industry. 2. When a man begins to amass money, he begins to feed an appetite which nothing can appease, and which its proper food will only render fiercer. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver." To greed there may be "increase," but no increase can ever be "abundance." Therefore, happy they who have never got enough to awaken the accumulating passion, and who, feeling that food and raiment are the utmost to which they can aspire, are therewith content. 3. It should reconcile us to the want of wealth, that, as abundance grows, so grow the consumers, and of riches less perishable, the proprietor enjoys no more than the mere spectator. A rich man buys a picture or a statue, and he is proud to think that his mansion is adorned with such a famous masterpiece. But a poor man comes and looks at it, and, because he has the æsthetic insight, in a few minutes he is conscious of more astonishment and pleasure than the dull proprietor has experienced in half a century. Or, a rich man lays out a park or a garden, and, except the diversion of planning and remodelling, he has derived from it little enjoyment; but some bright morning a holiday student or a town-pent tourist comes, and when he leaves he carries with him a freight of life-long recollections. 4. Amongst the pleasures of obscurity, or rather of occupation, the next noticed is sound slumber. Sometimes the wealthy would be the better for a taste of poverty; it would reveal to them their privileges. But if the poor could get a taste of opulence, it would reveal to them strange luxuries in lowliness.

Fevered with late hours and false excitement, or scared by visions the righteous recompense of gluttonous excess, or with breath suppressed and palpitating heart listing the fancied footsteps of the robber, grandeur often pays a nightly penance for the triumph of the day. 5. Wealth is often the ruin of its possessor. It is "kept for the owner to his hurt." Like that King of Cyprus who made himself so rich that he became a tempting spoil, and who, rather than lose his treasures, embarked them in perforated ships; but, wanting courage to draw the plugs, ventured back to land and lost both his money and his life: so a fortune is a great perplexity to its owner, and is no defence in times of danger. And very often, by enabling him to procure all that heart can wish, it pierces him through with many sorrows. Ministering to the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, misdirected opulence has ruined many both in soul and body. 6. Nor is it a small vexation to have accumulated a fortune, and when expecting to transmit it to some favourite child, to find it suddenly swept away (vers. 14-16). There is now the son, but where is the sumptuous mansion? Here is the heir, but where is the vaunted heritage? 7. Last of all, are the infirmity and fretfulness which are the frequent companions of wealth. You pass a stately mansion, and as the powdered menials are closing the shutters of the brilliant room, and you see the sumptuous table spread and the fire-light flashing on vessels of gold and vessels of silver, perhaps no pang of envy pricks your bosom, but a glow of gratulation for a moment fills it: Happy people who tread carpets so soft, and who swim through halls so splendid! But, some future day, when the candles are lighted and the curtains drawn in that selfsame apartment, it is your lot to be within; and as the invalid owner is wheeled to his place at the table, and as dainties are handed round of which he dare not taste, and as the guests interchange cold courtesy, and all is so stiff and so commonplace, and so heartlessly grand, your fancy cannot help flying off to some humbler spot with which you are more familiar, and "where quiet with contentment makes her home." (*J. Hamilton, D.D.*) *Silver and satisfaction*:—This is true of all earthly things. No man is satisfied with any human idol. I. CORRUPT AFFECTION. All worldly love is corrupt. There is nothing good in silver. It has only present beauty and usefulness. II. THE GLAMOUR OF TIME. How bright is the tinsel of an illuminated theatre! Such is the spell cast over the things of time and sense, until the Spirit of God causes the sunshine to beam in our hearts. III. THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF AMBITION. Like a mirage the object sought eludes the grasp. No acquisition is final. The more we get the more we want. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 18. **It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour.**—*Labour*:—It is concerning Labour in its broadest sense that I wish to speak. The navvy with his shovel, the ploughman with his team, the weaver with his loom, the clerk with his pen, the "commercial" with his order-book, the domestic with her scrubbing-brush, the designer, manager, inventor, writer with his brain and brilliant gifts, the minister with tender heart and cultured mind—these all are sons of Labour, who, in their striving to do true work, can realize a responsibility so great as to declare their brotherhood with Him who declared, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work." I. THE RIGHTS OF LABOUR. 1. Has not the labourer a right to expect some degree of pleasure in his labour? To some this may seem somewhat fanciful, but they cannot deny its justness. To eat, to drink, to sleep, to think, to speak, are pleasurable sensations; why should so natural and necessary a function as toil be otherwise? Yet we know it is to many. Multitudes are brutalized by work, simply because they find no satisfaction in it. They work in order to live, and die in order to find rest. 2. Equally just is it for Labour to assert its right to an honest reward. Adam Smith, in his "Wealth of Nations," got to the root of the wage question when he said that the wages of labour were the fruits of labour. And the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes, had he been able to hear that sentiment, would have said "Amen! for it is his portion." Amid the complex tangle of modern mercantile transactions it would be an impossibility to assign to the hand-worker the exact product of his individual labour, after deducting the wages of the brain-worker who designs, organizes, or superintends, and the other expenses involved in production. But should it not be the striving of a Christian employer to secure to every worker as near an approximation to his true reward as can be ascertained? Should it not be frowned upon as a deadly sin for men to grow rich on "the hire

of the labourers, which they keep back by fraud"? 3. Further, it is surely Labour's right to have the fullest liberty in seeking these ends. The work done by our trade unions is a splendid monument to the sturdy self-restraint of the workers, and whilst in the future the principles taught and the methods adopted by them may undergo considerable change, yet the intelligent association of men for purposes of educating public opinion, and influencing the legislature will remain the most effective of means for realizing Labour's ideals. II. THE DUTIES OF LABOUR. Let Labour, whilst seeking for justice to itself, seek to deal justly with others. If "capital" be the miserable abstraction of which the proverb says it has "neither soul to save, nor heart to feel, nor body to kick," it is no reason why workers should deal unfairly with the individual "capitalist," who often is as much the victim of an evil social system as the worker himself. If it be the maxim of commerce to buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest, blind to all considerations as to whether thereby one obeys or disobeys the law of Christ; if to take advantage of a brother's necessity is not condemned as a breach of commercial ethics, there is no justification whatever for any worker adopting similar principles in his life work. Because a man does not believe in the justice of our present system of doing business, it is no reason why he should play ducks and drakes with his employer. Assuming that the principle of competition is a cruelly oppressive one, and that many employers are heartless tyrants, a sensible worker will, nevertheless, while those evil conditions remain—and they may for some time yet—make the best he can of them. To worry employers for concessions that it would be suicidal to grant is, at best, a short-sighted policy. Better to attack the system to which both masters and men are victims. Employers of labour are sometimes made unnecessarily hard by the foolishness and inconsiderateness of workers. It may, for instance, be quite legitimate for a mill-hand to grumble over the poorness of his pay, but the justice of his plea becomes miserably weakened when he "plays" for a couple of days when work is abundant, with the consequence that that work is driven elsewhere. It may be quite lawful for a man to take a holiday at any time he pleases, but not expedient. Even in such a matter the higher law of brotherliness should prevail. In the ranks of manual labour, though not these exclusively, we find a lamentable "want of thought," which in its results is often as bad as "want of heart." It has been asserted that the British workman is the hardest of all masters when he reaches that position; that in his co-operative societies his "divvy" is often larger than it should be because of underpaid labour. Not difficult would it be to prove that the overwork of multitudes of shop assistants is caused by thoughtless working-folk who "shop" late when it would be as easy to "shop" early. A man's religion is seen in the byways of conduct, and if in these movements he is not above suspicion, he loses all claim to be called a Christian, for the spirit of Christ's Gospel says, "Deal with all men as with your brother, as with children of God, whose necessity is your sorrow, whose strength is your joy." (T. A. Leonard.)

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 3, 4. **If a man live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, I say that an untimely birth is better than he.**—*The sorrows of old age:*—The wise Preacher supposes a man to have seen the utmost possible limit of human existence. And then he estimates the worth of the whole of this proud and protracted life, if it has passed without the acquisition of that object which the Word of God proposes for the attainment of man. I. **WHAT IS THE GREAT OBJECT OF HUMAN LIFE?** It is that "the soul may be filled with good." It was to gain this that each one has been placed in his period of earthly education. It is for this alone that Divine forbearance lengthens out to grey hairs the life of man who has not yet secured it, to give to men the full opportunity to be wise, and to think of the things which belong to their peace. How, then, shall this soul be filled with good? Is there anything within the limits of the gifts of this world, which can thus fill it? When he can sow grace in the furrows of his field, or fill his barns with glory, when he can plough up heaven from the earth, and extract God from perishing creatures, the world

may fill his soul with good and furnish an adequate exchange for its loss. But who does not see the utter disproportion between the desires of the soul and all the fruits which earth produces? The sinner is descending where his earthly glory cannot descend after him, and where, for a soul unredeemed, all redemption ceaseth for ever. II. THE SORROWS OF THE MAN WHO HAS LIVED LONG WITHOUT ATTAINING THIS GREAT OBJECT OF LIFE, whose soul is not "filled with good." 1. He has passed through a life, a reflection upon which gives him no comfort. Every hour rises up as the accuser of a guilty conscience. The remembrance of youth is a remembrance of convictions smothered, the Holy Spirit resisted, and a Saviour's love despised. The thoughts upon manhood present the awful picture of the self-immolation of the sinner's soul to the enemy of God and man upon the altar of worldly gain. All the resolutions and plans which were made for life have gone by unfulfilled. Every opportunity has been lost. Every mercy has been abused. Oh, what sorrow for the aged sinner does such a life produce! 2. He is pressing onward to a near eternity, for which he has no preparation. How truly is that old age which has no such provision for eternity, and to which "hope comes not, that comes to all" besides, an evil day, in which man finds no pleasure! 3. He has experienced the vanity of the world, and has nothing which can supply its place. They are thus left without a single source of comfort; and while they are struggling thus with unconquerable despair, they feel that the man who has not an interest in the Saviour, and a sure acceptance in His redemption, has no hope, though he has gained, when God takes away his soul. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*) *Sorrows of old age without religion*:—Even with all the comforts and hopes of Christianity, old age is not a desirable condition of being. We naturally desire to live; we shrink instinctively from death—and yet many an aged one longs to lay down the oppressive burden of life before the appointed time. If this be true, with all the consolations and supports which true religion affords, how unutterably sad and sorrowful must old age be to the aged pilgrim who has no home in the skies to look forward to—no God and Saviour to light up the dark valley and welcome him to an eternity of bliss! But why are the sorrows of an irreligious old age so many and poignant? 1. A portion of them is natural and common alike to all. Nature will decay; the system wear out. The organs of the body and the faculties of the mind become impaired. We are out of touch with the life around us. Our children, our friends, our neighbours, are gone from us. We are solitary, desolate. 2. The retrospect of a godless life from the period of old age must necessarily be a painful one, at least one destitute of rational comfort and satisfaction. The day of activity, of passion, of recklessness, has gone by. With old age come reflection, introspection, seriousness, and the monitions of a coming judgment. O the bitterness of the retrospect of a life devoted to the world—a life without God and without a serious purpose! 3. If such the bitterness of the retrospect, what shall we say of the anticipation? Very few repent in old age. What a prospect! A misspent probation, a hopeless doath, a lost eternity! (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. **Do not all go to one place?**—*All men's place*:—Do you know what the wise man means when he offers this question to your consideration, "Do not all go to one place?" The thing, no doubt, here spoken of is death; the place here spoken of, no doubt, is the grave. An amazing consideration! part of the first sentence that the great and holy God ever denounced against fallen man, to one and all, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." But in another case we may venture to contradict even Solomon: for if we consider the words of our text in another view, all do not go to one place; it is true, all are buried in the grave either of earth or water, but then after death comes judgment; death gives the decisive, the separating blow. Suppose, then, in our enlarging on the text, we should confine the word "all" to the unregenerate; these, indeed, die when they will, all go to one place. O awful thought! and yet it is a certain truth, all on earth must go to one place; if we live like devils here, we must go to, and be with them, when we die, for ever! A blessed minister of Christ, in Scotland, told me a story he knew for truth, of a dreadful answer a poor creature gave on her deathbed. This person when dying was asked by a minister, "Where do you hope to go when you die?" Says she, "I do not care where I go." "What," says he, "do not you care whether you go to heaven or hell?" "No," says she; "I do not care whither I go." "But," says he, "if you were put to your choice, where would you go?" Says she, "To hell." To that he replied, "Are you

mad—will you go to hell?" "Yes," says she, "I will." "Why so?" says he. "Why," says she, "all my relations are there." But I have another place to tell you of, and another sort of people to speak of, who shall all, as well as those I have spoken of, go to one place; blessed is it to live in God. When death closes the eyes, an actual separation is made, and instead of hearing "Depart, ye cursed," they will hear, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." If you ask where that place is? I answer, to heaven; if you ask to whom they shall go? I answer, to the spirits of just men made perfect; and, what will be best of all, to Jesus Christ, the heavenly inheritance. If we were not to go to Him, what would heaven be? If we were not to see Him, what would glory be? (*G. Whitefield, M.A.*)

Vers. 10–12. **That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man.**—*Solomon's dark ideas of life.*—He says in effect—I. FATE IS FIXED. "That which hath been." Everything is fate. Most men feel this at times. Do you ever say, I must obey my destiny? It is no use contending with fate. Mine is an unlucky star. There is some truth in this idea. Christ taught a pre-ordination in all events. But His fate was moral, not mechanical; not a blind destiny, but a wise decree. II. MAN IS FEEBLE. "Neither may he contend with Him that is mightier than he." And Christless humanity is a very feeble thing. His bodily frame is feeble. An insect's sting has been known to consign it to dissolution. Man's intellect is feeble; still the human intellect can do something great in connection with Christ. III. JOY IS FUTILE (ver. 11). What the better is man for all he has? What the better for his wealth, his reputation, his philosophy? IV. LIFE IS FLEETING. It "is a vain life," and all its days are a shadow. A shadow is the nearest thing to anility. A cloud may catch the eye, and its changing views and figures may give amusement for a few minutes—a shadow, who notes it or records it? V. THE FUTURE IS ENIGMATIC. "Who can tell what shall be after him under the sun?" (*J. Hamilton, D.D.*) **Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?—How is the adherent vanity of every condition most effectually abated by serious godliness?**—I. EVERY CONDITION IS CLOGGED WITH VANITY. 1. God never made the world, nor any condition in it, to be a place of rest and satisfaction. And since sin hath so far marred the beauty of the universe, there is a judicial vanity upon the whole creation (Rom. viii. 20). 2. We know but very little of the true nature of things, nor of ourselves, nor of our temptations, nor of our interests (Job viii. 9). 3. That little that we do know of anything, we come so droppingly to the knowledge of it that, ere we can lay things together, so as to compare them, and separate them, and sort them, and compound them, so as to make a judgment, either things themselves or our circumstances are altered, or upon alteration. II. ALL THINGS ON THIS SIDE RELIGION, WHEREBY MEN ENDEAVOUR TO GET ABOVE VANITY, INCREASE IT. The multiplication of cyphers amounts to less than nothing. Can anything of the world supply the soul with grace, satisfy the desires in so much as any one thing, or fill any one faculty of the soul to satisfaction? Can the world fill the mind with heavenly light, or the will with heavenly love, or the conscience with that "peace that passeth understanding"? III. IT IS ONLY SERIOUS GODLINESS THAT CAN ANY WHIT REALLY ABATE THE VANITY THAT CLEAVES TO EVERY CONDITION. To hate sin and love holiness; to live a life of faith, in dependence upon God and resignation to Him; to live above the transports of hopes and fears about things temporal; in short, to be blessings to the world while we live, and to be blessed with God when we die: this is the business and fruit of serious godliness; and this alone is that which at present can effectually abate the vexatious vanities which every condition swarms with. 1. Serious godliness will make your present condition good for you, be it what it will. 2. Serious godliness will make every change of condition good for us, though the change shock both nature and grace. 3. Serious godliness will make relative afflictions (which of all outward afflictions are the most grievous) good for us; and nothing else can do it. 4. Serious godliness will make horror of conscience and Divine desertions good for us. 5. Serious godliness will force something good out of the evil of sin. The rising ground of a dunghill may help to raise thy flight towards heaven. 6. Though to your own apprehension you have no faith at all to believe any one word of all this, nor any skill at all to know what to do; yet serious godliness will make all this good to thee. Uses:—1. Set your hearts upon serious godliness. 2. Learn to be more than barely contented with your present condition. 3. Make conscience of both sorts of

duties,—religious and worldly; and allot fit and distinct times for heavenly and worldly business. But with this difference, let religion mix itself with worldly business, and spare not; but let not the world break in upon religion, lest it spoil it. 4. Whatever you do for the bettering of your condition, follow God, but do not go before Him. (*S. Annesley, LL.D.*)

Ver. 12. **For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?**—*The known and the unknown*.—I. OUR LIFE WHICH WE DO KNOW. 1. We do know something about our present life, and what we do know about it should humble us in the presence of God, for, first, it is very short. Solomon here says nothing about the “years” of our life, he only counts it by “days.” The older a man grows, the shorter his life seems to be; and it was because Jacob was so old, and had seen so many days, that he called them “few and evil.” Children and youths appear to have lived a long while; men seem to have lived only a short time; older men an even shorter period; but the oldest man reckons his days the shortest of all. The calculations about time are very singular, for length seems to turn to shortness. Well, then, since I am such an ephemeral creature, the insect of an hour, an aphid creeping on the bay leaf of existence, how dare I think of contending with Thee, my God, who wast long before the mountains were brought forth, and who wilt be when mountains are gone for ever? 2. Our life, besides being very short, is singularly uncertain. Do not let us forget this fact, for if the thought be unpleasant to us, it is because there is something wrong within. The child of God, when he is right with his Father, forgets the uncertainty, and remembers that all things are certain in the eternal purpose of God, and that all changes are wisely ordained, and therefore the uncertainty causes him no distress. Yet should this truth make us live with much caution, and tenderness, and watchfulness. 3. Yet again, our life is not only short and uncertain, but, while we have it, it is singularly unsubstantial. Many things which we gain for ourselves with much care are very unsatisfying. Have you never heard the rich man confess that it is so? Have you never heard the scholar, who has won many degrees, and stood at the head of his profession, declare that the more he knew the less he felt that he knew? “Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity.” Now, look ye; it ill becomes us, whose lives are so uncertain, and whose lives at the best are so unsubstantial, to begin to contend with Him in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. It were better far for us at once to submit ourselves to Him, and to learn that in Him we live, and move, and have our being. It were well for us also to give the Lord all this poor life, be it what it may, to be used in His service, and to be spent for His glory. II. WHAT IS BEST FOR US IS NOT KNOWN TO US. Suppose we ask the question, “Which is the better for a man in this life—wealth or poverty?”—what will be the answer? Wealth—the eye is dazzled with it; it brings many comforts and luxuries; yet there is a passage of Scripture as true now as when the Master first uttered it, “How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God.” Who knows, then, that wealth is a good thing? Do any choose poverty? There is as much to be said concerning the evils and the disadvantages of poverty as there is to be said on the other side. He that lacks bread is often tempted to envy, and to many other sins which he might not have committed if he had not been in that state. It is not for you or for me to be able to balance the answer to this question, “Who knoweth what is good for man in this life,—wealth or poverty?” There was a wise man who said, “Give me neither poverty nor riches,” and he seemed to have hit the golden mean. Now, take another question,—that of health or sickness: “What is good for man in this life?” It seems at first that it must be good for a man to enjoy the best of health, and the most sprightly vigour, does it not? We all wish for it, and we are allowed to do so. Nobody thinks that sickness and disease can really be in themselves a blessing. Yet have I seen some gentle, holy, devout, matured spirits that could not have come from any garden but that which was walled around with disease, and grief, and woe. The graver’s best art has been spent upon them, the graving tool has been very sharp, and the hammer has smitten them very terribly. They had never been such marvels of the Master’s grace if it had not been for their sorrows. Yet I doubt not that there are other spirits who have been brought nearer to God in their gladness, saints who, for very gratitude to God for their overflowing delights, and

the mercies of this life, and the health of their bodies, have been drawn and bound more closely to their God. So is it with regard to publicity or obscurity. There are some persons whose graces are best seen in public, and they minister for the good of others; they have to be thankful that God has placed them in a position where they are seen, for it has led them to watchfulness and carefulness. The vows of God have been upon them, and they have been helped in their way to heaven by the very responsibilities of their public position. But, sometimes, I have wished that I might be a violet, that I might shed my perfume in some lowly spot hidden by leaves. Yet I do not doubt that obscurity has its ills as well, and that many a man would fain escape from it. "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" All depends upon your being where God puts you. Any man is safe if he is where God would have him to be, and if he trembles for his own safety, and clings to the Strong for strength; but those who think that their position gives them immunity from danger are in peril already from their fancied security. I believe that the same question might be asked concerning Christian experience: "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" It must be good to be full of high joys,—to rise to the loftiest heights of holiness and blessedness, must it not? Yes, yes, but it may be good to go down into the very deeps, and to know the plague of your own heart, and to feel the scourging of your Father's rod. "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" A mixed experience may be better than one uniform level either of height or depth.

III. The text mentions another form of our ignorance, and it is this, **WHAT SHALL BE AFTER US IS NOT KNOWN TO US**: "for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?" 1. The question may mean, "Who can tell a man what he will yet go through in this life?" He is now well-to-do, he is prosperous, he is healthy; but who can tell him what is yet to come to him? No one; therefore, let not the rich man glory in the wealth which may take to itself wings and fly away. Let not the man who is honoured by his fellows reckon that the applause of men is any more substantial than a vapour. 2. But I think that the text has its main bearing on what will happen after death. That we must leave in the Lord's hands; it is not for us to know what will be done when we are called away from the earth. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The secret of a happy life*:—The question of the text has been repeated many a time since the days of Solomon, and various replies have been given by teachers who have claimed to be the leaders of men. The Stoic has replied,—“The chief good for man in this life is to take everything just as it comes, and maintain stolid indifference,—be like a cold, unmoved statue amid the storms or amid the sunshine of life.” The Epicure replies,—“Eat and drink and be merry; indulge your senses, and banish all thought and care about the future.” The Miser replies,—“Get all you can, and give as little as you can; heap up riches, and treasure up the choicest thing earth can yield—gold.” The Ascetic says,—“Treat the world with disdain and scorn, retreat from it, and trample upon all its associations and joys.” Let us answer the question of the text in the light of the New Testament, and we shall see that it is good for man in this life—I. To **EXPERIENCE RECONCILIATION TO GOD**. The prodigal could not be happy while away from his father, while at variance with him; and man cannot be happy away from God, while at variance with Him. Enmity in the heart is a disturber of joy; and for a man to have enmity in his heart against God cannot be good, cannot conduce to joy. It is good for a man to surrender himself, and be on the Lord's side; then, instead of discord, there will be harmony in his heart; instead of conflict, there will be peace in his mind. II. To **EXERCISE RESIGNATION TO GOD**. A man cannot have a happy life who denies God, or who harbours doubt about His goodness and wisdom, whose will runs counter to the Divine will. This is the mind that was in Christ; He surrendered to the will of His Father constantly and entirely. III. To **EXPECT RESTITUTION FROM GOD**. We shall only find rest and joy by believing in the final triumph of goodness, in the ultimate reconciliation of all the apparent discrepancies of the now. These things comprise the good for man in this life, and will make human existence not only tolerable, but happy. (*F. W. Brown.*) *On our ignorance of good and evil in this life*:—Let us inquire what account can be given of our present ignorance, respecting what is good for us in this life; whether nothing be left, but only to wander in uncertainty amidst this darkness, and to lament it as the sad consequence of our fallen state; or whether such instructions may not be derived from it, as give ground for acknowledging that by this, as by all its other appointments, the wisdom of Providence brings

real good out of seeming evil. I. ILLUSTRATE THE DOCTRINE OF THE TEXT. When we review the course of human affairs, one of the first objects which everywhere attracts our notice is the mistaken judgment of men concerning their own interest. The sore evil which Solomon long ago remarked with respect to riches, of their being kept by the owners thereof to their hurt, takes place equally with respect to dominion and power, and all the splendid objects and high stations of life. We every day behold men climbing, by painful steps, to that dangerous height which, in the end, renders their fall more severe, and their ruin more conspicuous. But it is not to high stations that the doctrine of the text is limited. Around us, we everywhere behold a busy multitude. Restless and uneasy in their present situation, they are incessantly employed in accomplishing a change of it; and as soon as their wish is fulfilled, we discern, by their behaviour, that they are as dissatisfied as they were before. Where they expected to have found a paradise, they find a desert. The man of business pines for leisure. The leisure for which he had longed proves an irksome gloom; and, through want of employment, he languishes, sickens, and dies. The man of retirement fancies no state to be so happy as that of active life. But he has not engaged long in the tumults and contests of the world, until he finds cause to look back with regret on the calm hours of his former privacy and retreat. Beauty, wit, eloquence, and fame, are eagerly desired by persons in every rank of life. They are the parent's fondest wish for his child; the ambition of the young, and the admiration of the old. And yet in what numberless instances have they proved, to those who possessed them, no other than shining snares; seductions to vice, instigations to folly, and, in the end, sources of misery? II. The fact then being undoubtedly certain that it is common for men to be deceived in their prospects of happiness, let us next INQUIRE INTO THE CAUSES OF THAT DECEPTION. Let us attend to those peculiar circumstances in our state, which render us such incompetent judges of future good or evil in this life. 1. We are not sufficiently acquainted with ourselves to foresee our future feelings. Our minds, like our bodies, undergo great alteration, from the situations into which they are thrown, and the progressive stages of life through which they pass. Hence, concerning any condition which is yet untried, we conjecture with much uncertainty. 2. But next, supposing our knowledge of ourselves sufficient to direct us in the choice of happiness, yet still we are liable to err, from our ignorance of the connections which subsist between our own condition and that of others. 3. Farther, as we are ignorant of the events which will arise from the combination of our circumstances with those of others, so we are equally ignorant of the influence which the present transactions of our life may have upon those which are future. 4. Supposing every other incapacity to be removed, our ignorance of the dangers to which our spiritual state is exposed would disqualify us for judging soundly concerning our true happiness. Can you esteem him prosperous who is raised to a situation which flatters his passions, but which corrupts his principles, disorders his temper, and, finally, oversets his virtue? In the ardour of pursuit, how little are these effects foreseen! And yet how often are they accomplished by a change of condition! Latent corruptions are called forth; seeds of guilt are quickened into life; a growth of crimes arises, which, had it not been for the fatal culture of prosperity, would never have seen the light. III. Instead of only lamenting this ignorance, let us CONSIDER HOW IT OUGHT TO BE IMPROVED; what duties it suggests, and what wise ends it was intended by Providence to promote. 1. Let this doctrine teach us to proceed with caution and circumspection through a world where evil so frequently lurks under the form of good. 2. Let our ignorance of what is good or evil correct anxiety about worldly success. 3. Let our ignorance of good and evil determine us to follow Providence, and to resign ourselves to God. Study to acquire an interest in the Divine favour; and you may safely surrender yourselves to the Divine administration. 4. Let our ignorance of what is good for us in this life prevent our taking any unlawful step in order to compass our most favourite designs. 5. Let our imperfect knowledge of what is good or evil attach us the more to those few things concerning which there can be no doubt of their being truly good. 6. Let our ignorance of what is good or evil here below lead our thoughts and desires to a better world. (*H. Blair, D.D.*) *Object of human life*.:-What is the use, the meaning of my life? For what purpose was it given? To what end shall it aim? Is life an instrument ministering to some solid purpose, or a fleeting phantasmagoria, that leaves no lasting result? Such, substantially, was the inquiry of the Preacher three thousand years ago, and which

demands an answer still from every new generation and living man. Have any of you been willing to go on, without settling, or even starting, this great query; willing to sail in this frail boat of our mortality down the stream of years, without knowing whither, or desiring any port? If you reflect, you cannot proceed in this ignorant and accidental way. "Commune with your own heart," and you will not be satisfied till some object rise broad as the horizon before you, embracing all lesser occupations and pursuits in its glorious compass, and enabling you, by clear and continual reference, to shape every daily trifle and detail, otherwise worthless or perhaps unmeaning, towards its accomplishment. To this single point I would hold your attention, to decide whether such an object be yours; for in the want of it lies, if anywhere, man's great fault, fatal error, unpardonable sin. The principle may be put into various forms of statement. You may recur to the old Preacher's language, or you may say with the modern catechism, that the "chief end of man is to glorify God, and enjoy Him for ever." You may speak in the phrase, rightly understood, of the philosophy of our time, "Self-culture"; or in the phrase, profoundly interpreted of the philanthropy of our time, "Reform." All these mean essentially the same thing, requiring in the analysis the same elements. This solution of our problem carries us into no fanatical austerity, does not abolish the minor callings and aims of activity, of study, or traffic, or mechanical skill, in this world. It but leavens them with a higher spirit, and turns them to a nobler influence. It polarizes the wandering and aimless affairs of time and sense, makes all our dealings not only serve temporary purposes, but, in their effects on our hearts, point to permanent results. It puts a new question into our mouth, which the changeling slave of temporal expedients and little ends does not think to ask,—a question that rightly comes up with every transaction we engage in, every conversation we hold, every plan we form, every measure we execute,—Are we promoting here in this very thing, however great or trifling it may look, the object of life? If not promoting, but defeating this object, it bids us beware and abstain. It does not shut us up in a narrow place of hermit stiffness and seclusion, but goes with us over the broad ocean of worldly business, only asking that it may stand a Divine pilot at the helm. It lays no bar upon pleasure, tasted with an innocent moderation, but it converts pleasure itself from the foe into the friend and servant, as it well may be the true friend and faithful servant, of virtue. It does not condemn the acquisition of wealth as a means which may accomplish the very ends of religion; but it inquires with a searching whisper at the very confessional of man's spirit, and which, beside God, only the man himself can hear, whether the heart is given to wealth, delighting in it, with supreme habitual desire; or, on the contrary, as a steward regarding it as God's loan, as a worshipper proffering it for his sacrifice; while, on the wings of its chief and ardent aspiration, itself ever rises to him as the Infinite Good, takes the breath of His Spirit in return for the incense of its praise, and, from the elevation of its prayer, brings down the counsels of His majestic law upon its mortal conduct. (C. A. Bartol.)

CHAPTER VII.

VER. 1. A good name is better than precious ointment.—*The fragrance of moral worth.*—I. THE ELEMENTS OF A GOOD NAME. It is something more than being "well spoken of," for often "what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." It is not even a good reputation, unless that be sustained by the good reality. Socrates, on being asked how one might obtain a good name, replied, "Study really to be what you wish to be accounted." "A good name" is enshrined in "whatsoever things are honest, lovely, and of good report"—a "name" not only remembered on earth, but "written in heaven." It includes—1. Piety. 2. Diligence. 3. Integrity. 4. Patriotism. 5. Benevolence. 6. Devotedness. II. THE SUPERIOR VALUE OF A GOOD NAME. "Better than precious ointment." 1. It is rarer. Rare as some oriental unguents are, they are plentiful compared with Scripture's "good name" in this pretentious world. 2. It is more costly. Not a little did the alabaster box of ointment, poured by one on the Saviour, cost; but who shall estimate the expense at which a rebel against God has been so

changed in state and character as to have a name, absolutely fragrant, not only in a sinful earth, but throughout a sinless universe? The sufferings of Jesus and the influences of the Spirit indicate a cost which no arithmetic can compute.

8. It is more enduring than ointment. The latter's delectable properties will soon evaporate, as if it had never been; but a "good name," earned in "doing the will of God, abideth for ever." "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance."

4. Than ointment, such a "good name" is "better" for the individual himself. It inlays the soul with satisfaction. "A good man shall be satisfied," not with, but "from himself." He secures a signal luxury. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Such "a good name" is "better" for society. It is stimulating. Barnabas's "good name" was a passport to Saul of Tarsus among the Churches. Paul's "good name" was all that was needed to secure large donations for the poor saints at Jerusalem. Such a name is absolutely beneficial. What woes have not fled before its odoriferous power! What songs has it not kindled on lips unaccustomed to "the music of the spheres"! (*A. M. Stalker.*) *A well-grounded good name*:—The improving of our life in this world to the raising up a well-grounded good name and savoury character in it, is the best balance for the present for the vanity and misery attending our life, better than the most savoury earthly things.

I. **SOME THINGS SUPPOSED IN THE DOCTRINE.** 1. There is a vanity and misery that is the inseparable attendant of human life in this world. No man in life is free of it, nor can be (Ps. xxxix. 6). 2. Every man will find himself obliged to seek for some allay of that vanity and misery of life, that he may be enabled to comport with it (Ps. vi. 6). This makes a busy world, every one seeking something to make his hard seat soft. 3. It is natural for men to seek an allay to the vanity and misery of life in earthly things (Ps. vi. 6). 4. But the best of earthly things will make but a sorry plaster for that sore; they will not be able to balance the vanity and misery of life, but with them all life may be rendered sapless, through the predominant vanity and misery of it. 5. Howbeit, the improving of life to the raising a well-grounded good name, will balance the vanity and misery of life effectually; so that he who has reached that kind of living, has what is well worth the enduring all the miseries of life for. There is an excellency and good in it that downweigh all the evils attending life.

II. **WHAT IS THE WELL-GROUNDED GOOD NAME THAT IS THE BALANCE OF THE VANITY AND MISERY OF HUMAN LIFE?** 1. It is the name of religion, and no less; for there is nothing truly good separate from religion (Matt. vii. 18). 2. It is raised on the reality of religion, and no less; for a mere show of religion is but a vain and empty thing, which will dwindle to nothing with other vanities. We may take up that good name in three parts. (1) Friend of God (James ii. 23). (2) Faithful to the Lord (Acts xvi. 15). That designs the man's temper and way towards God. (3) Useful to men, serving his generation (Acts xiii. 35). That designs the man's temper and way towards his neighbour.

III. **WHAT IS THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIFE WHEREBY THAT GOOD NAME MAY BE RAISED.** 1. Improve your life by a personal and saving entering into the covenant of grace, and uniting with Christ, by believing on His name. 2. Improve your life to a living a life of faith in this world. (1) Let it be a life of believing and dependence on God in Christ for all. (2) Let it be a life of devotion, despise and scoff at it who will. In respect of the truths of God made known to you, reckoning every truth sacred, and cleaving thereto against all hazards and opposition (Prov. xxiii. 28). In respect of the worship of God, in secret, private, and public, showing reverence in the frame of your heart and outward gestures; so shall ye have the good name. (3) Let it be a life of heavenly-mindedness and contempt of the world (Phil. iii. 20). So Enoch got the good name of walking with God (Gen. v. 24), and the worthies (Heb. xi. 13–16). (4) Let it be a life of Christian deportment under trials and afflictions in life. So patience, resignation, holy cheerfulness under the cross are necessary to raise the good name (James i. 4). (5) Let it be a life of uprightness, the same where no eye sees you but God's, as where the eyes of men are upon you. 3. Improve your life to the living of a life beneficial to mankind, profitable to your fellow-creatures, diffusing a benign influence through the world, as ye have access; so that when you are gone, the world may be convinced they have lost a useful member that sought their good; so shall ye have the good name, "Useful to men" (Acts xiii. 36). (1) Cast the world a copy by your good example (Matt. v. 16). Of devotion and piety towards God, in a strict and religious observance of your duty towards Him. This will be a practical testimony for Him, a light that will condemn the world's profane

contempt of Him (Prov. xxviii. 4). Of exact justice and truth in all your doings and sayings with men (Zech. viii. 16). Of sobriety in moderating your own passions with a spirit of peacefulness, meekness, and forbearance (Matt. xi. 29). (2) Be of a beneficent disposition, disposed to do good to mankind as you have access (Gal. vi. 10). (3) Lay out yourselves to forward the usefulness of others (1 Cor. xvi. 10, 11). (4) Be conscientious in the performance of the duties of your station and relations (1 Cor. vii. 24). It is exemplified in the case of the priests (Mal. ii. 6); of wives (1 Pet. iii. 1); and of servants (Tit. ii. 9, 10). To pretend to usefulness without our sphere is the effect of pride and presumption, and is the same absurdity in moral conduct as it would be in nature for the moon and stars to set up for the rule of the day, the sun contenting himself with the rule of the night. IV. CONFIRM THE POINT. 1. This improvement of life is the best balance for the present, for the vanity and misery of life. (1) Hereby a man answers the end of his creation, for which he was sent into the world; and surely the reaching of such a noble end is the best balance for all the hardships in the way of it. (2) It brings such a substantial and valuable good out of our life as will downweigh all the inconveniences that attend our life in the world. (3) It brings such valuable good into our life as more than counterbalanceth all the vanity and misery of it. A present comfort and satisfaction within oneself (2 Cor. i. 12). A future prospect, namely, of complete happiness, which must needs turn the scales entirely, be the miseries of life what they will (Rom. viii. 35-39). (4) That good name well grounded is a thing that may cost much indeed, but it cannot be too dear bought (Prov. xxiii. 23). Whatever it cost you, you will be gainers, if ye get it (Phil. iii. 8). 2. This improvement of life is better than the best and most savoury earthly things. (1) It will give a greater pleasure to the mind than any earthly thing can do (Prov. iii. 17; Ps. iv. 7; 2 Cor. i. 17). (2) It will last longer than they will all do (Ps. cxii. 8). (3) It is the only thing we can keep to ourselves in the world to our advantage when we leave the world. (4) The good name will, after we are away, be savoury in the world, when the things that others set their hearts on will make them stink when they are gone. (5) The good name will go farther than the best and most savoury things of the earth. Mary pours a box of precious ointment on Christ, which no doubt sent its savour through the whole house; but Christ paid her for it with the good name that should send its savour through the whole world (Matt. xxvi. 13). But ye may think we can have no hope that ever our good name will go that wide. That is a mistake; for if we raise ourselves the good name, it will certainly be published before all the world at the last day (Rev. iii. 5), and we will carry it over the march betwixt the two worlds into the other world (ver. 12). (T. Boston, D.D.) *A good name*:—There are a thousand men in our cities to-day who are considering, "What is the best investment that I can make of myself? What are the tools that will cut my way in life best?" It sounds to them very much like old-fashioned preaching to say that a good name is the best thing you can have. Now, let us consider that a little. In the first place, what is included in a name? A man that has a name has a character; and a good name is a good character; but it is more than a good character; it is a good character with a reputation that properly goes with character. It is what you are, and then what men think you to be—the substance and the shadow both; for character is what a man is, and what men think him to be; and when they are coincident, then you have the fulness of a good name. In the world at large, what are the elements of conduct which leave upon society a kind of impression of you? The first foundation quality of manliness is truth-speaking. Then, perhaps, next to that is justice; the sense of what is right between man and man; fairness. Then sincerity. Then fidelity. If these are all coupled with good sense, or common sense, which is the most uncommon of all sense; if these are central to that form of intelligence which addresses itself to the capacity of the average man, you have a very good foundation laid. Men used, before the era of steam, to wearily tow their boats up through the lower Ohio, or through the Mississippi, with a long line; and at night it was not always safe for them to fasten their boats on the bank while they slept, because there was danger, from the wash of the underflowing current, that they would find themselves drifting and pulling a tree after them. Therefore they sought out well-planted, solid, enduring trees and tied to them, and the phrase became popular, "That man will do to tie to"—that is to say, he has those qualities which make it perfectly safe for you to attach yourself to him. Now, not only are these foundation qualities, but they are

qualities which tend to breed the still higher elements. If with substantial moral excellence there comes industry, superior skill, in any and every direction, if a man's life leads him to purity and benevolence, then he has gone up a stage higher. If it is found, not that the man is obsequious to the sects, but that he is God-fearing in the better sense of the term fear, that he is really a religious-minded man, that he is pure in his moral habits, though he is deficient in his enterprise and endeavours, so that his inspiration is not calculation, so that the influence that is working in him is the influence of the eternal and invisible; if all these qualities in him have been known and tested; if it is found that his sincerity is not the rash sincerity of inexperience, and that it is not the impulse of an untutored and untrained generosity; if it is found that these qualities implanted in him have been built upon, that they have increased, that they have had the impact of storms upon them, and that they have stood; if there have been inducements and temptations to abandon truth and justice, and sincerity and fidelity, but the man has been mightier than the temptation or the inducement—then he has built a name, at least, which is a tower of strength; and men say, "There is a man for you." Now, how does a man's name affect his prosperity? It is said that it is better than precious ointment. Well, in the first place, it works in an invisible way, in methods that men do not account for. It suffuses around about one an atmosphere, not very powerful, but yet very advantageous, in the form of kind feelings and wishes. Then consider how a good name, where it is real, and is fortified by patient continuance in well-doing, increases in value. There is no other piece of property whose value is enhanced more rapidly than this, because every year that flows around about a man fortifies the opinion of men that it is not put on, that it is not vincible, that it is real and stable. Then, a good name is a legacy. There is many and many a father that has ruined a son by transmitting money to him. There is no knife that is so dangerous as a golden knife. But there is no man that ever hurt his son by giving him a good name—a name that is a perpetual honour; a name such that when it is pronounced it makes every one turn round and say, "Ah, that is his son," and smile upon him. A good name is worth a man's earning to transmit to his posterity. And that is not the end of it, where men are permitted to attain a great name. Some such we have had in our history. Some such appear in every age and generation in European history—some far back over the high summits of the thousands of years that have rolled between them and us. But some names there are in European history, and some names there are in American history, that have lifted the ideal of manhood throughout the whole world. So a good name becomes a heritage not only to one's children, to one's country, and to one's age, but, in the cases of a few men, to the race. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *A good name.*—Hitherto the book has chiefly contained the diagnosis of the great disease. The royal patient has passed before us in every variety of mood, from the sleepy collapse of one who has eaten the fabled lotus, up to the frantic consciousness of a Hercules tearing his limbs as he tries to rend off his robe of fiery poison. He now comes to the cure. He enumerates the prescriptions which he tried, and mentions their results. Solomon's first beatitude is an honourable reputation. He knew what it had been to possess it; and he knew what it was to lose it. And here he says, Happy is the possessor of an untarnished character! so happy that he cannot die too soon! A name truly good is the aroma from virtuous character. It is a spontaneous emanation from genuine excellence. It is a reputation for whatsoever things are honest, and lovely, and of good report. To secure a reputation there must not only be the genuine excellence but the genial atmosphere. There must be some good men to observe and appreciate the goodness while it lived, and others to foster its memory when gone. But should both combine,—the worth and the appreciation of worth,—the resulting good name is better than precious ointment. Rarer and more costly, it is also one of the most salutary influences that can penetrate society. For, just as a box of spikenard is not only valuable to its possessor, but pre-eminently precious in its diffusion; so, when a name is really good, it is of unspeakable service to all who are capable of feeling its exquisite inspiration. And should the Spirit of God so replenish a man with His gifts and graces, as to render his name thus wholesome, better than the day of his birth will be the day of his death; for at death the box is broken and the sweet savour spreads abroad. There is an end of the envy and sectarianism and jealousy, the detraction and the calumny, which often environ goodness when living; and now that the stopper of prejudice

is removed, the world fills with the odour of the ointment, and thousands grow stronger and more lifesome for the good name of one. Without a good name you can possess little ascendancy over others; and when it has not pioneered your way and won a prepossession for yourself, your patriotic or benevolent intentions are almost sure to be defeated. And yet it will never do to seek a good name as a primary object. Like trying to be graceful, the effort to be popular will make you contemptible. Take care of your spirit and conduct, and your reputation will take care of itself. (*J. Hamilton, D.D.*)

The day of death than the day of one's birth.—*The day of the Christian's death:*—This statement must be understood not absolutely, but conditionally. It is applicable only to those who "die unto the Lord," and none can do so but those who are sincere believers in Christ, the sinner's Saviour. I. THE DAY OF THE CHRISTIAN'S DEATH BRINGS DELIVERANCE FROM ALL SUFFERING AND GRIEF. The end of a voyage is better than the beginning, especially if it has been a stormy one. Is not then the day of a Christian's death better than the day of his birth? II. In the case of the believer in Jesus, THE DAY OF DEATH IS THE DAY OF FINAL TRIUMPH OVER ALL SIN. It is the day in which the work of grace in his soul is brought unto perfection; and is not that day better than the day of his birth? III. In the case of Christ's followers, THE DAY OF THEIR DECEASE INTRODUCES THEM INTO A STATE OF ENDLESS REWARD (Ps. xxxi. 19; 1 Pet. i. 4; 1 Cor. ii. 9; Rev. iii. 21). (*G. S. Ingram.*)

The believer's deathday better than his birthday:—You must have a good name,—you must be written among the living in Zion, written in the Lamb's book of life, or else the text is not true of you; and, alas, though the day of your birth was a bad day, the day of your death will be a thousand times worse. But now, if you are one of God's people, trusting in Him, look forward to the day of your death as being better than the day of your birth. I. First, then, OUR DEATHDAY IS BETTER THAN OUR BIRTHDAY: and it is so for this among other reasons—"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." When we are born we begin life, but what will that life be? Friends say, "Welcome, little stranger." Ah, but what kind of reception will the stranger get when he is no longer a new-comer? He who is newly born and is ordained to endure through a long life is like a warrior who puts on his harness for battle; and is not he in a better case who puts it off because he has won the victory? Ask any soldier which he likes best, the first shot in the battle or the sound which means "Cease firing, for the victory is won." When we were born we set out on our journey; but when we die we end our weary march in the Father's house above. Surely it is better to have come to the end of the tiresome pilgrimage than to have commenced it. Better is the day of death than our birthday, because about the birthday there hangs uncertainty. I heard this morning of a dear friend who had fallen asleep. When I wrote to his wife I said, "Concerning him we speak with certainty. You sorrow not as those that are without hope. A long life of walking with God proved that he was one of God's people, and we know that for such there remains joy without temptation, without sorrow, without end, for ever and ever." Oh, then, as much as certainty is better than uncertainty, the day of the saint's death is better than the day of his birth. So, too, in things which are certain the saint's deathday is preferable to the beginning of life, for we know that when the child is born he is born to sorrow. Trials must and will befall, and your little one who is born to-day is born to an inheritance of grief, like his father, like his mother, who prophesied it as it were by her own pangs. But look, now, at the saint when he dies. It is absolutely certain that he has done with sorrow, done with pain. Now, surely, the day in which we are certain that sorrow is over must be better than the day in which we are certain that sorrow is on the road. II. The day of death is BETTER TO THE BELIEVER THAN ALL HIS HAPPY DAYS. What were his happy days? I shall take him as a man, and I will pick out some days that are often thought to be happy. There is the day of a man's coming of age, when he feels that he is a man, especially if he has an estate to come into. That is a day of great festivity. You have seen pictures of "Coming of age in the olden time," when the joy of the young squire seemed to spread itself over all the tenants and all the farm labourers: everybody rejoiced. Ah, that is all very well, but when believers die they do in a far higher sense come of age, and enter upon their heavenly estates. Then shall I pluck the grapes from those vines that I have read of as enriching the vales of Eschol; then shall I lie down and drink full draughts of the river of God, which is full of water; then shall I know even as I am known, and see no more through a glass darkly, but face to face. Another very happy

day with a man is the day of his marriage: who does not rejoice then? What cold heart is there which does not beat with joy on that day? But on the day of death we shall enter more fully into the joy of our Lord, and into that blessed marriage union which is established between Him and ourselves. There are days with men in business that are happy days, because they are days of gain. They get some sudden windfall, they prosper in business, or perhaps there are long months of prosperity in which all goes well with them, and God is giving them the desires of their heart. But, oh, there is no gain like the gain of our departure to the Father; the greatest of all gains is that which we shall know when we pass out of the world of trouble into the land of triumph. "To die is gain." There are days of honour, when a man is promoted in office, or receives applause from his fellow-men. But what a day of honour that will be for you and me if we are carried by angels into Abraham's bosom! Days of health are happy days, too. But what health can equal the perfect wholeness of a spirit in whom the Good Physician has displayed His utmost skill? We enjoy very happy days of social friendship, when hearts warm with hallowed intercourse, when one can sit a while with a friend, or rest in the midst of one's family. Yes, but no day of social enjoyment will match the day of death. Some of us expect to meet troops of blessed ones that have gone home long ago, whom we never shall forget. III. The day of a believer's death is **BETTER THAN HIS HOLY DAYS ON EARTH**. I think that the best holy day I ever spent was the day of my conversion. There was a novelty and freshness about that first day which made it like the day in which a man first sees the light after having been long blind. Since then we have known many blessed days; our Sabbaths, for instance. We can never give up the Lord's day. Precious and dear unto my soul are those sweet rests of love—days that God has hedged about to make them His own, that they may be ours. Oh, our blessed Sabbaths! Well, there is this about the day of one's death—we shall then enter upon an eternal Sabbath. Our communion days have been very holy days. It has been very sweet to sit at the Lord's table, and have fellowship with Jesus in the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine; but sweeter far will it be to commune with Him in the paradise above, and that we shall do on the day of our death. Those days have been good, I am not going to depreciate them, but to bless the Lord for every one of them. When we say that a second thing is "better," it is supposed that the first thing has some goodness about it. Aye, and our holy days on earth have been good; fit rehearsals of the jubilee beyond the river. When you and I enter heaven, it will not be going from bad to good, but from good to better. The change will be remarkable, but it will not be so great a change as thoughtless persons would imagine. First, there will be no change of nature. The same nature which God gave us when we were regenerated—the spiritual nature—is that which will enjoy the heavenly state. On earth we have had good days, because we have had a good nature given us by the Holy Spirit, and we shall possess the same nature above, only more fully grown and purged from all that hinders it. We shall follow the same employments above as we have followed here. We shall spend eternity in adoring the Most High. To draw near to God in communion—that is one of our most blessed employments. We shall do it there, and take our fill of it. Nor is this all, for we shall serve God in glory. You active-spirited ones, you shall find an intense delight in continuing to do the same things as to spirit as you do here, namely, adoring and magnifying and spreading abroad the saving name of Jesus in whatever place you may be. IV. The day of a saint's death is **BETTER THAN THE WHOLE OF HIS DAYS PUT TOGETHER**, because his days here are days of dying. The moment we begin to live we commence to die. Death is the end of dying. On the day of the believer's death dying is for ever done with. This life is failure, disappointment, regret. Such emotions are all over when the day of death comes, for glory dawns upon us with its satisfaction and intense content. The day of our death will be the day of our cure. There are some diseases which, in all probability, some of us never will get quite rid of till the last Physician comes, and He will settle the matter. One gentle touch of His hand, and we shall be cured for ever. Our deathday will be the loss of all losses. Life is made up of losses, but death loses losses. Life is full of crosses, but death is the cross that brings crosses to an end. Death is the last enemy, and turns out to be the death of every enemy. The day of our death is the beginning of our best days. "Is this to die?" said one. "Well, then," said he, "it is worth while to live even to enjoy the bliss of dying." The holy calm of some and the transport of others prove that better is

the day of death in their case than the day of birth, or all their days on earth. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Of the birthday and the dying-day*.—To one who has so lived as to obtain the good name, his dying day will be better than his birthday, quite downweighing all the vanity and misery of life in this world. I. SOME TRUTHS CONTAINED IN THIS DOCTRINE. 1. However men live, they must die. 2. The birthday is a good day, notwithstanding all the vanity and misery of human life. It is a good day to the relations, notwithstanding the bitterness mixed with it (John xvi. 21). And so it is to the party, too, as an entrance on the stage of life whereby God is glorified, and one may be prepared for a better life (Isa. xxxviii. 19). 3. The dying-day is not always so frightful as it looks; it may be a good day too. As in scouring a vessel, sand and ashes first defiling it makes it to glisten; so grim death brings in a perfect comeliness. The waters may be red and frightful, where yet the ground is good, and they are but shallow, passable with all safety. 4. Where the dying-day follows a well-improved life, it is better than the birthday, however it may appear. There is this difference betwixt them, the birthday has its fair side outmost, the dying day has its fair side inmost; hence the former begins with joy, but opens out in much sorrow; the latter begins with sorrow, but opens out in treasures of endless joy. And certainly it is better to step through sorrow into joy than through joy into sorrow. 5. The dying-day in that case is so very far better than the birthday, that it quite downweighs all the former vanity and misery of life. 6. But it will not be so in the case of an ill-spent life. For whatever joy or sorrow they have been born to in this world, they will never taste of joy more, but be overwhelmed with floods of sorrow when once their dying-day is come and over. II. IN WHAT LATITUDE THIS DOCTRINE IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD. 1. As to the parties, those who have so lived as to obtain the good name. It is to be understood of them—(1) Universally, whatever different degrees be among them in the lustre of the good name. (2) Inclusively, of infants dying in their infancy, before they are capable of being faithful to God, or useful to men; because, having the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them, whereby they are united to Christ, they are the friends of God. (3) Exclusively of all others. They that have not so lived as to obtain the good name have neither part nor lot in this matter (Prov. xiv. 32). 2. As to the points in comparison, the birthday and the dying-day, it is to be understood of them—(1) In their formal notion as days of passing into a new world. It is better for him when he has got the good name to leave his body a corpse, than it was to leave the womb of his mother when he was a ripe infant. (2) In all circumstances whatsoever. The saint's dying-day compared with his birthday does so preponderate, that no circumstances whatsoever can cast the balance; suppose him born healthy and vigorous, dying in the most languishing manner, or in the greatest agonies; born heir to an estate or a crown, dying poor at a dyke-side, neglected of all; yet the day of his death, in spite of all these advantages of his birth, is better than the day of his birth. 3. As to the preference, it stands in two points. (1) The advantages of the saint's dying-day are preferable to the advantages of his birthday. (2) The advantages of the saint's dying-day downweigh all the disadvantages of his birthday. III. DEMONSTRATE THE TRUTH OF THIS PARADOX, this unlikely tale, That the saint's dying-day is better than his birthday. 1. The day of the saint's birth clothed him with a body of weak and frail flesh, and so clogged him; the day of his death looses the clog, and sets him free, clothing him with a house that will never clog him (2 Cor. v. 1–3). 2. The day of his birth clogged him with a body of sin; the day of his death sets him quite free from it, and brings him into a state morally perfect (Heb. xii. 23). 3. The day of the saint's death carries him into a better world than the day of his birth did. (1) The day of his birth brought him into a world of uncertainty, set him down on slippery ground; the day of his death takes him into a world of certainty, sets his feet on a rock. (2) The day of his birth brought him into a world of sin and defilement; but the day of his death brings him into a world of purity (Heb. xii. 23). (3) The day of his birth brought him into a world of toil and labour; but the day of his death brings him into a world of rest (Rev. xiv. 13). (4) The day of his birth brought him into a world of care and sorrow; but the day of his death brings him into a world of ease and joy (Matt. xxv. 21). (5) The day of his birth brought him into a world of disappointment; but the day of his death brings him into a world surmounting expectation (1 Cor. ii. 9). (6) The day of his birth brought him into a world of death; but the day of his death takes him into a world of life (Matt. x. 30). 4. The day of his death settles him among better company than the day of his

birth did (Heb. xii. 22). (1) The day of his birth brought him at most into but a small company of brothers and sisters; perhaps he was an eldest child, or an only one; but the day of his death lands him in a numerous family, whereof each one with him calls God in Christ Father (Rev. xiv. 1). Whatever welcome he had in the day of his birth from neighbours or relations, the joy was but on one side; though they rejoiced in him, he could not rejoice in them, for he knew them not; but in the day of his death the joy will be mutual; he that in the day of his birth was not equal to imperfect men will in the day of his death be equal to the angels. He will know God and Christ, the saints, and angels, and will rejoice in them, as they will rejoice in him. Whatever welcome he had into the world in the day of his birth, he had much uncomfortable society there in the days of his after life that made him often see himself in his neighbourhood in the world, as in Mesch and Kedar (Ps. cxx. 5), yea, dwelling among lions' dens and mountains of leopards (Cant. iv. 8). But in the day of his death he will bid an eternal farewell to all uncomfortable society, and never see more any in whom he will not be comforted to be with them. 5. The day of his death brings him into a better state than the day of his birth did. (1) The day of his birth sets him down in a state of imperfection, natural and moral; the day of his death advances him to a state of perfection of both kinds (Heb. xii. 23). (2) The day of his birth brought him into a state of probation and trial; but the day of his death brings him into a state of retribution and recompense (2 Cor. v. 10). (3) The day of his birth brought him into a state of changes, but the day of his death brings him into an unalterable state (Rev. iii. 12). 6. The day of the saint's death brings him to, and settles him in better exercise and employment than the day of his birth did. He will spend his eternity in the other world better than he did his time in this world, how well soever he spent it (Rev. iv. 8). (*T. Boston, D.D.*)

Comparative estimate of life and death:—What are those circumstances of the Christian which give superiority to the time of death—which justify us in adopting the sentiment of the text as our own? I. THERE IS AN ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE IN THE CONDITION OF THE CHRISTIAN AT THE PERIODS OF HIS EARLIEST AND LATEST CONSCIOUSNESS. At the day of birth you cannot distinguish the future king from the peasant; the hero from the coward; the philosopher from the clown; the Christian from the infidel. There is a negation of character common to them all; and the positive qualities of each are not to be distinguished from the other. What is there to give value to the birthday of such a being? We pass over the years of childhood and youth, during which the human being is acquiring varied knowledge, to the period when character is more fully developed. He feels his responsibility, and knows himself to be a sinner; but his heart has never submitted to Divine authority, he has never sought for the pardon of his sins, he is an utter stranger to the grace of the Gospel. What reason has such a man to exult in the day of his birth? to commemorate it as a joyous event? But imagine him spared by the goodness of God until he is brought to repentance. He is in an essentially different position to that in which he was on the day of his birth, not only by the enlargement of his faculties, and the exercise of his affections, but they are directed to nobler objects; he knows and loves the character of God, he aspires after the enjoyment of Him, looks forward to enduring happiness with Him after the toils and sufferings of earthly existence, and his faith becomes "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." On the day of his birth he was the mere creature of flesh and sense, but now he is born of the Spirit, and he lives by faith. Oh, let death come when it may to the Christian, his dying day will be better than his birthday. II. LIFE IS A PERIOD OF PROBATION, THE SUCCESSFUL TERMINATION OF WHICH IS BETTER THAN ITS COMMENCEMENT. It requires the utmost circumspection and watchfulness—the strictest examination of our motives and feelings, to preserve the evidences of our Christian character bright and unclouded. There are few Christians, faithful to their own hearts, who have not had seasons of darkness and gloominess, and been distressed with various doubts and fears. And when once these arise in the mind, they impart a character of uncertainty to our personal salvation. But as we draw nearer to the goal, our confidence increases; the decline of a Christian's life is ordinarily marked by greater stability of mind—by a less wavering faith. God has been, in times past, better to us than our fears; He has frequently perfected His strength in our weakness, and carried us unexpectedly through deep waters of affliction; the ultimate issue appears more certain; we are more habitually confiding on the arm of omnipotence. And when we come to die, with our souls

awake to our real condition, conscious that we have been upheld to the last moment, a vigorous faith may enable the Christian to say, with the apostle, in the near prospect of death, "I have fought the good fight," etc. We mean not to say that every successful competitor has a feeling of triumph in the dying hour. The shout of victory may not be heard on this side the stream of death; but, when he has passed through its flood, and reached the opposite bank, his redeemed soul will be attuned to a song of glorious and everlasting triumph. III. IF WE CONSIDER THE EVILS TO WHICH THE CHRISTIAN IS EXPOSED IN LIFE, WE SHALL SEE HE HAS REASON TO REGARD THE DAY OF DEATH AS BETTER THAN THE DAY OF HIS BIRTH. On this side death there are bitter herbs for medicine, suitable to imperfect and diseased conditions of life; but on the other side are the fruits of paradise, not to correct the tendencies of an evil nature, but to feed the soul, to nourish it up unto everlasting blessedness. IV. THE PRESENT LIFE IS TO THE CHRISTIAN A PERIOD OF IMPERFECT ENJOYMENT. Here he is, at a distance from home, from his Father's house, in which there are many mansions; here his graces are imperfect, and constitute very limited channels of happiness to his spirit; here he cannot always enjoy God. His weak faith fails to realize the loveliness and perfections of Jehovah. Here he cannot at all times hold fellowship with the Saviour; it is interrupted by doubts and fears—by unworthy suspicions and criminal feelings. Here he knows but in part, sees but through a glass darkly, and this state of imperfection will continue until the period of death. The better country which the Christian seeks is a heavenly country—it is an incorruptible, undefiled, unfading inheritance, not to be realized in mortal flesh—not to be reached until the spirit, freed from the bonds of earth, ascends to God who gave it. (S. Summers.)

Vers. 2-4. **It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting.**—*On the benefits to be derived from the house of mourning:*—It is evident that the wise man does not prefer sorrow, upon its own account, to mirth; or represent sadness as a state more eligible than joy. He considers it in the light of discipline only. He views it with reference to an end. The true scope of his doctrine in this passage is, that there is a certain temper and state of heart, which is of far greater consequence to real happiness, than the habitual indulgence of giddy and thoughtless mirth; that for the attainment and cultivation of this temper, frequent returns of grave reflection are necessary; that, upon this account, it is profitable to give admission to those views of human distress which tend to awaken such reflection in the mind; and that thus, from the vicissitudes of sorrow, which we either experience in our own lot, or sympathize with in the lot of others, much wisdom and improvement may be derived. I begin by observing, that the temper recommended in the text suits the present constitution of things in this world. Had man been destined for a course of undisturbed enjoyment, perpetual gaiety would then have corresponded to his state; and pensive thought have been an unnatural intrusion. But in a state where all is chequered and mixed, where there is no prosperity without a reverse, and no joy without its attending griefs, where from the house of feasting all must, at one time or other, pass into the house of mourning, it would be equally unnatural if no admission were given to grave reflection. It is proper also to observe, that as the sadness of the countenance has, in our present situation, a proper and natural place; so it is requisite to the true enjoyment of pleasure. It is only the interposal of serious and thoughtful hours that can give any lively sensations to the returns of joy. Having premised these observations, I proceed to point out the direct effects of a proper attention to the distresses of life upon our moral and religious character.—1. The house of mourning is calculated to give a proper check to our natural thoughtlessness and levity. When some affecting incident presents a strong discovery of the deceitfulness of all worldly joy, and rouses our sensibility to human woe; when we behold those with whom we had lately mingled in the house of feasting, sunk by some of the sudden vicissitudes of life into the vale of misery; or when, in sad silence, we stand by the friend whom we had loved as our own soul, stretched on the bed of death; then is the season when the world begins to appear in a new light; when the heart opens to virtuous sentiments, and is led into that train of reflection which ought to direct life. He who before knew not what it was to commune with his heart on any serious subject, now puts the question to himself, For what purpose he was sent forth into this mortal, transitory state: what

his fate is likely to be when it concludes; and what judgment he ought to form of those pleasures which amuse for a little, but which, he now sees, cannot save the heart from anguish in the evil day? 2. Impressions of this nature not only produce moral seriousness, but awaken sentiments of piety, and bring men into the sanctuary of religion. Formerly we were taught, but now we see, we feel, how much we stand in need of an Almighty Protector, amidst the changes of this vain world. Our soul cleaves to Him who despises not, nor abhors the affliction of the afflicted. Prayer flows forth of its own accord from the relenting heart, that He may be our God, and the God of our friends in distress; that He may never forsake us while we are sojourning in this land of pilgrimage; may strengthen us under its calamities. The discoveries of His mercy, which He has made in the Gospel of Christ, are viewed with joy, as so many rays of light sent down from above to dispel, in some degree, the surrounding gloom. A Mediator and Intercessor with the Sovereign of the universe, appear comfortable names; and the resurrection of the just becomes the powerful cordial of grief. 3. Such serious sentiments produce the happiest effect upon our disposition towards our fellow-creatures, as well as towards God. It is a common and just observation, that they who have lived always in affluence and ease, strangers to the miseries of life, are liable to contract hardness of heart with respect to all the concerns of others. By the experience of distress, this arrogant insensibility of temper is most effectually corrected; as the remembrance of our own sufferings naturally prompts us to feel for others when they suffer. But if Providence has been so kind as not to subject us to much of this discipline in our own lot, let us draw improvement from the harder lot of others. Let us sometimes step aside from the smooth and flowery paths in which we are permitted to walk, in order to view the toilsome march of our fellows through the thorny desert. By voluntarily going into the house of mourning; by yielding to the sentiments which it excites, and mingling our tears with those of the afflicted, we shall acquire that humane sensibility which is one of the highest ornaments of the nature of man. 4. The disposition recommended in the text, not only improves us in piety and humanity, but likewise assists us in self-government, and the due moderation of our desires. The house of mourning is the school of temperance and sobriety. Thou who wouldst act like a wise man, and build thy house on the rock, and not on the sand, contemplate human life not only in the sunshine, but in the shade. Frequent the house of mourning, as well as the house of mirth. Study the nature of that state in which thou art placed; and balance its joys with its sorrows. Thou seest that the cup which is held forth to the whole human race, is mixed. Of its bitter ingredients, expect that thou art to drink thy portion. Thou seest the storm hovering everywhere in the clouds around thee. Be not surprised if on thy head it shall break. Lower, therefore, thy sails. Dismiss thy florid hopes; and come forth prepared either to act or to suffer, according as Heaven shall decree. Thus shalt thou be excited to take the properest measures for defence, by endeavouring to secure an interest in His favour, who, in the time of trouble, can hide thee in His pavilion. Thy mind shall adjust itself to follow the order of His providence. Thou shalt be enabled, with equanimity and steadiness, to hold thy course through life. 5. By accustoming ourselves to such serious views of life, our excessive fondness for life itself will be moderated, and our minds gradually formed to wish and to long for a better world. If we know that our continuance here is to be short, and that we are intended by our Maker for a more lasting state, and for employments of a nature altogether different from those which now occupy the busy, or amuse the vain, we must surely be convinced that it is of the highest consequence to prepare ourselves for so important a change. This view of our duty is frequently held up to us in the sacred writings; and hence religion becomes, though not a morose, yet a grave and solemn principle, calling off the attention of men from light pursuits to those which are of eternal moment. (*H. Blair, D.D.*). *The house of mourning*:—Jesus, our Almighty Saviour, authoritative Teacher and perfect Exemplar, attended houses of feasting sometimes, but ever seemed more ready to go to, and more at home in, houses of mourning. His example suggests that while it may be good to visit the former, it is better to visit the latter. 1. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting, BECAUSE WE CAN GET MORE GOOD THERE. We may get less good for the body, but we shall get more good for the soul. We may get less to minister to our present pleasure, but

we shall get more that will minister to our future well-being. It is a school-room in which great moral and spiritual lessons are very lucidly and very impressively taught. 1. There we may thoroughly learn the terrible evil of sin. 2. There we best learn the vanity of the creature. 3. There we may best learn the value of time. 4. There we may learn the present blessedness of true personal religion. II. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, BECAUSE WE CAN DO MORE GOOD THERE. Every man should be as much concerned about doing good as about getting good. In fact, doing good is one of the most certain ways of getting good. But, even apart from that, the man who has received great good from God should endeavour to dispense good to his fellow-men, and we can generally do more good in the house of mourning than we can in the house of feasting. For in the latter men are so given over to the business of pampering their bodies that they are usually little disposed to heed anything you may venture to say about the salvation of their souls. But in the house of mourning, where poverty, sickness or death has been busy, if you have shown an unmistakable interest in the family's temporal welfare, you will usually find them disposed to listen to what you may have to say about their spiritual and eternal welfare. Thus shall you scatter much sorrow and let in much peace and comfort. Thus shall you benefit your fellow-creatures, enrich your own souls, and glorify that Christ who died for your salvation. (*John Morgan.*) *On the dangers of pleasure:*—Sensual pleasures are among the most dangerous enemies of virtue. But, ardent and prone to excess, they require to be subjected to a prudent and holy vigilance, and to be indulged with caution and circumspection. I. MUCH INDULGENCE IN PLEASURE TENDS TO WEAKEN THAT WATCHFULNESS AND GUARD, WHICH A WISE AND GOOD MAN WILL FIND IT NECESSARY ALWAYS TO MAINTAIN OVER HIMSELF. Pleasure seldom admits wisdom of her party. The wand of truth which she carries, would destroy all those unreal images and airy visions with which the deluded voluptuary is surrounded. There the heart is thrown loose from restraint, and laid open to the lively and warm impression of every seducing idea. Men abandon themselves without suspicion to the sweet neglect, and through the unguarded avenues enter a multitude of enemies, who were only lying in wait for this decisive moment. II. PLEASURE NOT ONLY IMPAIRS THE GUARD WHICH A WISE MAN SHOULD CONSTANTLY MAINTAIN OVER HIS HEART, BUT OFTEN LAYS IT OPEN TO TOO STRONG TEMPTATIONS. Of this David affords us an instructive and affecting example. How much more certainly will pleasure corrupt those, who enter its purlieus without circumspection, and expose themselves unguarded to all the dangerous force of its temptations in the house of feasting! Here example, and sympathy, all the arts of seduction, all the allurements of ingenuity, all the decorations that wit can give to vice, unite their influence to betray the heart. III. SCENES OF PLEASURE AND INDULGENCE TEND TO IMPAIR THE SENTIMENTS OF PIETY TOWARDS GOD. A continual succession of pleasures is apt to efface from the mind that sentiment of dependence upon the Creator, so becoming the state of man. The mind, humbled by suffering, enjoys the smallest mercy with gratitude; while the greatest, by proud prosperity, is first abused and then forgotten. IV. HIGH AND CONSTANT PLEASURES ARE UNFRIENDLY TO THE EXERCISE OF THE DENEVOLENT AFFECTIONS. They tend to contract and harden the heart. The importunities of want, the sighs of wretchedness, are unwelcome intruders on the joyous festival. Who are disposed to seek out the retreats of sorrow and distress, and to administer there those consolations which the afflicted require? Are they not those who have themselves been educated in the school of misfortune, and who have been taught, by their own feelings, the claims of suffering humanity? Are they not those who often turn aside from the prosperous course, which Providence permits them to hold through life, to visit the receptacles of human wretchedness, and to carry comfort into the habitations of penury and disease? Who learn there to feel what is due to human nature? Pleasure is selfish. Attracting everything into its own centre, it loosens the bonds of society. Hence it is that luxury hastens the ruin of nations in proportion as it makes the love of pleasure the reigning character of their manners. V. PLEASURES TEND TO ENFEEBLE THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-GOVERNMENT. Self-denial is necessary to self-command. In the midst of moderate enjoyments and corrected appetites, the sentiments of duty have opportunity firmly to root themselves, and to acquire ascendancy among the other principles of the heart, unrestrained indulgence corrupts them. And the passions, growing inflamed and ungovernable, hurry away their weak

captives over all the fences of prudence as well as of piety. Moderation and self-denial are necessary to restore the tone of nature, and to create the highest relish even of the pleasures of sense. VI. PLEASURE IS UNFAVOURABLE TO THOSE SERIOUS REFLECTIONS UPON OUR MORTAL CONDITION, AND THE INSTABILITY OF ALL HUMAN THINGS, SO USEFUL TO PREPARE THE SOUL FOR HER IMMORTAL DESTINATION. It is only when we recollect that we are united to this world by a momentary tie, and to the next by eternal relations, that we shall despise, as reasonable beings ought to do, the fantastic occupations of the dissipated and the idle, and cultivate the solid and immortal hopes of piety. These are lessons not taught in the house of seating. (*S. S. Smith, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. Sorrow is better than laughter.—*Sorrow better than laughter*.—Sorrow is set over against laughter; the house of mourning over against the house of mirth; the rebuke of the wise over against the music of fools; the day of death over against the day of birth: all tending, however, to this, that trouble and grief have their bright side, and that giddy indulgence and merriment carry a sting. I. SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER, BECAUSE A GREAT PART OF WORLDLY MERRIMENT IS NO BETTER THAN FOLLY. Here we take no extreme or ascetic ground. It would be morose and unchristian to scowl at the gambols of infancy, or to hush the laugh of youth, on fit occasions. Cheerfulness is nowhere forbidden, even in adult life; and we perhaps offend God oftener by our frowns than by our smiles. But you all know that there is a merriment which admits no rule, confines itself by no limit, shocks every maxim even of sober reason, absorbs the whole powers, wastes the time, and debilitates the intellect, even if it do not lead to supreme love of pleasure, prodigality, and general intemperance and voluptuousness. II. SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER, BECAUSE MUCH OF WORLDLY MERRIMENT TENDS TO NO INTELLECTUAL OR MORAL GOOD. Worldly pleasures, and the expressions of these, do nothing for the immaterial part. The utmost that can be pretended is that they amuse and recreate. In their very notion they are exceptions, and should be sparing. But there are a thousand recreative processes connected with healthful exercise, with knowledge, with the study of beautiful nature, with the practice and contemplation of art, and with the fellowship of friends, which unbend the tense nerve and refresh the wasted spirits, while at the same time they instruct the mind and soften or tranquillize the heart. Not so with the unbridled joys which find vent in redoubled peals of mirth and obstreperous carousal, or in the lighter play of chattered nonsense and never-ending giggle. III. SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER, BECAUSE WORLDLY MIRTH IS SHORT. In the Eastern countries, where fuel is very scarce, every combustible shrub, brush, and bramble is seized upon for culinary fires. Of these the blaze is bright, hot, and soon extinct. Such is worldly mirth. "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool." It is noisy—more noisy than if there were anything in it. But it soon ceases. Physical limits are put to gay pleasures. The loudest laughter cannot laugh for ever. Lungs and diaphragm forbid and rebel. There is a time of life when such pleasures become as difficult as they are ungraceful; and there is not in society a more ridiculous object, even in its own circle, than a tottering, antiquated, bedizened devotee of fashion. Grief comes in and shortens the amusement. Losses and reverses shorten it. And, if there were nothing else, pleasure must be short, because it cannot be extended to judgment and eternity. IV. WORLDLY MIRTH IS UNSATISFYING. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," i. e. emptiness and disappointment. The man wonders why the toys and rattles which pleased him once please him now no more. They are vanity, and all is vanity; and every day that he lives longer will make it more formidable vanity. Now, pray observe, the case is directly the reverse with regard to sound intellectual and spiritual enjoyments; for which the capacity is perpetually increasing with its indulgence. V. SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER, BECAUSE SORROW NEEDS REFLECTION. There can be no contemplation amidst the riot of self-indulgence; but the house of mourning is a meditative abode. Before they were afflicted, a large proportion of God's people went astray; and, if they live long enough, they can all declare that the solemn pauses of their bereavement, illness, poverty, shame, and fear, have been better to them than the dainties of the house of feasting. VI. SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER, BECAUSE SORROW BRINGS LESSONS OF WISDOM. Sufferers not only think but learn. Many sermons could not record all the lessons of affliction. It tells us wherein we have offended. It takes us away from the flattering crowd, and from seducing charmers, and

keenly reaches, with its probe, the hidden iniquity. This is less pleasing than worldly joy, but it is more profitable. The Bible is the chief book in the house of mourning—read by some there who have never read it elsewhere, and revealing to its most assiduous students new truths, shining forth in affliction like stars which have been hidden in daylight. VII. SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER, BECAUSE SORROW AMENDS THE HEART AND LIFE. Not by any efficiency of good; of such efficiency, pain, whether of body or mind, knows nothing; but by becoming the vehicle of Divine influences. The ways of Providence are such, that troubled spirits, bathed in tears, are repeatedly made to cry with a joy which swallows up all foregoing griefs, "Before we were afflicted we went astray, but now have we kept Thy law!" VIII. SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER, BECAUSE SORROW LIKENS US TO HIM WHOM WE LOVE. You know His name. He is the Man of Sorrows—the companion or brother of grief. His great work, even our salvation, was not more by power or holiness than by sorrows. He took our flesh that He might bear our sorrows. If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. IX. SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER, BECAUSE SORROW ENDS IN JOY. The very resistance of a virtuous mind to adversity—the bracing of the frame—the breasting of the torrent—the patience, the resignation, the hope amidst the billows, the high resolve and courage that mount more boldly out of the surge of grief, the silent endurance of the timid and the frail, when out of weakness they are made strong—these, and such as these, increase the capacity for future holiness and heavenly bliss. "These are they that have come out of great tribulation." (*J. W. Alexander, D.D.*) *The service of sorrow*.—I. SORROW SERVES TO PROMOTE INDIVIDUALISM OF SOUL. 1. A deep practical sense of self-responsibility is essential to the virtue, the power, and progress of the soul. 2. Social influences, especially in this age of combinations, tend to destroy this and absorb the individual in the mass. 3. Sorrow is one of the most individualizing of forces. Sorrow detaches man from all, isolates him, makes him feel his loneliness. II. SORROW SERVES TO HUMANIZE OUR AFFECTIONS. It helps us to feel for others; to "weep with those who weep," etc. III. SORROW SERVES TO SPIRITUALIZE OUR NATURE. There are tremendous forces ever at work to materialize. Sorrow takes us away into the spiritual; makes us feel alone with God, and view the world as but a passing show. IV. SORROW SERVES TO PREPARE US TO APPRECIATE CHRISTIANITY. The Gospel is a system to "heal broken hearts." Who appreciates pardon, but the sorrowing penitent? Who values the doctrine of a parental providence, but the tried? Who the doctrine of the resurrection, but the bereaved and the dying? (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 4. **The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.**—*The advantages of visiting the mansions of distress*.—For so valuable a purpose it is well worth while to bear with all the gloominess of the house of mourning. For most useful lessons will the heart of the wise be able to learn there; and excellent rules of conduct, with respect to himself, to the memory of those who are deceased, and to such as they have left behind them. 1. With respect to himself. "Death is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart." It is because we do not lay it to our hearts that we most of us go on just as if we imagined there was to be no end at all; and though we do not, indeed, speculatively think so, yet we live and act upon that supposition; and our knowing it to be a false one hath no manner of influence for want of reflecting upon it as such. This could not be would we but stop a little at the house of mourning; and make the most obvious of all reflections there, from contemplating the end of others, how very quickly our own end may come, and how soon it must. Such thoughts will enliven our diligence in performing our duty here; in working, while it is day, the works of Him that sent us. And as the thoughts of death are excellently fitted to compose the vehemence of our other passions, so they are fitted particularly to check that very sinful kind of vehemence, which we are exceedingly prone to express, one against another. Another instruction, which the heart of the wise will learn in the house of mourning, is, never to flatter himself with expectations of any lasting good in a state so uncertain as this. You see, therefore, what improvement the heart of the wise may receive from a general consideration of the end of all men. But the further view of the different ends of different men is a subject of yet further advantage. 2. The heart of the wise, whilst it dwells in the house of mourning, will not only improve itself in a general sense of Christian piety, but also more especially in such precepts of it as constitute a proper behaviour with

respect to the memory of those whose departure is at any time the object of our thoughts. The dead, indeed, are out of our reach: our goodness extends not to them, and our enmity can do them no harm. But for the sake of common justice and humanity, we are bound to the amiable duties of showing candour in regard to their failings, and paying the honour which is due to their merit. 3. We may learn, from a considerate meditation on the examples of mortality, very useful instructions for our behaviour, not only with respect to the deceased, but those whom they have left behind any way peculiarly related to them. The death of a wise and good, of a near and affectionate friend, is unspeakably the greatest of all calamities. Whoever is capable of these reflections, if he allows himself time to make them, will sincerely pity all that have suffered such a loss, and equally esteem all that show they are sensible of it. (*T. Secker.*)

Ver. 8. Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.—*The new year.*—The text expresses the general principle or doctrine, that by the condition of our existence here, if things go right, a conclusion is better than a beginning. The fruit is better than the blossom; the reaping is better than the sowing; the enjoyment than the reaping; the second stage of a journey to the happy home is better than the first; the home itself than all; the victory is better than the march and the battle; the reward is better than the course of service; the ending in the highest improvement of means is better than being put at first in possession of them. In all this we see it is conditionally, and not absolutely, that "the end is better than the beginning." Now let us consider in a short series of plain particulars what state of the case would authorize us at the end of the year to pronounce this sentence upon it. 1. It will easily occur as a general rule of judgment on the matter, that the sentence may be pronounced if, at the end of the year, we shall be able, after deliberate conscientious reflection, to affirm that the year has been, in the most important respects, better than the preceding. 2. The sentence will be true if, during the progress of the year, we shall effectually avail ourselves of the lessons suggested by a review of the preceding year. 3. At the close of this year, should life be protracted so far, the text will be applicable, if we can then say, "My lessons from reflection on the departed year are much less painful, and much more cheering than at the close of the former"; if we can say this without any delusion from insensibility, for the painfulness of reflection may lessen from a wrong cause; but to say it with an enlightened conscience to witness, how delightful! To be then able to recall each particular, and to dwell on it a few moments—"that was, before, a very painful consideration—now, . . ." "This, again, made me sad, and justly so—now, . . ." "What shall I render to God for the mercy of His granting my prayer for all-sufficient aid? I will render to Him, by His help, a still better year next." And let us observe, as the chief test of the true application of the text, that it will be a true sentence if then we shall have good evidence that we are become really more devoted to God. 4. If we shall have acquired a more effectual sense of the worth of time, the sentence, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning," will be true. Being intent on the noblest purposes of life will itself in a great degree create this "effectual sense." But there may require, too, a special thought of time itself—a habit of noting it—because it is so transient, silent, and invisible a thing. There may be a want of faith to "see this invisible," and of a sense of its flight. For want of this, and the sense, too, of its vast worth, what quantities reflection may tell us we have wasted in past years—in the last year! How important to have a powerful habitual impression of all this! And if, this year, we shall acquire much more of this strong habitual sense—if we become more covetous of time—if we cannot waste it without much greater pain—if we shall, therefore, lose and mispend much less—then the text is true. 5. It will again be true if, with regard to fellow-mortals, we can conscientiously feel that we have been to them more what Christians ought—than in the preceding year. "I am become more solicitous to act toward you in the fear of God. I am become more conscientiously regardful of what is due to you, and set a higher importance on your welfare. I have exerted myself more for your good. On the whole, therefore, I stand more acquitted towards you than I have at the conclusion of any former season." 6. Another point of superiority we should hope the end may have over the beginning of the year, is that of our being in a better state of preparation for all that is to follow. Who was ever too well prepared for sudden emergencies of trial?—too well prepared for duty, temptation, or affliction?—too well prepared

for the last thing that is to be encountered on earth? 7. It will be a great advantage and advancement to end the year with, if we shall then have acquired more of a rational and Christian indifference to life itself. "My property in life is now less by almost 400 days; so much less to cultivate and reap from. If they were of value, the value of the remainder is less after they are withdrawn. As to temporal good, I have but learnt the more experimentally that that cannot make me happy. I have, therefore, less of a delusive hope on this ground as to the future. The spiritual good of so much time expended I regard as transferred to eternity; so much, therefore, thrown into the scale of another life against this. Besides, the remaining portion will probably be, in a natural sense, of a much worse quality. Therefore, as the effect of all this, my attachment to this life is loosening, and the attraction of another is augmenting." (*John Foster.*) *The end of a good man's life is better than the beginning.*—I. AT THE END OF HIS LIFE HE IS INTRODUCED INTO A BETTER STATE. 1. He begins his life amidst impurity. The first air he breathes, the first word he hears, the first impression he receives, are tainted with sin; but at its end he is introduced to purity, saints, angels, Christ, God! 2. He begins his life on trial. It is a race—shall he win? It is a voyage—shall he reach the haven? The end determines all. 3. He begins his life amidst suffering "Man is born to trouble." II. AT THE END OF HIS LIFE HE IS INTRODUCED INTO BETTER OCCUPATIONS. Our occupations here are threefold—physical, intellectual, moral. All these are more or less of a painful kind. But in the state into which death introduces us, the engagements will be congenial to the tastes, invigorating to the frame, delightful to the soul and honouring to God. III. AT THE END OF HIS LIFE HE IS INTRODUCED INTO BETTER SOCIETY. We are made for society. But society here is frequently insincere, non-intelligent, unaffected. But how delightful the society into which death will introduce us! We shall mingle with enlightened, genuine, warm-hearted souls, rising in teeming numbers, grade above grade, up to the Eternal God Himself. (*Homilist.*) *The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*—*The power of patience.*—The lion was caught in the toils of the hunter. The more he tugged, the more his feet got entangled; when a little mouse heard his roaring, and said that if his majesty would not hurt him, he thought he could release him. At first the king of beasts took no notice of such a contemptible ally; but at last, like other proud spirits in trouble, he allowed his tiny friend to do as he pleased. So one by one the mouse nibbled through the cords till he had set free first one foot and then another, and then all the four, and with a growl of hearty gratitude the king of the forest acknowledged that the patient in spirit is sometimes stronger than the proud in spirit. And it is beautiful to see how, when some sturdy nature is involved in perplexity, and by its violence and vociferation is only wasting its strength without forwarding its escape, there will come in some timely sympathizer, mild and gentle, and will suggest the simple extrication, or by soothing vehemence down into his own tranquillity, will set him on the way to effect his self-deliverance. Even so, all through the range of philanthropy, patience is power. It is not the water-spout but the nightly dew which freshens vegetation. They are not the flashes of the lightning which mature our harvests, but the daily sunbeams, and that quiet electricity which thrills in atoms and which flushes in every ripening ear. Niagara in all its thunder fetches no fertility; but the Nile, coming without observation, with noiseless fatness overflows, and from under the retiring flood Egypt looks up again, a garner of golden corn. The world is the better for its moral cataracts and its spiritual thunderbolts; but the influences which do the world's great work—which freshen and fertilize it, and which are maturing its harvests for the garner of glory, are not the proud and potent spirits, but the patient and the persevering; they are not the noisy and startling phenomena, but the steady and silent operations. (*J. Hamilton, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these?—*Mistaken signs.*—On the whole we may confidently affirm that the world improves, and yet in certain moods we are apt to regard its conditions as increasingly desperate. Thus is it sometimes with our religious life—we mistake the signs of progress for those of retrogression, and through this mistake do injustice to ourselves. 1. "I am not so happy as I once was," is a lament from Christian lips with which we are almost distressingly familiar. We look back to our conversion, to the glittering joy which welled up in our soul in those days, and the memory moves us to tears. Then "all things were apparelled in celestial light,

the glory and the freshness of a dream." Then we turn to consider the present phases of our experience, and conclude sadly that we are not so happy now as then—all the gold has changed to grey. Now, is this really so? We fully allow that it may be so. Through unfaithfulness we may have lost the joy and power of the days when first we knew the Lord. But may not the mournful inference be mistaken, and what we regard as a diminished happiness be really a profounder blessedness? The essence of religion is submission to the will of God, and that grave tranquillity of mind which follows upon deeper self-renunciation, the chastened cheerfulness which survives the strain and strife of years, is a real, although not perhaps seeming, gain upon the first sparkling experiences of our devout life.

2. "I am not so holy as I once was," is another note of self-depreciation with which we are unhappily familiar, and with which, perhaps, we are sometimes disposed to sympathize. When we first realized forgiveness, we felt that there was "no condemnation"; the Spirit of God seemed to hallow our whole nature; our heart was cleansed, and strangely glowed. But it is not so now. We have not done all we meant to do, not been all we meant to be, and have a consciousness of imperfection more vivid than ever. With the lapse of years we have grown more dissatisfied with ourselves; and this more acute sense of worldliness leads us to the conclusion that we have lost the rarer purity of other days. Once more we admit that this may be the case. There may be a very real depreciation in our life; we may have allowed our raiment to be soiled by the world and the flesh. But may not this growing sense of imperfection be a sign of the perfecting of our spirit? It may be that we are not less pure than formerly, only the Spirit of God has been opening our eyes, heightening our sensibility, and faults once latent are now discovered; the clearer vision detects deformities, the finer ear discords, the pure taste admixtures which were once unsuspected. It is possible to be growing in moral strength and grace, in everything that constitutes perfection of character and life, when appearances are decidedly to the contrary. Watch the sculptor and note how many of his strokes seem to mar the image on which he works, rendering the marble more unshapely than it seemed the moment before, and yet in the end a glorious statue rises under his hand; so the blows of God, bringing us into glorious grace, often seem as if they were marring what little symmetry belonged to us, often as if knocking us out of shape altogether.

3. "I do not love God as I once did," is another sorrowful confession of the soul. How glowing was that first love! Your whole soul went out after the Beloved! But it is not so now. The temperature of your soul seems to have fallen, your love to your God and Saviour does not glow as in those memorable hours when first it was kindled "by the spirit of burning." Once again, it may be so. The Church at Ephesus had "left" its "first love," and we may not cherish the same fervid affection for God which once filled and purified our heart. But may we not misconceive the love we bear to God? Our more dispassionate affection may be equally genuine and positively stronger. Our love to God may not be so gushing, so florid in expression as it once was, but in this it only bears the sober hue of all ripened things.

(1) The test of love is sacrifice. We love those for whose sake we are prepared to suffer. Will our love to God to-day bear this test? Would we for His sake endure hardship, death? Many sorrowing souls know they are ready to die for Him whom they cannot love as they feel He ought to be loved.

(2) The test of love is obedience. We love those to whom we pay ungrudging service. "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. . . . Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Here, once more, are we sure of ourselves? We "have not wickedly departed from" our God. Is it not the supreme purpose of our heart to bring life into entire harmony with the will of God?

(3) The test of love is confidence. We love those whom we trust. Do we not feel, then, that God has our confidence so thoroughly that even if He "slay" us, yet will we trust in Him? "Red-hot religion" has its place and value, but white-hot religion, the silent, intense force which acts without sparks, smoke or noise, is a diviner thing. Is it thus with our love to God? Has that passion simply changed from red to white? Has the sentiment become a principle, the ecstasy a habit, the passion a law? If so, the former days were not better than these.

4. "I do not make the rapid progress I once did," is another familiar regret. Once we had the pleasing sense of swift and perpetual progress. Each day we went from strength to strength, each night knew our "moving tent a day's march nearer home." But we have not that sense of progress now, and this fact

is to us, perhaps, a great grief. Our grief may be well founded; for those who "did run well" are sometimes "hindered" and fall into slowest pace. Yet impatience with our rate of progress is capable of another construction. Our first experiences of the Christian life are in such direct and striking contradistinction to the earthly life that our sense of progress is most vivid and delightful; but as we climb heaven, get nearer God, traverse the infinite depths of love and righteousness sown with all the stars of light, the sense of progress may well be less definite than when we had just left the world behind. And in considering our rate of progress, we must not forget that the sense of progress is regulated by the desire for progress. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Vain thoughts concerning the past*:—What a softening power there is in distance; how often an object, on which you gazed with great delight while beheld afar off, will lose its attractiveness when it is brought near. Every admirer of the natural landscape is thoroughly conscious of this. Now, we are inclined to suppose that there is much the same power in distance, with regard to what we may call the moral landscape, which is so universally acknowledged with regard to the natural. We believe that what is rough becomes so softened, and what is hard so mellowed through being viewed in the retrospect, that we are hardly fair judges of much on which we bestow unqualified admiration. If, however, it were only the softening power of distance which had to be taken into the account, it might be necessary to caution men against judging without making allowance for this power, but we should scarcely have to charge it upon them as a fault, that they looked so complacently on what was far back. But from one cause or another men become disgusted with the days in which their lot is cast, and are therefore disposed to the concluding that past days were better. Whence does it arise that old people are so fond of talking of the degeneracy of the times, and referring to the days when they were young, as days when all things were in a healthier and more pleasing condition? If you were to put implicit faith in the representations you would conclude that there was nothing which had not changed for the worse, and that it was indeed a great misfortune that you had not been born half a century sooner. And here comes into play the precept of our text—"Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." To quote the words of a brilliant modern historian: "The more carefully we examine the history of the past, the more reason shall we find to dissent from those who imagine that our age has been fruitful of new social evils. The truth is, that the evils are, with scarcely an exception, old. That which is new is the intelligence which discerns them, and the humanity which relieves them." But we shall speak only of the religious advantages of different times, in endeavouring to prove "that the former days" were not "better than these." 1. And first, it ought to be carefully observed in regard of human nature that it did not grow corrupt by degrees, but became all at once as bad as it was ever to be. The being who had been formed in the very image of his Maker became instantly capable of the most heinous of crimes; and so far was human nature from requiring long familiarity with wickedness, in order to the learning to commit it in its most atrocious shapes, that well nigh its first essay after apostatizing from God was one which still fills us with horror, notwithstanding our daily acquaintance with a thousand foul deeds. Sin was never an infant; it was a giant in the very birth; and forasmuch as we should have had precisely the same evil nature whensoever we had lived, it would be very hard to show that any former period would have been better for us than the present. You may fix on a time when there was apparently less of open wickedness, but this would not necessarily have been a better time for individual piety. The religion of the heart, perhaps, flourishes most when there is most to move to zeal for the insulted law of God. Or you may fix upon a time when there was apparently less of misery; but we need not say that this would not necessarily have been a better time for growth in Christian holiness, seeing that confessedly it is amidst the deepest sorrows that the strongest virtues are produced. So that if a man regard himself as a candidate for immortality, we can defy him to put his finger on an age of the past, in which, as compared with the present, it would necessarily have been more advantageous for him to live. 2. Now, we are quite aware that this general statement does not exactly meet the several points which will suggest themselves to an inquiring mind; but we propose to examine next certain of the reasons which might be likely to lead men to a different conclusion from that which seems stated in our text. And here again we must narrow the field of inquiry, and confine ourselves to points in which,

as Christians, we have an especial interest. Would any former days have been better days for us, estimating the superiority by the superior facilities for believing the Christian religion, and acquiring the Christian character? In answering such a question, we must take separately the evidences and the truths of our holy religion. And first, as to the evidences. There is a very common and a very natural feeling with regard to the evidences of Christianity, that they must have been much stronger and much clearer, as presented to those who lived in the times of our Lord and of His apostles, than as handed down to ourselves through a long succession of witnesses. Many are disposed to imagine that if with their own eyes they could see miracles wrought, they should have a proof on the side of Christianity far more convincing than any which they actually have, and that there would be no room whatever for a lingering doubt if they stood by a professed teacher from God, whilst he stilled the tempest, or raised the dead. Why should such superior power be supposed to reside in the seeing a miracle? The only thing to be sure about is, that the miracle has been wrought. There are two ways of gaining this assurance: the one is by the testimony of the senses, the other is by the testimony of competent witnesses. The first, the testimony of the senses, is granted to the spectator of a miracle; only the second, the testimony of witnesses, to those who are not present at the performance. But shall it be said that the latter must necessarily be less satisfactory than the former? Shall it be said that those who have not visited Constantinople cannot be as certain that there is such a city as others who have? The testimony of witnesses may be every jot as conclusive as the testimony of your own senses. Though, even if we were forced to concede that the spectator of a miracle has necessarily a superiority over those to whom the miracle travels down in the annals of well-attested history, we should be far enough from allowing that there is less evidence now on the side of Christianity than was granted to the men of some preceding age. Let it be, that the evidence of miracle is not so clear and powerful as it was; what is to be said of the evidence of prophecy? Who will venture to deny, that as century has rolled away after century, fresh witness has been given to the Bible by the accomplishment of the predictions recorded in its pages? The stream of evidence has been like that beheld in mystic vision by Ezekiel, when waters issued out from the eastern gate of the temple. Yes, the Christian religion now appeals to mightier proofs than when it first engaged in combat with the superstitions of the world. Its own protracted existence, its own majestic triumphs, witness for it with a voice far more commanding than that which was heard when its first preachers called to the dead, and were answered by their starting into life. Away, then, with the thought that it would have been better for those who are dissatisfied with the evidences of Christianity, had they lived when Christianity was first promulgated on earth. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Discontent with the present unreasonable*:—The matter in controversy is, the pre-eminence of the former times above the present; when we must observe, that though the words run in the form of a question, yet they include a positive assertion, and a downright censure. 1. That it is ridiculous to ask why former times are better than the present, if really they are not better, and so the very supposition itself proves false; this is too apparently manifest to be matter of dispute: and that it is false we shall endeavour to prove. (1) By reason: because there were the same objects to work upon men, and the same dispositions and inclinations in men to be wrought upon, before, that there are now. All the affairs of the world are the births and issue of men's actions; and all actions come from the meeting and collision of faculties with suitable objects. There were then the same incentives of desire on the one side, the same attractiveness in riches, the same relish in sovereignty, the same temptation in beauty, the same delicacy in meats and taste in wines; and, on the other side, there were the same appetites of covetousness and ambition, the same fuel of lust and intemperance. (2) The same may be proved by history, and the records of antiquity; and he who would give it the utmost proof that it is capable of from this topic must speak volumes, and preach libraries, bring a century within a line and an age into every period. Is the wickedness of the old world forgot, that we do so aggravate the tempest of this? In those days there were giants in sin, as well as sinners of the first magnitude, and of the largest size and proportion. And to take the world in a lower epocha, what after-age could exceed the lust of the Sodomites, the idolatry and tyranny of the Egyptians, the fickle levity of the Grecians? and that monstrous mixture of all baseness in the Roman Neros, Caligulas, and Domitians, emperors of the world, and slaves to their vice? I conceive

the state of the Christian Church also may come within the compass of our present discourse. Take it in its infancy, and with the properties of infancy, it was weak and naked, vexed with poverty, torn with persecution, and infested with heresy. It began the breach with Simon Magus, continued it with Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, Acrius, some rending her doctrine, some her discipline; and what are the heresies that now trouble it, but new editions of the old with further gloss and enlargement? 2. I shall now take it in a lower respect; as a case disputable, whether the preceding or succeeding generations are to be preferred; and here I shall dispute the matter on both sides. (1) And first for antiquity, and the former ages, we may plead thus. Certainly everything is purest in the fountain and most untainted in the original. The dregs are still the most likely to settle in the bottom, and to sink into the last ages. The world cannot but be the worse for wearing; and it must needs have contracted much dross, when at the last it cannot be purged but by a universal fire. (2) But secondly, for the pre-eminence of the succeeding ages above the former, it may be disputed thus: If the honour be due to antiquity, then certainly the present age must claim it, for the world is now oldest, and therefore upon the very right of seniority may challenge the precedency; for certainly, the longer the world lasts, the older it grows. And if wisdom ought to be respected, we know that it is the offspring of experience, and experience the child of age and continuance. In every thing and action it is not the beginning, but the end that is regarded: it is still the issue that crowns the work, and the Amen that seals the petition: the *plaudite* is given to the last act: and Christ reserved the best wine to conclude the feast; nay, a fair beginner would be but the aggravation of a bad end. And if we plead original, we know that sin is strongest in its original; and we are taught whence to date that. The lightest things float at the top of time, but if there be such a thing as a golden age, its mass and weight must needs sink it to the bottom and concluding ages of the world. In sum, it was the fulness of time which brought Christ into the world; Christianity was a reserve for the last: and it was the beginning of time which was infamous for man's fall and ruin; so, in Scripture, they are called the "last days" and the "ends of the world," which are ennobled with his redemption. But lastly, if the following ages were not the best, whence is it that the older men grow the more still they desire to live? Now such things as these may be disputed in favour of the latter times beyond the former. 3. That admitting this supposition as true, that the former ages are really the best, and to be preferred: yet still this querulous reflection upon the evil of the present times, stands obnoxious to the same charge of folly: and, if it be condemned also upon this supposition, I see not where it can take sanctuary. Now that it ought to be so, I demonstrate by these reasons. (1) Because such complaints have no efficacy to alter or remove the cause of them: thoughts and words alter not the state of things. The rage and expostulations of discontent are like a thunder without a thunderbolt, they vanish and expire into noise and nothing; and, like a woman, are only loud and weak. (2) Such complaints of the evil of the times are irrational, because they only quicken the smart, and add to the pressure. Such querulous invectives against a standing government are like a stone flung at a marble pillar, which not only makes no impression upon that, but rebounds and hits the flinger in the face. (3) These censorious complaints of the evil of the times are irrational, because the just cause of them is resolvable into ourselves. It is not the times that debauch men, but men that derive and rabb a contagion upon the time: and it is still the liquor that first taints and infects the vessel. (*R. South, D.D.*) *Former things not better*:—As we grow older we are more prone to look back into the past. Our best days and brightest hours are those which have long since passed away. Most of the old poets have written and sung of a golden age. But it was away in the distant past. They have pictured it near the world's beginning, in the days when the human race was yet in its youth. And so every nation has had its fancied golden age. Dreamers have dreamed of its charms. A time of peace, and love, and joy, when the earth yielded all manner of fruits and flowers, and all nations lived together in harmony and peace. And the Bible, too, tells of a golden age in the far distant past. As our thoughts go back to that blessed time, we can scarcely refrain from asking bitterly, "What is the cause that the former days were better than these?" But in our text the wise man cautions us that we do not inquire wisely concerning this. The tree is beautiful when it is covered with blossoms. But is it not a richer, though a different kind of beauty, when in autumn it is loaded with delicious

fruit? The morning is beautiful when the rising sun bathes stream and flood, hill and dale with his glorious beams. But is it not another and a higher kind of beauty when, at the close of day, the sun is slowly sinking in the west, like a king dying on a couch of gold, and the fading hues of even light up the whole heavens with a glory that seems to have come down from the New Jerusalem! The field is beautiful when the fresh green blades appear, like a new creation, life out of death. But it is another and a higher order of beauty when, instead of the fresh young blade, you have the rich golden harvest. The spring is beautiful with all its stores of bloom and fragrance and song. But is it not a higher beauty, a more advanced perfection when the bloom of spring has given place to the golden sheaves and plentiful stores of autumn? Life's opening years may be beautiful, but its close may be glorious. You may have seen the raw recruit, fresh from his country home, setting out to join the war in a distant land. His laurels are yet unsullied. The keen edge of his sword has never yet been blunted. See him years afterward, when he comes home, after a long service in some foreign land. His clothes are tattered and torn; his colours are in rags; his steps are feeble and tottering; his brow is seamed and scarred; his sword is broken. He seems but the wreck, the mere shadow of his former self. But in all that is true, and noble, and unselfish, he is a braver and a better man. His courage has been tried. The tinsel has been lost, but the fine gold all remains. And so is it with the youthful Christian. In the first days of his profession, when he has given his heart to Jesus for the first time, all his graces seem so fresh and lovely. All his being is filled with joy unspeakable. Years pass on. The young professor grows into the aged Christian. His graces do not now seem so fresh and beautiful as they did forty or fifty years ago. His feelings do not flow out so steadily toward the Saviour whom he loves, nor do the tears come as freely now as they did long ago when he sits down at the table of the Lord. You would say that in his case the former days were better than these. But you do not inquire wisely concerning this. His last days are his best days. The blossoms may have perished, but you have in their stead the mellow, luscious fruit. The golden age of a nation is not always behind, lost in the myths of its earliest existence. Years of conflict, ages of revolution, centuries of daring and doing nobly, freedom's battle bequeathed by bleeding sires to sons, through long decades of stern resistance to all oppression and tyranny. It is through such a fiery discipline as this that a nation becomes truly great in all those qualities that ennoble them in the sight of God. When they stand up as the champions of right, the defenders of the oppressed, then are they entering on their true golden age, the perfection of their national existence. Nor is it true in regard to the world that its former days were better than these. Its golden age has not all passed away. A still more glorious golden age awaits it in the ages that are to come. The curse of sin is to be fully and for ever removed. The old earth is to pass away. The destroying fire will burn out the footprints of evil. And God will make all things new. A new heaven and a new earth. (*J. Carmichael, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. The excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.—Religious education:—The argument which I shall advance on behalf of this and of all other institutions with which it is the happiness of our country now to abound, having a similar object in view—the supply of wholesome education for the poor—is this, that, in providing instruction for the destitute, you confer on them a much more precious gift than in giving them pecuniary supplies for the relief of their outward and physical necessities. To this mode of stating the case I have been led by observing the remark of the wise man in the text—that "wisdom is a defence"—the possession of solid, but more especially of religious knowledge, is the means of protecting a man from many dangers and many calamities—"and money," too, "is a defence"—as the medium of procuring the outward necessities and comforts of life, it has the power of saving its possessor from numerous and painful sufferings and fears—but yet, if we compare these two defences with one another, "the excellency," the advantage will be found upon the side of knowledge or wisdom, for this reason, "that wisdom giveth life to them that have it." 1. The blessing of education is a more valuable gift of charity to the poor than the direct relief of their physical necessities, even in the way of supplying them with the resources of natural life. The gift of money will, no doubt, avail to procure the means of physical maintenance and enjoyment so far as it goes, and so long as it lasts; but then it perishes in the using—it has in it

no self-preserving, no self-renewing power. What you give the poor man to expend on food and raiment, clothes and supports him for a season; but then food is consumed, and raiment waxes old, and it avails him no longer to remember that he has been warmed, that he has been filled. He cannot feed on the memory of food, nor yet array himself with that of clothing. But lay out, on the other hand, a comparatively trivial sum in bestowing on the indigent child, otherwise the heir of hopeless ignorance, a sound and suitable instruction, and then you bestow on him a source of support and comfort which really is inexhaustible. "Knowledge is power," and being personal is permanent power. It is in a man, and therefore continues with him whatever changes may occur in his outward estate to strip him of that which is not inherent but attached—not in but about him; the gift of education gives him a means of support which is not exhausted by being used—which, if it is useful to-day, was useful yesterday, and will be so to-morrow—which is self-preserving, self-strengthening, self-renewing. And while, as the giver of life to those who have it, knowledge thus excels money in respect of permanence—no less does the former surpass the latter in respect of its efficiency. In the degree in which education is judiciously conducted does it give a human being the command of what are the highest, the mightiest, the most productive of human powers—the faculties of the rational and immortal mind—faculties which, whether acting by themselves or co-operating with corporeal energies to the production of what is needful for the support, the comfort, the refreshment, the convenience of the present state, give at once an elevated character, and an enlarged efficiency to all the individual's exertions and pursuits. By implanting, too, and conforming, the habit of thinking—prospective, serious, considerate thinking—which is one great aim and effect of education, you put into the hands of man or woman what has been well denominated "the principle of all legitimate prosperity." Not these habits alone, however, but all moral and religious principles are nursed and cherished by such an education as that of which we speak—the activity and temperance which are the parents of health—the industry and integrity, the benevolence and magnanimity, the prudence and public spirit, the rectitude and love, of which the progeny are substance, reputation, influence, domestic and social comfort—the morality which is connected by so general a law even with worldly prosperity—the godliness which "hath the promise of this life as well as of that which is to come." 2. While "wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence, the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth" intellectual "life to them that have it." It is of the nature of our intellectual, as of all our other powers, to rust through want of use; so that in him who has never been accustomed to employ his mind, the very mind itself seems to fall into dormancy, and the man to become, at length, a merely sentient rather than a rational being. Have you never witnessed cases in which the spirit has seemed thus steeped in lethargy—persons who could be kept awake only by the necessity of manual labour and the stimulants of sensual excitement, and who deprived of these, seem to suffer the suspension of their whole spiritual existence, and sink straightway into utter apathy and listlessness, finding no resources within them to employ time, or keep alive attention, when the impulse from without has disappeared—who employ their minds, such as they are, but as the slaves and instruments of body, and have their whole being rightly defined, "of the earth, earthy"? Now, to prevent this death, as it may be called, of the intellectual soul within its clayey dungeon—whether it expire in stupefaction or in agony—the only means you can employ is to supply it with that knowledge, "the excellency of which is, that it giveth life to them that have it." The capacity of intellectual exercise must be early provoked, and stimulated, and directed. The taste for intellectual enjoyment must be early implanted, and nourished, and improved. In providing, then, the means of education for the else deserted children of your city and your country, you are providing the only direct—the absolutely necessary means of rendering them worthy of the name of rational and intelligent creatures—of saving from being overborne and extinguished that which defines them human beings. You may, peradventure, give the first impulse to some master-mind which else might have remained for ever cramped and fettered without command or consciousness of its latent powers, but which, let loose by you, may mightily accelerate and advance the great march of human improvement. You may, peradventure, kindle some luminous spirit which else must have been finally absorbed amidst the gloom in which it had its birth, and which shall stream far-darting and imperishable lustre to distant generations and

distant climes. 8. While we admit, in speaking of the case of our necessitous fellow-creatures, "that money is a defence and wisdom a defence," still we say that "the excellency belongeth unto knowledge; because wisdom giveth life"—life spiritual and eternal—"to those that have it." It is "the key of knowledge" that opens the kingdom of heaven; and if this be the constitution of the Gospel, very plain it is that the state of a human soul abandoned to utter ignorance is that of a soul devoted to inevitable death. Alas! what multitudes are in this condition. But there is still another circumstance which darkens and aggravates the view we are compelled to take of the spiritually deathful power of ignorance, and it is this—that, especially amidst a condensed and crowded population, those who grow up utterly uneducated are almost sure to grow up openly profligate. The first and most direct consequence of their early abandonment without the means of education is, that they are left to spend their time in utter idleness. Led by idleness follows the twin-plague evil company, under whose noxious breath every budding of thought or emotion congenial to virtue grows sickly and expires, while every plant of deathful odour and poisonous fruit expands into dense and overshadowing rankness. In process of time such childish associations in childish folly and childish vice ripen into combinations of licentiousness and leagues of iniquity. The means are in your power of possibly, of probably averting so sad a catastrophe in a multitude of cases. (*J. B. Patterson, M.A.*) *Christianity the guardian of human life*:—We may unhesitatingly charge upon heathenism, even if you keep out of sight its debasing effect upon morals, and think of it only as a system of religious ceremonies and observances, the having a direct tendency to the destroying men's lives. It has not been merely amongst the more savage of pagans, but also amongst those who have advanced far in civilization, that the custom has prevailed of offering human sacrifices. The Grecians made great progress in sciences and arts; yet it would seem to have been a rule with each of their states to sacrifice men before they marched against an enemy. The Romans, who emulated the Grecians in civilization, appear not to have been behind them in the cruelties of their religion; even so late as in the reign of Trajan, men and women were slain at the shrine of some one of their deities. As to the heathenism of less refined states, it would be easy to affix to it a yet bloodier character: nothing, for example, could well exceed the massacres, connected with religious rites, which appear to have been common among the nations of America: the annual sacrifices of the Mexicans required many thousands of victims, and in Peru two hundred children were devoted for the health of the sovereign. What a frightful destruction of life! But we should vastly underrate the influence of Christianity in saving human life, were we merely to compute from the abolition of the destructive rites of heathenism. The influence has been exerted in indirect modes yet more than in direct. It has gradually substituted mild for sanguinary laws, teaching rulers that the oases must be rare which justify the punishing with death. And what but Christianity, giving sacredness to human life, ever taught men to erect asylums for the sick and the aged? Add to this the mighty advancements which have been made under the fostering sway of Christianity in every department of science. And how wonderfully, in promoting knowledge, has Christianity preserved life. The study of the body, of its structure and diseases; acquaintance with the properties of minerals and plants; skill in detecting the sources of pain, and applying remedies or assuagements—all this would appear peculiar, in a great degree, to Christian nations; as if there could be only inconsiderable progress in medical science, whilst a land were not trodden by the alone Physician of the soul. And need we point out how knowledge of other kinds, cherished by Christianity, has subserved the preservation of life? Witness astronomy, watching the mariner, lest he be bewildered on the waters. Witness chemistry, directing the miner, that he perish not by subterranean fires. Witness geography, with its maps and charts, informing the traveller of dangers, and pointing him to safety. Witness architecture, rearing the lighthouse on rocks, where there seemed no foundation for structures which might brave the wild storm, and thus warning away navies which must otherwise have perished. Witness machinery, providing for the poorest what once the wealthy alone could obtain, the means of guarding against inclement seasons, and thus preserving health when most rudely threatened. But it were greatly to wrong Christianity as a giver of life, were we to confine our illustrations to the bodies, in place of extending them to the souls of men. We have higher evidence than any yet assigned, that Christianity is the only wisdom which will answer the description contained in our text. It may be said

of the world, in every period of its history, "The world by wisdom knew not God." Our liability to punishment is discoverable by human wisdom, but the possibility of our escaping it not without heavenly; and hence there is no life-giving power in the former. But the wisdom which the Holy Ghost continually imparts to such as submit to His influence is, from first to last, a quickening, vivifying thing. It makes the believer alive, in the sense of being energetic for God and for truth; alive, as feeling himself immortal; alive, as having thrown off the bondage of corruption; alive, as knowing himself "begotten again" "to an inheritance that fadeth not away." "I live," said the great apostle, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And life indeed it is, when a man is made "wise unto salvation"; when, having been brought to a consciousness of his state as a rebel against God, he has committed his cause unto Christ, "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." There is needed only that, renouncing all wisdom of our own, we come unto God to be taught, and we shall receive the gift of the Spirit, that Spirit which is breath to the soul, quickening it from the death of nature, and causing its torpid energies and perverted affections to rise to their due use, and fix on their due end. And the excellency of this knowledge is, that, having it, you will have life. You cannot have it, except in the heart; for no man knows Christ who knows Him only with the head. And having this knowledge in the heart, you have renewal of the heart; and with renewal of the heart forgiveness of sin, and the earnestness of immortality. Are we not now, therefore, able to vindicate in all its extent the assertion of our text? In the former part of the verse the wise man had allowed that "wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence." But "riches profit not in the day of wrath," and "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." But they whose treasure has been above—they who have counted "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ"—they shall have a defence, a sure defence, when the rich man is destitute and the wise man speechless. They have chosen that which cannot be taken away, and which, indeed, is then only fully possessed, when everything else departs from human hold. As they soar to inherit the kingdom obtained for them by Christ, and thus lay hold on an immortality of joy through having acquainted themselves with Him as "the way, the truth, and the life," there may be none to say that "money is a defence, and wisdom is a defence"—none to say it in the face of the confounding witness of the elements melting with fervent heat, and of the shrinking away of those who have been "wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight"; but the whole company of the redeemed shall be joined by the thousand times ten thousand of the celestial host, in confessing and publishing that the excellency of knowledge is, "that wisdom," Christian wisdom, "giveth life to them that have it." (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Vers. 13, 14. Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which He hath made crooked?—The power of God, and the duty of man:—I. **WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY "THE WORK OF GOD."** This is an expression often used in the Scriptures, and has different significations. In one place it refers to the two tables of stone, containing the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God and given to Moses. In another to the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith (John vi. 29, 30). In a third to the progress of the Gospel, and to the influence of the Holy Spirit in the heart, by which a radical change is effected, and holy tempers produced (Rom. xiv. 20). In the text it is evidently used to point out to us the infinitely wise arrangement of all the situations and circumstances of the sons of men: that the bounds of their habitation are marked out by Him to whom all things in earth and heaven owe their existence. II. **THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ALTERING OR DEFEATING THE PURPOSES OF GOD.** To prove this, might I not refer to the experience and observation of all people? Our fields may be cultivated with all imaginable care—we may sow the best corn that can be procured—but if the will of the Lord be so, we can reap nothing but disappointment. If He designs to chastise a guilty people by sending a famine upon them, He can make a worm, or a dew, hail, storm, or lightning, to blast man's hope in a moment, and to teach him that except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; and that except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain (Ps. cxvii. 1). If it be His will to fill a sinner with remorse of conscience, He can make him cry out with Cain, My punishment is greater than I can bear—or with Joseph's brethren, when they imagined that vengeance was about to overtake them, We are verily guilty concerning our brother—or with

Judas, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. All hearts are in His hand; His power rules over all; none can stay that hand or resist successfully that power. III. *THE DUTY INCUMBENT ON MAN TO BE SATISFIED WITH HIS LOT.* A sinner by nature and practice, man deserves no blessing from his Maker—he can lay no claim to a continuance of present mercies, nor has he in himself any ground to hope for fresh ones—of course everything he enjoys is unmerited. Is it for such a being as this to be dissatisfied with what he possesses, because others possess more? Is it for him to think that he is hardly dealt with, while oppressed by pain, sickness, hunger or thirst—when a moment's reflection ought to convince him that anything short of hell is a blessing? The heart must be changed by the grace of God before it can rejoice in tribulation—and testify that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and it is through the belief of the Gospel that this change is effected. IV. *CONSIDERATION IS AN IMPORTANT AND PLAINLY ENJOINED DUTY*—and when we take into account the character of man, and the distractions produced in his mind by visible things, its necessity is quite apparent. Let us then consider that we are not called upon to account for the Lord's dealings, or to make the vain attempt of reconciling the seeming contrarieties in the Divine administration. If clouds and darkness are round about Him, we may yet be sure that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. His servants will one day understand, as far as is necessary, everything which now appears dark and perplexing. and in the mean season they are called to live by faith—to “take no thought for the morrow”—to “commit their ways unto Him,” and to be satisfied with the assurance that “the Judge of all the earth does right.” (*P. Roe, M.A.*) *The crook in the lot*:—A just view of afflicting incidents is altogether necessary to a Christian deportment under them: and that view is to be obtained only by faith, not by sense. For it is the light of the Word alone that represents them justly, discovering in them the work of God, and consequently designs becoming the Divine perfections. These perceived by the eye of faith, and duly considered, one has a just view of afflicting incidents, fitted to quell the turbulent motions of corrupt affections under dismal outward appearances. I. *WHATSOEVER CROOK IS IN ONE'S LOT, IT IS OF GOD'S MAKING.* 1. As to the crook itself, the crook in the lot, for the better understanding thereof these few things following are premised. (1) There is a certain train or course of events, by the providence of God, falling to every one of us during our life in this world: and that is our lot, as being allotted to us by the sovereign God, our Creator and Governor, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. (2) In that train or course of events, some fall out cross to us, and against the grain; and these make the crook in our lot. (3) Everybody's lot in this world hath some crook in it. Complainers are apt to make odious comparisons: they look about, and taking a distant view of the condition of others, can discern nothing in it but what is straight, and just to one's wish; so they pronounce their neighbour's lot wholly straight. But that is a false verdict: there is no perfection here, no lot out of heaven without a crook. (4) The crook in the lot came into the world by sin: it is owing to the fall (*Rom. v. 12*). 2. Having seen the crook itself, we are, in the next place, to consider of God's making it. (1) That the crook in the lot, whatever it is, is of God's making, appears from these three considerations. It cannot be questioned, but the crook in the lot, considered as the crook, is a penal evil, whatever it is for the matter thereof: that is, whether the thing in itself, its immediate cause and occasion be sinful or not, it is certainly a punishment or affliction. Now, as it may be, as such holily and justly brought on us, by our sovereign Lord and Judge, so He expressly claims the doing or making of it (*Amos iii. 6*). It is evident from the Scripture-doctrine of Divine providence that God brings about every man's lot and all the parts thereof. (2) That we may see how the crook in the lot is of God's making, we must distinguish between pure sinless crooks and impure sinful ones. There are pure and sinless crooks: the which are mere afflictions, cleanly crosses; grievous indeed, but not defiling. Such were Lazarus' poverty, Rachel's barrenness, Leah's tender eyes, the blindness of the man who had been so from his birth (*John ix. 1*). Such crooks in the lot are of God's making, in the most ample sense, and in their full comprehension, being the direct effects of His agency, as well as the heavens and the earth are. There are impure sinful crooks, which, in their own nature, are sins as well as afflictions, defiling as well as grievous. Such was the crook made in David's lot, through his family disorders, the defiling of Tamar, the murder of Amnon, the rebellion

of Absalom, all of them unnatural. Now, the crooks of this kind are not of God's making, in the same latitude as those of the former; for He neither puts evil in the hearts of any, nor stirreth up to it (James i. 13). But they are of His making, by His holy permission of them, powerful bounding of them, and wise over-ruling of them to some good end. (3) It remains to inquire why God makes a crook in one's lot. And this is to be cleared by discovering the design of that dispensation: a matter which it concerns every one to know, and carefully to notice, in order to a Christian improvement of the crook in their lot. The design thereof seems to be, chiefly, seven-fold. The trial of one's state—whether one is in the state of grace, or not? Whether a sincere Christian, or a hypocrite? Excitation to duty, weaning one from this world, and prompting him to look after the happiness of the other world. Conviction of sin. As when one, walking heedlessly, is suddenly taken ill of a lameness; his going halting the rest of his way convinceth him of having made a wrong step; and every new painful step brings it afresh to his mind: so God makes a crook in one's lot, to convince him of some false step he hath made, or course he hath taken. Correction or punishment for sin. In nothing more than in the crook of the lot is that word verified (Jer. ii. 19). Preventing of sin (Hos. ii. 6). Many are obliged to the crook in their lot, that they go not to these excesses, which their vain minds and corrupt affections would with full sail carry them to: and they would from their hearts bless God for making it, if they did but calmly consider what would most likely be the issue of the removal thereof. Discovery of latent corruption, whether in saints or sinners. The exercise of grace in the children of God. The crook in the lot gives rise unto many acts of faith, hope, love, self-denial, resignation, and other graces; to many heavenly breathings, pantings, longings, and groanings, which otherwise would not be brought forth. II. WHAT CROOK GOD MAKES IN OUR LOT, WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO EVEN. 1. Show God's marring and making a crook in one's lot, as He sees meet. (1) God keeps the choice of every one's crook to Himself: and therein he exerts His sovereignty (Matt. xx. 15). (2) He sees and observes the bias of every one's will and inclination how it lies, and wherein it specially bends away from Himself, and consequently wherein it needs the special bow. (3) By the conduct of His providence, or a touch of His hand, He gives that part of one's lot a bow the contrary way; so that henceforth it lies quite contrary to that bias of the party's will (Ezek. xxiv. 25). (4) He wills that crook in the lot to remain while He sees meet, for longer or shorter time, just according to His own holy ends He designs it for (2 Sam. xii. 10; Hos. v. 15). 2. Consider man's attempting to mend or even that crook in their lot. This, in a word, lies in their making efforts to bring their lot in that point to their own will, that they may both go one way; so it imports three things. (1) A certain uneasiness under the crook in the lot; it is a yoke which is hard for the party to bear, till his spirit be tamed and subdued (Jer. xxxi. 18). (2) A strong desire to have the cross removed, and to have matters in that part going according to our inclinations. (3) An earnest use of means for that end. This natively follows on that desire. And if the means used be lawful, and not relied upon, but followed with an eye to God in them, the attempt is not sinful either, whether he succeed in the use of them or not. 3. In what sense it is to be understood, that we will not be able to mend or even the crook in our lot? (1) It is not to be understood as if the case were absolutely hopeless, and that there is no remedy for the crook in the lot. For there is no case so desperate but God may right it (Gen. xviii. 14). (2) We will never be able to mend it by ourselves; if the Lord Himself take it not in hand to remove it, it will stand before us immovable, like the mountain of brass, though, perhaps, it may be in itself a thing that might easily be removed. We take it up in these three things. It will never do by the mere force of our hand (1 Sam. ii. 9). The use of all allowable means, for it will be successful unless the Lord bless them for that end (Lam. iii. 37). It will never do in our time, but in God's time, which seldom is so early as ours (John vii. 6). 4. Reasons of the point. (1) Because of the absolute dependence we have upon God (Acts xvii. 28). (2) Because His will is irresistible (Isa. xli. 10). Inference 1. There is a necessity of yielding and submitting under the crook in our lot; for we may as well think to remove the rocks and mountains, which God has settled, as to make that part of our lot straight which He hath crooked. 2. The evening of the crook in our lot, by main force of our own, is but a cheat we put on ourselves, and will not last, but, like a stick by main force made straight, it will quickly return to the bow again. 3. The only effectual way of getting the crook evened

is to apply to God for it. Exhortation 1. Let us then apply to God for removing any crook in our lot, that in the settled order of things may be removed. 2. What crook there is, that, in the settled order of things, cannot be got removed or evened in this world, let us apply to God for suitable relief under it. 3. Let us then set ourselves rightly to bear and carry under the crook in our lot, while God sees meet to continue it. What we cannot mend, let us bear Christianly, and not fight against God. So let us bear it—(1) Patiently, without firing and fretting, or murmuring (James v. 7; Ps. xxxvii. 7). (2) With Christian fortitude, without sinking under discouragement—"nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him" (Heb. xii. 5). (3) Profitably, so as we may gain some advantage thereby (Ps. cxix. 71). Motives to press this exhortation. 1. There will be no evening of it while God sees meet to continue it. 2. An awkward carriage under it notably increases the pain of it. 3. The crook in thy lot is the special trial God has chosen for thee to take thy measure by (1 Pet. i. 6, 7). Think, then, with thyself under it. Now, here the trial of my state turns; I must, by this be proven either sincere or a hypocrite. For—(1) Can any be a cordial subject of Christ without being able to submit his lot to Him? Do not all who sincerely come to Christ put a blank in His hand? (Acts ix. 6; Ps. xlvii. 4). And does He not tell us that without that disposition we are not His disciples? (Luke xiv. 26). (2) Where is the Christian self-denial and taking up of the cross without submitting to the crook? This is the first lesson Christ puts in the hands of His disciples (Matt. xvi. 24). (3) Where is our conformity to Christ, while we cannot submit to the crook? (4) How will we prove ourselves the genuine kindly children of God, if still warring with the crook? 4. The trial by the crook here will not last long (1 Cor. vii. 31). 5. If ye would, in a Christian manner, set yourselves to bear the crook, ye would find it easier than ye imagine (Matt. xi. 29, 30). 6. If ye carry Christianly under your crook here, ye will not lose your labour, but get a full reward of grace in the other world, through Christ (2 Tim. ii. 12; 1 Cor. xv. 58). 7. If ye do not carry Christianly under it, ye will lose your souls in the other world (Jude 15, 16).

III. CONSIDERING THE CROOK IN THE LOT AS THE WORK OF GOD IS A PROPER MEANS TO BRING ONE TO CARRY RIGHTLY UNDER IT. 1. What it is to consider the crook as the work of God. (1) An inquiry into the spring whence it riseth (Gen. xxv. 22). (2) A perceiving of the hand of God in it. (3) A representing it to ourselves as the work of God, which He hath wrought against us for holy and wise ends, becoming the Divine perfections. This is to take it by the right handle, to represent it to ourselves under a right notion, from whence a right management under it may spring. (4) A continuing of the thought of it as such. It is not a simple glance of the eye, but a contemplating and leisurely viewing of it as His work that is the proper mean. (5) A considering it for the end for which it is proposed to us, viz. to bring to a dutiful carriage under it. 2. How is it to be understood to be a proper means to bring one to carry rightly under the crook? (1) Negatively; not as if it were sufficient of itself, and as it stands alone, to produce that effect. But (2) Positively; as it is used in faith, in the faith of the Gospel: that is to say, a sinner's bare considering the crook in his lot as the work of God, without any saving relation to him, will never be a way to carry rightly under it: but having believed in Jesus Christ, and so taking God for his God, the considering of the crook as the work of God, his God, is the proper means to bring him to that desirable temper and behaviour. 3. I shall confirm that it is a proper mean to bring one to carry rightly under it. (1) It is of great use to divert from the considering and dwelling on these things about the crook, which serve to irritate our corruption. (2) It has a moral aptitude for producing the good effect. Though our cure is not compassed by the mere force of reason; yet it is carried on, not by a brutal movement, but in a rational way (Eph. v. 14). This consideration has a moral efficacy on our reason, is fit to awe us into submission, and ministers much argument for it, moving to carry Christianly under our crook. (3) It hath a Divine appointment for that end, which is to be believed (Prov. iii. 6). (4) The Spirit may be expected to work by it, and does work by it in them that believe, and look to Him for it, forasmuch as it is a mean of His own appointment. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *Crooked things* (with Isa. xl. 4):—These two passages contain a question and the answer to it. We are taught therefrom that God, and God alone, can make that straight which He has permitted to be made crooked—that He alone can make that plain which He has allowed to become rough. I. THE INEQUALITIES, OR CROOKEDNESS, OF TEMPORAL THINGS. 1. We must first of all grant that crooked things are not necessarily evil things. Many of them are very beautiful—

many very useful. If all the limbs of a tree were straight, how curious would be our surroundings! If all the fields were flat, how monotonous the landscape, and how unhealthy the situation! It is when crookedness takes the place of that which ought to be straight that the crookedness becomes an evil. 2. We must, secondly, bear in mind that these crooked things are made so by God—"that which God hath made crooked." There are many reasons why He has done so, but He has not revealed all those reasons to us. Some, however, are so evident that we cannot but see them. (1) He would not make this world too comfortable for us, or else we should never desire a better one. (2) He could not leave us without temptations, or else we should never be proved. (3) He could not obliterate the consequences of sin until sin is done away. Man brought these consequences on himself at the fall, and they must remain as long as sin remains. 3. Let us now glance at some of these crooked things. (1) See them in nature. There are extremes of heat and cold. No part of the world is without its drawbacks. In no country are all advantages combined. A warm land has venomous serpents, and insect-plagues infest the inhabitants. In northern countries the cold absorbs half the pleasure of human life. Tornadoes, tempests, storms destroy the verdure of spring, and spread terror and dismay. Mountains and oceans and language separate nations. The very change of seasons introduces an element of uncertainty and crookedness. (2) See it in life. Pain racks the limbs, fear, anxiety, dread, sorrow, bereavement, trial, the bitter struggle of existence, the cry of cruel want, poverty, and improvidence; the strange distribution of wealth and power, the inequalities of ability. All these things stand out prominently and in lurid brightness, among the crooked things. (3) See it in social relationships. We meet with crooked characters, and crooked dispositions in others, and are not without crooked tempers in our own breasts. There are contrary people around us, conceited people, thoughtless people, with whom we come in contact. There are changeable people, irritating people, cross-grained people, vexatious acts and foolish repartees, until, disheartened and crushed, we feel as if it were a very crooked world indeed. (4) See it in spiritual things. No sooner do we begin to try to serve and love God than these roughnesses crop up. Watch the door of your lips and see how much irreverence, how many vain and foolish words come forth. Watch your tempers, and something surely comes to put them out of gear. II. NO HUMAN POWER CAN PUT THESE THINGS STRAIGHT. How could we expect anything different? How can man contravene the purposes of an almighty God? No more can we expect to rectify things in this world than we could expect to create the world itself. III. THE GRAND CONSUMMATION REFERRED TO IN OUR SECOND TEXT—"The crooked shall be made straight." Yes; but this is by God Himself, and not by man. God shall put things straight by going down to the cause of their disorder. He will not attack the details like man would when he finds a medicine to cure a pain; but He will set the springs right, and then all the wheels will run with smoothness and regularity. (*Homilist.*) *The crooked in life*:—I. WHAT IS HERE IMPLIED. It is something crooked. What is this? It is not the same in all, but it may easily be found. 1. It is sometimes found in the mind. One complains of the slowness of his apprehension; another of a narrow capacity; another of a treacherous memory. 2. It is sometimes found in the body. Some are defective in their limbs. Some are the subjects of indisposition and infirmity. 3. It is sometimes found in our connections. Perhaps it is a bad wife. Perhaps it is a brother. Perhaps it is a servant. Perhaps it is a treacherous or a frail friend. 4. It is sometimes found in our calling or business. Bad times. Untoward events. Dear purchases and cheap sales. Bad debts. 5. Sometimes it is found in our condition considered at large. Is the man wealthy? In the midst of his sufficiency he is afraid of poverty. Has he been crowned with success? There is some circumstance that tarnishes the lustre, or mars the joy. Has he honour? This bringeth along with it defamation. Has he exquisite pleasure? It soon cloyes, and the repetition of the scene becomes insipid. II. WHAT IS EXPRESSED—namely, that God is the author of this. There is no such thing as chance in our world. Nothing can befall us without the permission and appointment of the all-disposing providence of our Heavenly Father. Now, how rational this is. Why, surely it is not beneath God to govern what it was not beneath Him to create! III. WHAT IS ENJOINED. It is to "consider." 1. So consider the work of God as to be led to acknowledge that resistance to it is useless. 2. See and acknowledge the propriety of acquiescence. (1) Remember, in order to produce this acquiescence, that your case is not peculiar. (2) Remem-

ber that all is not crookedness. (3) There is wisdom in the appropriating of your crook. (4) There is goodness in your crook. 3. So consider the work of God as to improve it and turn it to advantage. (1) Let it embitter sin. (2) You are to improve it by turning from the creature to the Creator. (3) You are to improve it, by its leading you from earth to heaven. (*W. Jay.*)

Ver. 14. In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider.—*Prosperity and adversity:*—The life of man is made up of prosperity and adversity, of pleasure and pain, which succeed one another here below in an eternal rotation, like day and night, summer and winter. Prosperity and adversity usually walk hand in hand. The Divine providence hath joined them, and I shall not put them asunder, but offer some remarks upon them both. I. I begin with the latter part of the sentence; **IN THE DAY OF ADVERSITY CONSIDER.** In the day of adversity we should consider whether we can free ourselves from it. For it happens sometimes that whilst we complain, we have the remedy in our own hands, if we had heart and the sense to make use of it; and then we cannot expect that men or that God should assist us, if we are wanting to ourselves. But most commonly adversity is of that nature, that it is not in our power to remove it; and then we should consider how to lessen it, or how to bear it in the best manner we can. We should consider that adversity, as well as prosperity, is permitted or appointed by Divine providence. God hath so ordered the course of things that there should be a mixture and a rotation of both in this world, and, therefore, we ought to acquiesce in it, and to be contented that God's will be done. Submission, patience and resignation are of a calm and quiet nature, and afford some relief, composure and peace of mind; but repining and reluctance only irritate the pain, and add one evil to another. To tell an afflicted person that it must be so, may be thought a rough and an overbearing argument, rather fit to silence than to satisfy a man. Therefore we should add this consideration, not only that adversity is proper because God permits it, but that God permits it because it is proper. Perhaps we have brought the adversity upon ourselves, by our own imprudence and misconduct. If so, it is just that God should suffer things to take their course, and not interpose to relieve us, and we ought to submit to it, as to a state which we deserve. Nature, indeed, will dispose us in such a case to discontent and to remorse; but religion will teach us to make a good use of the calamity. God may suffer us to fall into adversity by way of correction for our sins. If so, sorrowful we should be for the cause, and sorrowful we may be for the effect; but we have many motives to patience, resignation and gratitude. It is much better that we should receive our punishment here than hereafter; and if it produce any amendment in us, it serves to the best of purposes, and ends in peace and joy and happiness. God may visit us with adversity, by way of trial, and for our greater improvement, that we may correct some frailties and faults into which prosperity hath led us, or of which it could never cure us, that we may look upon the transitory vanities of the present world with more coldness and indifference, and set our affections on things above, that we may be humble and modest, and know ourselves, that we may learn affability, humanity and compassion for those who suffer, and likewise that we may have a truer taste for prosperity when it comes, and enjoy it with wisdom and moderation. Upon all these accounts adversity is suitable to us, and tends to our profit. II. One of the ends of adversity is to make us better disposed and qualified to receive the favours of God, when they come, with prudence and gratitude, and, as Solomon directs us in the other part of the text, to **REJOICE IN THE DAYS OF PROSPERITY.** 1. We ought to be in such a temper as to be easily contented, and to account our state prosperous whenever it is tolerable. 2. We ought to remember that prosperity is a dangerous thing, that it is a state which often perverts the judgment, and spoils the understanding, and corrupts the heart, that it is never sincere and unmixed, that it is also of a precarious nature, and may leave us in an instant. By being sober and sedate, it will be more easily preserved, and the less liable to pass away, and to be turned into sadness. The truest joy is an even cheerfulness, pleased with the present, and not solicitous about the future. 3. We ought to consider what Solomon, who exhorts us to rejoice in prosperity, hath represented as the most important point: *Let us hear, says he, the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this concerns us all. This is what every man may do, and this is what every man must do, and whosoever neglects it cannot be happy.* 4. If we would rejoice

in prosperity, we must acquire and preserve, cherish and improve a love towards our neighbour, an universally benevolent and charitable disposition, by which we shall be enabled to take delight not only in our own prosperity, but in that of others; and this will give us several occasions of satisfaction, which selfish persons never regard or entertain. III. THIS SUBJECT WHICH WE HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING IS CONSIDERED IN A VERY DIFFERENT MANNER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND IN THE NEW. Solomon, as a wise man, recommends it to his nation to be cheerful in prosperity and considerate in adversity. Further than this the wisdom and religion of his times could not conduct a man. But St. Paul, when he treats the subject, exhorts Christians to rejoice evermore, and consequently in adversity as well as in prosperity; our Saviour commands His disciples to rejoice and to be exceeding glad when they should be ill used for His sake; and it is said of the first believers, that they were sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, and that they had in all circumstances an inward serenity, of which nothing could deprive them. 1. Christianity represents God as a God of love and goodness, and removes all gloomy and superstitious apprehensions of Him. 2. It represents Him, indeed, as a God of perfect purity, holiness and justice, which must raise in mortal minds a dread proportionable to their imperfections and offences, that is, to those imperfections which are indulged, and to those offences which are wilful; but by the gracious doctrine of forgiveness to the penitent it allays all tormenting terrors and excludes despondence and despair. 3. It gives us rules of behaviour, which, if carefully observed, have a natural and necessary tendency to secure us from many sorrows, and enliven our minds, and to set before us happy prospects and pleasing expectations. 4. It promises a Divine assistance under pressures and dangers, and losses and afflictions, which shall raise the mind above itself and above all outward and earthly things. 5. It promises an eternal recompense of well-doing, which whosoever believes and expects must be happy, or at least contented in all times and states: and without question, to a want of a lively faith, and of a reasonable hope in this great point, and to a certain degree, more or less, of doubt and diffidence, is to be principally ascribed the want of resignation and of composure. 6. When to these Christian considerations are also added reflections on the days of our abode here below, which are few, and on the world which passeth away, a sedateness and evenness of temper will ensue, which as it is patient and resigned under changes for the worse, so it is pleased with prosperity, accepts it as a Divine blessing, and uses it soberly and discreetly. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *Considerations in adversity*.—I. THE DESIGN OF THE VISITATION. It includes—1. Correction. 2. Prevention. 3. Trial or testing of character. 4. Instruction in righteousness. 5. Increased usefulness. II. THE RELIEF WHICH GOD IS READY TO BESTOW. 1. Your afflictions are not peculiar. It is not "a strange thing that has happened unto you." 2. They happen not by chance. God's wisdom plans, and His love executes, them all. 3. They are not unmixed evil. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." 4. They are not to endure always. Only for "a moment," and then heaven! 5. We are not asked to bear these afflictions alone. (*Homiletic Review*.) *Compensations for a poor harvest*.—More than one person has said to me, in relation to the services we hold to-day, "There is no harvest worth being thankful for this year." We are like children, ready enough to find fault with their parents' arrangements, but not so ready to be thankful for the daily care and love around them in the home. These they take for granted. There is, if we have only eyes to discern it, a wonderful law of compensation running through all things. It may be discerned even in the recent harvest, failure though it seems to be. We may see this if we remember that what is usually called the harvest is, after all, only a part of the harvest of the year. The autumn is not the only harvest time, though that may be specially the time of ingathering. All the year is, in greater or less degree, productive. And this year, though a poor one in respect of the harvest of hay and corn, is, if I mistake not, an exceptionally good one in respect of grass and roots on which the cattle so largely depend for sustenance. There is another aspect of the present year's weather which should not be overlooked. We have grumbled at the continuous downpour of rain; but let us not forget that the rain which frustrated so many plans and caused so much anxiety, has replenished the springs which, through the drought of last year, had become so low that more than one English city came very near to a famine of water. And this leads me to say that very often weather which is good for one part of the country, and for one kind of crop, is anything but good for another part and for another kind of crop. And sometimes we must be content to

suffer that others may prosper, whilst when we prosper others must be content to suffer. We can't have it always our own way. Unbroken prosperity is not good for us men who are so disposed to settle on our lees, and to cry, "I shall never be moved." For let us not forget that the Divine arrangements in the lower and material world have reference to man's higher nature. They are intended to be a means of moral and spiritual discipline. And if it be so, and that it is, few who have carefully observed life, will deny; then harvest disappointment will be often counterbalanced by a more enduring spiritual gain. If earthly loss force us to lift our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help, then the gain is greater than the loss. But this principle of compensation—that one thing is set over against another—has wider applications. It seems to run through all the Divine arrangements. It applies to the different positions and callings among men—*e. g.* the rich seem to be the people to be envied; their lot seems to have no drawbacks; they seem to have everything that heart can wish. But riches do not ensure happiness; indeed, they too often lead men and women to so purposeless a life, to such a neglect of work, that life becomes a burden, and time hangs heavy on their hands. The poor man's condition, on the other hand, seems to be without any compensations—one utterly to be pitied. But, as a matter of fact, except in extreme cases, the very necessity for labour brings with it no small measure of happiness, for work has more of pleasure in it than idleness. The happiest people are those who work, whether such work be compulsory or voluntary. Nor is it otherwise with the different callings of life. Those in which men have to work with the brain seem the easiest and pleasantest, and those in which men have to work with their hands the least to be desired. But work with the brain has its drawbacks. It develops the nerves at the expense of the muscles. It brings a weariness of its own. Whilst, on the other hand, work with the hand develops the muscles at the expense of the nerves, and has its own kind of weariness. Then, too, the same remark applies to the various ages. Youth longs for manhood, that it may escape restraint; but when the restraint goes, responsibility begins. Manhood longs for rest from toil; but when the time for rest comes, the vigour of life usually wanes. In each season one thing must be set over against another—the youth's freedom from responsibility against the restraint under which he lives; the vigour of manhood over against its toil; the rest of old age over against its feebleness. There are very few conditions of life which have not their compensations; and no estimate can be fair which does not take them into account. Plato, in his "Gorgias," says to Callicles, "I exhort you also to take part in the grave combat, which is the combat of life, and greater than every other earthly conflict." And if it is to be that, it would not do for life to be without drawbacks, disappointments, trials, changes. A life sheltered from all these would be a poor affair. But though these abound, yet there are always, or nearly always, compensations, which show a gracious design even in the midst of the discipline; that it is the order of One "who doth not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men." The laws under which we live look stern and hard; but in the heart of them is a loving purpose. (*W. G. Horder.*) *Hard times*:—"Hard times!" That is the cry we hear, all the week long, wherever we go. And this, strange to say, in face of crops of unparalleled abundance! 1. We ask ourselves, what is the cause of these hard times? "Over-production," say some; others, "under-consumption." One party blames a "high tariff"; the other, "free trade." I will not attempt to discuss here the purely political or economical aspects of the case. But there is a moral cause at work, which it is the province of the pulpit to point out. At this moment, while commerce and manufactures are nearly stagnant, the money market is glutted with funds that cannot be used! Why? One answer is, for want of confidence. Monstrous frauds, disgraceful failures, outright robberies, and numberlessascalities, small and great, have paralyzed credit, and made sensitive capital shrink into itself. We want more plodding and patient industry, more incorruptible honesty. No man can revolutionize a community. But every good man has a certain power, more, perhaps, than he thinks. It is the honest men who keep society from going to pieces altogether. 2. Under cover of the proverb, "Desperate diseases require desperate remedies," certain wild proposals are put forward by professed "friends of the working man," who are really his worst enemies, whether they mean it or not. Take, for example, the Socialist idea of abolishing private property in land or anything else, making the State the universal proprietor and the universal employer, and all men's conditions equal. It is only under the maddening pressure

of hunger that just and reasonable men can entertain such schemes. In dragging down "bloated monopolists," we bury the day-labourer in the common ruin. It is like setting fire to the house to get rid of the rats! 3. What a light is cast by our present condition on the Bible sayings, "We are members one of another"; "No man liveth unto himself!" We live in a vast system of co-operation and interdependence. And this, whether we wish it or not. The ends of the earth are ransacked to furnish food and clothing. Sailors cross the seas, miners delve in the earth, woodmen hew down the forests, farmers sow and reap, mechanics ply their tools, merchants buy and sell, physicians study diseases and remedies, teachers instruct, authors write, musicians sing, legislators make, judges administer and governors execute laws—all for your benefit and mine. God has bound us up together, so many wheels in a vast machine, different members of one body. You cannot break away from it. It is as foolish as it is wicked to try to live apart, for ourselves alone, to take and not to give, to expect good only, and to complain of suffering through those around us. 4. That is a good time to "consider" what use we have made of past times of "prosperity" in preparing for days of "adversity." We must learn the old-fashioned virtues of saving and "going without." And these hard times are sent, among other things, to drive that lesson home. Those who came from the old and crowded lands of Europe are showing us examples in this that we should be wise to follow. 5. We do well to ask ourselves at this time how far the words of God by Malachi apply to our case: "Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed Me." . . . "Wherein? In tithes and offerings." 6. Not all of us feel the full pressure of hard times. If you are not thrown out of employment, if your pay is not reduced, if your investments yield as much income, if your business is nearly or quite as profitable, what special duties devolve upon you? First, great thankfulness to God. By the sharp sorrows of your less fortunate neighbours learn how good He has been to you. Do not think that it is because of your superior worth. One duty is to see that His cause of the Gospel does not suffer—to give double because others can only give one-half. Another is, to relieve the wants of deserving sufferers. 7. May I say a brotherly word to those who do feel the pressure of the times? It is a hard discipline you are passing through, very hard. But "your Father knoweth." Money and goods are not everything. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Your character, your soul, is more to you than your earthly condition. That is what God is training, and the wide sweep of this providential dispensation, affecting whole nations, also includes your individual case. Receive the chastening. Submit without murmuring. Exercise your heart in the strong virtues of patience and fortitude. "Hope thou in God." "Walk by faith, not by sight." (*F. H. Marling.*) *Sunshine and shadow*:—I. First, concerning THIS TWOFOLD WORD OF EXHORTATION. "In the day of prosperity be joyful." Prosperity then is not in itself an evil thing. Undue prosperity is not to be coveted. "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me." But prosperity which is obtained in honest fashion, accepted with a thankful heart, and employed for the glory of God, is surely one of the best boons that Heaven itself can send. Further, gladness is by no means to be prohibited. Alas! for those who would stop our laughter. God Himself is glad, His Gospel is glad; it is the Gospel of the glory of the happy God. Christ Himself is joyous. Let your hearts have their sacred outpourings; let your souls rejoice before the Lord in the land of the living. "Be joyful in the Lord." Spiritual prosperity is best of all. Be thankful and bless His name. But the other part of the exhortation is not less necessary, and is, perhaps, more appropriate to the most of my hearers. "In the day of adversity consider." What are we to consider? Not the adversity only. "Consider the work of God." So this adversity is the work of God. He may have employed agencies, but He is at the back of them. Even the devil works in chains, and can do nought apart from permission from the throne. "Consider the work of God." Look away to first causes, trace the stream to its source. When you think of this adversity as being the work of God you come to the conclusion that it is all right, that it is the best thing that could happen. It is better than prosperity if it is the work of God. II. Now we turn to the second point, AN OBSERVATION. "God hath even made the one side by side with the other." Oh, what mercy there is here. If you had prosperity all the days of your life it would be the ruin of you. He has woven our web of time with mercy and with judgment. He has paved our path of life with mingled colours, so that

it is a mosaic, curiously wrought; sunshine and shadow have been our lot almost from babyhood till now, and April weather has greeted us from the cradle, and will be with us till the tomb. If this is true in daily life, it is true also of religious experience. You must not be surprised that your way is up and down. So far as we are responsible for it it should not be so. Spiritual experience is of the switchback order after all, up towards heaven and down into the deep, but it matters little if we are going onward all the time, and upward to the glorious end. The Lord sets the one beside the other. III. This word of EXPLANATION as we end. Why has God allowed it thus to be? Why does He give us joy to-day and grief to-morrow? It is that we may realize that His way is not of a set pattern; that He works according to a programme of His own choosing; that though He is a God of order, that order may be very different from our order; that we may come to no conclusion as to the probabilities of our experiences to-morrow, that we may make no plans too far ahead; that we may not peer behind the curtain of obscurity and futurity. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 16, 17. **Be not righteous overmuch.**—The “righteous overmuch” :—When the worldling sees another anxiously caring for the things of his soul or attending earnestly to the duties of religion, he is apt to refer to this text, and to say, “Be not righteous overmuch.” At first sight one might imagine, that of this warning in this wicked world there can be no special need. And if we search among our kinsfolk, shall we find many of whom we can say, that they are “righteous overmuch”? Do we remember ever having heard, or ever having met the man who has said, “I have been ruined because I went to church too often—because I have engaged continually in meditation and prayer”? People seem to think that some degree of religion is necessary, but while they admit the fact that some degree of religion is necessary, and will take care of what is the minimum of faith and good works which will save them from damnation, they accuse other persons, who think it safer to obey the Gospel injunction which says, “go on unto perfection,” of the sin of being “righteous overmuch.” But look a little forward. A few years hence, the Lord Jesus will come again into this world to be our Judge. Before the judgment-seat of Christ, Satan, the accuser of the brethren, will stand; by our side he will stand; and when he says of any one, “I accuse him of being ‘righteous overmuch,’” what think you will be the decision of the Divine Judge? Will He say, “Oh, thou wicked servant! thou hast been very scrupulous in thy conscience; thou hast prayed seven times a day instead of twice; thou hast fasted sometimes as well as prayed; thou hast gone to church every day, instead of confining thy devotions to the Sunday; because of these things, on account of thy committing these things, thou hast committed the great sin of being ‘righteous overmuch,’ and therefore thou shalt be ‘cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth’; ‘depart from Me,’ ye ‘righteous overmuch,’ ‘into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels’”? The very thought of such a judgment proceeding from the mouth of the all-righteous Judge is so monstrous that we have only to state the case as I just have done, and by that statement we show the folly as well as the iniquity of those who would lower the tone of religion among us by this fear, lest their neighbours should commit this imaginary sin of being “righteous overmuch.” It is said, again, that too much religion makes men morose; and there are pretenders to religion both censorious and morose. Some, perhaps a vast number of those who assume to themselves the character of being religious, are like the Pharisees of old, mere hypocrites, men who deceive themselves by supposing that under the cloak of religion they may freely indulge the worst and most malignant passions of their nature. We frankly admit that they who preach against being “righteous overmuch” have here their strongest ground. But deal fairly with this case also—is it religion that has made these men what they are? Were they not morose in temper before they pretended to be religious? Were they not crafty in their dealings with the world before they became deceivers in things spiritual? You do not know any one who, having been frank, generous, disinterested, noble-hearted before his conversion, has become morose because he has learnt to love his God as well as his neighbour, and enthusiastically to labour for the promotion of his Saviour’s glory. It is true, he takes a new view of the amusements of the world; but is that of necessity a morose view? It is not moroseness but advancement, that raises the true Christian above the things of this world, which renders him independent of external things, while he can

affectionately sympathize with those who are now what he once was, and whom he hopes to see ere long, by the mercy of God, even further advanced than he himself as yet may be. For true Christianity rejoices in the spiritual progress of another. Perhaps it may occur to some that in speaking thus I am speaking rather against than for the text. But it is merely against a wrong interpretation of the text that I am preaching. One part of our text shows at once that it is not to be understood literally—that part which says, “make not thyself over-wise.” Now, they who are very fearful lest they should be over-righteous, are seldom alarmed on the score of their being over-wise. I call upon you to dismiss from your mind all idle fears lest you should become “righteous overmuch”; and in the name of our God, I exhort you to take good heed, lest you become overmuch wicked, and be not righteous enough. Oh! here is the real danger; this is the sin against which we have really need to be warned. And, ask you, how are you to know whether you are righteous enough? That is a question to which neither I nor any one else can give an answer. What, then, is the conclusion but this—“be as righteous as you possibly can; go on improving; seek to grow in grace; attend to little things, as well as great; be always careful lest you should not be righteous enough, if God were this day to require your soul of you. Be very careful lest you should be overmuch wicked; let no man scare you from your duty, in seeking to advance in the straight and narrow path, which leadeth unto life, by their suggestions that ye be not “righteous overmuch.” (*Dean Hook.*) *Strained piety*:—This text may fairly be taken as a warning against strained piety. It is a common thing for religion to run wild; for goodness to be pushed on wrong lines; for it to be strained, arbitrary, inharmonious, and exaggerated. I. It sometimes reveals itself in DOCTRINAL FASTIDIOUSNESS. Paul writes to Timothy, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” Hold fast the form, the pattern. The religion of Christ finds expression in the definite, the concrete, the intelligible. But some of us are not content until we have etherealized the great articles of our faith, made our creed vague, intangible, and generally such as it is not possible for a man to utter. De Quincey said of Coleridge, touching the poet’s endless refinements and transcendentalisms, “He wants better bread than can be made with wheat.” That is rather a common failure in our day, and especially with men of a certain temper. They refine and sublimate their creed until they nearly lose hold of the substantial saving verity. II. It reveals itself in MORBID INTROSPECTIVENESS. There is, of course, such a thing as a just introspection, that a man looks closely into his own heart and life. It is, indeed, a solemn duty that we should examine ourselves in the sight of God. And yet this duty is often misconceived and pressed to false issues. Men sometimes get morbid about the state of their health. For example, there are the people who are always weighing themselves. Their feelings go up or down with their weight; they are the sport of their gravity. We all feel that such solicitude is a mistake; it is the sign of a morbid, miserable condition. But good people are, not rarely, victims of a similar morbidity: jealous about their religious state, curious about obscure symptoms, always with beating heart putting themselves into the balances of the sanctuary. This habit may prove most hurtful. It makes men morally weak and craven; it destroys their peace; it robs their life of brightness. III. It reveals itself in AN EXACTING CONSCIENTIOUSNESS. It was said of Grote that “he suffered from a pampered conscience.” Many good people do. A fastidious moral sense. It is a legal maxim that “the law concerneth not itself with trifles,” and the court is specially impatient of “frivolous and vexatious” charges. But some of us are evermore arranging ourselves at the bar of conscience about arbitrary, frivolous, vexatious things. It is a great mistake. A true and noble conscience is tender, quick, incisive, imperative; but it is also large, majestic, generous, as is the eternal law of which it is the organ. We cannot pretend to go through life with a conscience akin to those delicate balances which are sensitive to a pencil-mark; if we attempt such painful minuteness, we are likely to be incapable of doing justice to the weightier matters of the law. IV. This strained piety not rarely reveals itself in THE INORDINATE CULTURE OF SOME SPECIAL VIRTUE. For some reason or other a man conceives a special affection for a particular excellence; it engrosses his attention; it shines in his eye with unique splendour. But this extreme love for any one virtue may easily become a snare. A literary botanist says, “Most of the faults of flowers are only exaggerations of some right tendency.” May not the same be said about the faults of some Christians? V. It reveals itself in

STRIVING AFTER IMPRACTICABLE STANDARDS OF CHARACTER. It is a fine characteristic of Christianity that it is so sane, reasonable, practical, humane; it never forgets our nature and situation, our relations and duty. But many think to transcend the goodness of Christianity; they are dreaming of loftier types of character, of sublimer principles, of more illustrious lives than Christianity knows. Fanciful ideals exhaust us, distort us, destroy us. What sweet, bright, fragrant flowers God has made to spring on the earth—cowslips in the meadow, daffodils by the pools, primroses in the woods, myrtles, wall-flowers, lavenders, pinks, roses to bloom in the garden, an infinite wealth of colour and sweetness and virtue! But in these days we are tired of God's flowers, and with a strange wantonness we have taken to dyeing them for ourselves: the world is running after queer blossoms that our fathers knew not—yellow asters, green carnations, blue dahlias, red lilacs. And in the moral world we are guilty of similar freaks. "Learn of Me," says the Master. Yes; let us go back to Him who was without excess or defect. Nothing is more wonderful about our Lord than His perfect naturalness, His absolute balance, His reality, reasonableness, artlessness, completeness. With all His mighty enthusiasm He never oversteps the modesty of nature. (W. L. Watkinson.) *The danger of being over-righteous or over-wise*:—There may be several accounts given of these words if we take them as spoken by Solomon. 1. They seem to refer to the method of God's dealing with good and bad men in this world; of which he spake (ver. 15). Be not too strict and severe in passing judgment on God's providence; be not more righteous and wise than God is; do not think you could govern the world better than He doth; pry not too far into those mysteries which are too deep for you; why shouldst thou confound thyself? 2. They may refer to religion; but then they are not to be understood of what is truly and really so; but of what passes in the world for it; and men may esteem themselves very much for the sake of it. For although men cannot exceed in the main and fundamental duties of religion, in the belief and fear and love of God; yet they may, and often do, mistake in the nature and measures and bounds of what they account duties of religion. 3. They may be taken in a moral sense for that righteousness which men are to show towards each other, both in judgment and practice; and for that wisdom, which mankind is capable of, as a moral virtue; and in both these there are extremes to be avoided; and so they are not to be righteous overmuch, nor to make themselves over-wise. (1) In not making allowance for the common infirmities of mankind; which do not only consist in the imperfections of good actions, but in such failings, which human nature is subject to in this state, notwithstanding our greatest care to avoid them. (2) In putting the worst construction upon men's actions, which is directly contrary to that charity St. Paul so much commends. Now, there are many things men do which are accounted good or evil, according to the intention of the doer of them. I do not say that alters the nature of the action in itself; for what God commands is good, and what He forbids is evil, whatever men's intentions be; but although a good intention cannot make a bad action good, yet a bad intention may make a good action evil; not in itself, but to him that doth it. And so there are two ways men may exceed in judging. In making no abatement in an evil action as to the person for the goodness of his intention. For although the action be not good by it, yet it is so much less evil; and in doubtful cases it takes much from the guilt, although not where the command is plain, as in the case of Saul. In charging persons with a bad intention in a good action where there is no plain evidence; for then it is but suspicion and an uncharitable judgment. (3) In judging men's condition towards God, from some particular actions, although contrary to the general course of them. (4) In judging of men's spiritual estate from outward afflictions which befall them. (5) In judging too easily concerning the faults and miscarriages of others. Men show their severity to others, and partiality to themselves this way; they think themselves hardly dealt with, to be censured upon vain and idle reports, and yet they are too apt to do the same thing by others. (6) In not using the same measures, in judging the good and the evil of other men. The one they presently and easily believe, but the other they make many difficulties about. (7) In pronouncing concerning men's final state in another world. Which is wholly out of our reach and capacity. For that depends upon such things which it is impossible for us to know; as the nature and aggravation of men's sins; which depend upon circumstances we cannot know, but God doth. The sincerity of their repentance for those sins. We cannot know how much they have smarted for those sins in

secret. What failings are consistent with a general sincerity. What things are absolutely necessary to salvation, of particular persons. Bold and presumptuous men are very positive and daring in such cases, but such as are modest and humble dare not go farther than God hath declared. The bounds of God's mercy. The usual terms of it are expressed in Scripture. But even that hath acquainted us that God hath not tied up Himself from some extraordinary instances of it. As in the case of the thief on the cross. 4. The mischief they bring upon themselves, by being thus severe towards others. (1) This provokes the malice of others against them. (2) It provokes God to be severe to such as show no mercy towards others. And so our Saviour understands it (Matt. vii. 1, 2). 5. We may be righteous overmuch in the moral practice of righteousness towards others. (1) That men may exceed herein. When they mind justice without mercy. The truth is, such persons are not so much as moral heathens, so far are they from being good Christians. Which so earnestly recommends charity and kindness to our greatest enemies. So that even our justice ought to have a mixture of mercy in it. When they make the law the instrument of their revenge; when they are glad they have taken their enemies at such an advantage. We may here apply St. Paul's words (1 Tim. i. 8). When they seek for no accommodation of their differences in a fair and amicable manner. (2) How this proves so mischievous to men. It makes such men's lives very uneasy and troublesome to themselves and others. For it is impossible for some to disturb others, but they must expect a retaliation. (3) It provokes God to shorten their days out of pity to the rest of the world. 6. To conclude all by way of advice as to the general sense of these words—(1) Not to think everything too much, in religion and virtue, because some are here said to be righteous overmuch. The far greatest part of mankind err the other way. (2) To understand the difference between true wisdom and righteousness and that which is not. For upon that depends the just measure of them both. (3) Be not too curious in searching, nor too hard in censuring the faults of others. (4) Live as easily with others as you can, for that tends much to the sweetening and prolonging life. If you are forced to right yourselves, do it with that gentleness and fairness that they may see you delight not in it. (5) Avoid a needless scrupulosity of conscience, as a thing which keeps our minds always uneasy. A scrupulous man is always in the dark, and therefore full of fears and melancholy apprehensions; he that gives way to scruples is the greatest enemy to his own peace. But, then, let not the fear of scrupulosity make you afraid of keeping a good conscience, for that is the wisest and best and safest companion in the world. (*Bishop Stillingfleet.*) *Overmuch*:—Many a really good man has made enemies to himself by his rigid adherence to, and unwise advocacy of, what might be called no more than a mistaken scruple; while not a few who seemed to be running well have fallen away altogether from the profession and practice of the truth, by mistaken views of their own liberty. Hence, says this instructor, beware of both extremes: "Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself over-wise"; or, in other words, do not imagine that thou hast a monopoly of the wisdom of the world. "Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?" But, on the other hand (I would that our scoffer would quote this too), "Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?" I. LOOK AT THOSE THINGS WHICH THIS PRECEPT NEITHER TOUCHES NOR FORBIDS. 1. It does not touch the idea that the whole man should be under the power of the truth. This, in fact, is needful, to have anything which the Word of God could call religion, or righteousness; for it is the heart that determines what the action is, and not the action which gives its character to the heart. The sulphurous spring, with its healing properties, takes its nature from the strata in which it has its source; and he would be a fool who should say that the water gave its properties to them. The fruit is determined by the nature of the tree, not the nature of the tree by the fruit. I admit, indeed, nay contend, that the fruit evidences what the nature of the tree is; but it does so only because the tree gives its nature to the fruit, and not the fruit to the tree. Now, in perfect harmony with this principle that pervades nature, it is the heart of a man which gives its character to the man, and to the man's life; and hence, unless his heart be right with God, he has no religion worthy of the name, and is not, in the Scripture sense, a righteous man. Let no one who is unconverted, therefore, shelter himself under a false interpretation of these words. Conversion is not being righteous overmuch; regeneration is not too much of a good thing; but contrariwise. It is that one indispensable thing without which there is no

righteousness at all, and the soul is still in sin. 2. This text neither touches nor condemns the idea that a man should be under the influence of the truth at all times; for, of course, if his heart be under its power, he cannot but be so always. Nevertheless, it is of importance enough to have a place by itself; for there are multitudes who have here, too, the most fallacious opinions. Religion, they say, is for Sabbath. Or, if they extend its province farther, and allow it to come into the week-day at all, they are careful to confine it to the closet, and never by any chance permit it to go farther. They write up on the door of their counting-room or their workshop, "No admittance, except on business"; and as they conceive Religion has no business there, she is unceremoniously shut out. "Everything," say they, "in its own place; and this is not the place for Religion." And if she is not suffered to enter the place of business, still less, if possible, is she permitted to make her appearance in the hall of pleasure. There is a time for everything; is there? "Yes," you answer, "so Solomon says." But will you please to turn to the passage, and see if, amid his exhaustive enumeration of things for which there is a time, you will find this: "There is a time for religion, and a time to have no religion." You will look for that in vain; and such an omission is of very great significance. No doubt you will say, "But then we cannot always be engaged in religious exercises." Ah! but you have shifted your ground; religious exercises is not religion. There are many so-called religious exercises, I will venture to say, in which there is no religion at all; and there are many exercises, which are not so denominated, in which there is a great deal. Would you confine the blood to the heart, and not allow it to circulate to the extremities of the body? No more need you attempt to confine religion to one place, or to imprison her into one day. She will not be chained thus to one spot; she must, and she will, have free course; and if, in your view, it is being righteous overmuch, to seek always and everywhere to serve God, then it is a sure sign that you have yet to learn wherein true righteousness consists. II. NOW, CONSIDER WHAT THIS PRECEPT DOES FORBID. 1. When other important duties are neglected for the purpose of engaging in what are called, strictly speaking, religious meetings, such a case comes clearly under the prohibition of the text. The multiplication of religious meetings seems to me to be fast becoming one of the evils of the day. I have often admired the answer of a working-man, who, being asked by his neighbour one Monday morning why he did not come out a third time on the previous day, when the minister preached an able sermon on family training, replied, "Because I was at home doing it." Now, this reply will help you to understand my meaning. I do not want the attendance on such meetings to interfere with the "at home doing it." Unless this be watched, the religion will become a thing of mere spiritual dissipation, and thereafter it will dwindle into a lifeless form, and entirely lose its power. 2. This prohibition fairly enough applies to those who, by their religious fasting and asceticism, so weaken their bodies as to render them incapable of attending to their proper work. God asks no man to starve himself for His glory. He bids us rather attend to our bodily health, and spend our strength by working in His service. 3. This prohibition touches and forbids the magnifying of small points of religious opinion into essential importance, and the thinking of it a matter of conscience and of duty to have no fellowship with those who do not hold them. 4. The principle of my text touches and prohibits all trust in personal righteousness for acceptance with God. Every man who thinks to work out his own righteousness, is righteous overmuch. Indeed, I question very much if the idea of working out something which may have merit in God's sight, is not, in one form or other, at the bottom of those things which I have enumerated. (W. M. Taylor, D.D.) *Righteous overmuch*.—In considering the text we may, I apprehend, at once, with perfect safety, decide what cannot be the true meaning of the inspired writer. It cannot, in the first place, be his design to imply that our feelings of piety and devotion towards God can strike into our hearts with too deep a root, or can press upon us with too close and powerful an influence. In the second place, it cannot be his intention to convey the idea that the sincere endeavour of any human beings to secure the eternal salvation of their souls can be too strong, too constant, or too earnest. Neither, in the third place, can we possibly err, on the side of a faulty excess, in scrupulously endeavouring to discharge all the duties of morality. If we love God, we must keep His commandments. We cannot be too watchful against temptations, too guarded against the seductions of sinful pleasure, too careful to check every intemperate and irregular

desire. Neither can we be too anxious to perform our duties towards our fellow-creatures; too kind, beneficent, and merciful, too just or honest in our dealings. It must, therefore, be perfectly clear that, when we are cautioned against "being righteous overmuch," as well as against making ourselves "over-wise," we are cautioned, not against extremes in respect to true righteousness, or true wisdom, but against mistakes in the pursuit of both these excellencies, and false pretensions to them. A person may be said to "make himself over-wise" when he mistakes the ends of true wisdom, or when he follows false wisdom instead of true, or when he pretends to possess it in matters where he is really deficient. And so, in a corresponding sense, he may become "righteous overmuch," when he professes to be more righteous than others, and really is not so, wearing his religion merely on the outside, and not inwardly in the heart; or when he mistakes the means of righteousness for the end; or when, in some manner or other, he follows and exhibits a false kind of righteousness instead of that which the Word of God, rightly understood, prescribes and enjoins. (*G. D'Oyly, D.D.*) *Be not righteous overmuch*.—1. In general, they are righteous overmuch who run into any excess in the practice of those acts which are of a religious nature, which are good, and absolutely necessary in a certain degree; such, for example, as prayer, contemplation, retirement, reading the Scriptures and other good books, frequenting the public worship of God, instructing others, abstinence, mortification, almsgiving, and religious conversation. These things are overdone when the practice of any of them interferes with other necessary duties, so as to cause them to be omitted, or when they are carried further than the health of the body, or the attention of the mind, can accompany them, or the situation and circumstances of life can admit. 2. Over-righteousness consists also in everything that is properly called will-worship—the invention and the practice of such expedients of appeasing or of pleasing God as neither reason nor revelation suggest; and which, since they are not contained in the law of nature, or in the law of God, must either be wicked, or at least frivolous and foolish. 3. Religious zeal, being naturally brisk and resolute, is a warmth of temper which may easily run into excesses, and which breaks in upon the great law of charity, when it produces oppression and persecution. The zealot pleads conscience for his own behaviour, but never will allow that plea in those who dissent from him: and what a perverse and saucy absurdity is this! 4. Over-righteousness hath conspicuously appeared in indiscreet austerities, a solitary life, a voluntary poverty, and vows of celibacy. I join all these together, because they have very often gone together. 5. This leads us to another instance of over-righteousness, which was common amongst the ancient Jews or Hebrews, namely, making solemn vows to God, without duly considering the inconveniences which might attend them. Such vows either ended in neglecting to perform them, which was perjury; or in performing them with a slovenly sorrow and reluctance, and in offending God, who loveth a cheerful giver. 6. Zeal, or righteousness, is carried beyond its bounds when men run into unnecessary danger even for a good cause. The ancient Christians had a laudable zeal for the Gospel; but it carried some of them into excessive imprudence in provoking, insulting, and defying their Pagan enemies, and seeking out martyrdom when they were not called to it. But it was observable that several of these rash zealots, when it came to the trial, fell off shamefully, and renounced their religion; whilst other Christians, who were timorous and diffident, who fled and hid themselves, and used every lawful method to shun persecution, being seized upon and brought forth to suffer, behaved, by the gracious assistance of God, with exemplary courage and constancy. 7. Another instance of over-righteousness appears in a busy, meddling, intriguing forwardness to reform defects, real or supposed, in the doctrines, discipline, or manners of the Christian community. Every one is not qualified for the office of a reformer. He hath a call, he will say: but a call to be turbulent and troublesome is not a call from God. 8. Lastly, a modest and a prudent man will not be over-righteous in the following instances: he will not be forward to rebuke all evil-doers at all times, and on all occasions, when the bad temper, or the high station of the offenders may make them impatient of censure, and draw upon him for an answer, Who made thee a judge and a ruler over us? Mind thy own concerns, and mend thy own manners. He will not be fond of disputing with every one who is in an error. It may be observed that in almost all debates, even between civil and polite contenders, the issue is, that each departs with the same sentiments which he brought along with him, and after much hath been said, nothing is done on either side, by way

of conviction. This will make a wise man not over-fond of the task of mending wrong heads. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *A perilous compromise*:—That is most soothing and comforting counsel for the indolent soul. "Be not righteous overmuch." What an easy yoke! How mild the requirements! How delightfully lax the discipline! Why, the school is just a playground! Have we any analogous counsel in our own day? In what modern guise does it appear? Here is a familiar phrase: "We can have too much of a good thing." Such is the general application of the proverb. But the word is stretched out to include the sphere of religion. The counsel runs somewhat in this wise; we require a little religion if we would drink the nectar of the world, and we require a little worldliness if we would really appreciate the flavour of religion. To put the counsel baldly, we need a little devilry to make life spicy. That is one modern shape of the old counsel. Here is the old counsel in another dress: "We must wink at many things." We must not be too exactly scrupulous. That is the way to march through life easily, attended by welcome comforts. Don't be too particular; "be not righteous overmuch." Here is a third dress in which the old counsel appears in modern times: "In Rome, one must do as Rome does." Our company must determine our moral attire. We must have the adaptability of a chameleon. If we are abstainers, don't let us take our scrupulosity into festive and convivial gatherings. Don't let us throw wet blankets over the genial crowd. If some particular expedient, some rather shaky policy be prevalent in your line of business, do not stand out an irritating exception. "Be not righteous overmuch." Now, let us pass from the Book of Ecclesiastes to another part of the sacred Word, and listen to a voice from a higher sphere. What says the prophet Isaiah? "Your wine is mixed with water." The people had been carrying out the counsel of Koboeth. They had been diluting their righteousness. They had been putting a little water into their wine. The prophet proclaims that God will not accept any dilutions. He will not accept a religion that is watered down. He despises a devotion which has been thinned into compromise. In many parts of the Old Testament this perilous compromise is condemned. "They have given their tears to the altar, and have married the daughter of a strange god." "They feared the Lord and served their own gods." This is the type of broken fellowship and of impaired devotion against which the prophets of the Old Testament direct their severest indictments. Let us pass on now to the day when the light is come, and the "glory of the Lord" is risen upon us. Let us hear the counsel and command of "the Word made flesh." "Be ye perfect;" that is the injunction of the Master. We are to carry the refining and perfecting influences of religion into everything. Everywhere it is to be pervasive of life, as the blood is pervasive of the flesh. Everything in our life is to constitute an allurements to help to draw the world to the feet of the risen Lord. This all-pervasive religion, this non-compromising religion, is the only one that discovers the thousand secret sweets that are yielded by the Hill of Zion. It is the only religion that presses the juice out of the grapes of life, and drinks the precious essences which God hath prepared for them that love Him. "Be ye perfect;" sanctify the entire round, never be off duty, and life will become an apocalypse of ever-heightening and ever-brightening glory. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*)

Ver. 20. For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.—*Man's inability to keep the law perfectly*:—Here is the undoubted character of all the human race, fixing imperfection and sinfulness on the best of the kind in this world, and so concluding all to be liable to sin, and under it. I. **WHAT IS LEGAL PERFECTION, OR PERFECT KEEPING OF THE COMMANDS.** It is a perfect conformity of heart and life to the commands of God; and implies—1. A perfection of the principles of action (*Matt. xxii. 37*). 2. A perfection of the parts of obedience. No part must be lacking, every command of whatsoever nature must be kept (*Gal. iii. 10*). 3. A perfection of degrees in every part (*Matt. xxii. 37*). Sincerity is not enough in the eye of the law. In everything one must come to the highest pitch, or there is no perfection. 4. A perfection of duration or continuance (*Gal. iii. 10*). One bad trip after a course of obedience will mar all. II. **THE ATTAINABLENESS OF THIS PERFECTION.** 1. Adam before the fall was able to have kept the commands perfectly; he might have attained it; for "God made him upright" (*Eccles. vii. 20*). 2. The man Christ, who was not a mere man, but God-man, who was not only able to keep the law perfectly, but actually did so. 3. The saints in heaven are able, and do actually perfectly obey whatever

God's will to them is (Heb. xii. 23). 4. But since Adam fell, no more man is able, while in this life, either of himself, or by virtue of any grace now given, to keep the commands perfectly (James iii. 2). This inability is owing to the remains of corruption that cleaves to every one of them in this mortal state (Rom. vii. 23), and from which they ardently long to be delivered (ver. 24). III. **HOW THE SAINTS SIN DAILY, AND BREAK THE COMMANDS.** 1. How many ways the commands may be broken. (1) In deeds done contrary to the command of God, or not done, though required. (2) In words, either speaking what we ought not, or not speaking what we ought, or speaking what we ought, but not in the manner commanded. (3) In thoughts. One may sin by thinking what he ought not, by omitting of good thoughts, and by not managing good thoughts, in the manner required by the law. 2. In what respect the saints sin daily, in thought, word and deed. (1) Negatively: not that the saints fall into gross sins daily, against the letter of the law, either in thought, word or deed. Such spots are not the spots of God's people. Christ's dwelling by His Spirit in them, the breaking of the reign of sin in them by the power of Divine grace, and their habitual tenderness and watchfulness, hold them off that way of life. (2) Positively. Besides that saints may be surprised into gross sins in thought, word and deed, sometimes by inadvertency, weakness and violence of temptation, which is the burden of their souls, they sin every day in thought, word and deed when they keep the strictest watch and have most of the Divine assistance. 3. How these failures of theirs break the commands, while they sincerely endeavour to obey them. Why, the moral law is the eternal rule of righteousness, and in whatever state the creature be, he is bound to obey his Creator, whether in a state of nature or grace, glory or damnation. And though perfection be not attainable in this life, yet it is the saints' duty as well as that of others. So every coming short of that perfection is their sin, needing to be taken away by Christ's blood. IV. **CONFIRM THE POINT, THAT PERFECTION IS NOT ATTAINABLE IN THIS LIFE.** 1. The Scripture attests that there is no man without sin (1 Kings viii. 46; James iii. 2). If any man set up for it in himself, the Spirit of God says he deceives himself (1 John i. 8). See an unanswerable question (Prov. xx. 9). 2. The best have a corrupt as well as a gracious principle, making the spiritual combat never ending till death give the separating stroke (Gal. v. 17). 3. We are taught always to pray for pardon, "Forgive us our debts"; but sinless creatures need no pardons. This clearly shows that all sin, and so come short of perfect obedience. 4. Consider the spirituality of the law and its extent with human weakness, and you will see this clearly. (T. Boston, D.D.)

Ver. 21. Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken: lest thou hear thy servant curse thee.—Listeners hear no good of themselves:—I. **WE SHOULD PAY SOME ATTENTION TO WHAT OTHERS THINK AND SAY ABOUT US.** What a force public opinion is! We cannot see it, nor touch it; and yet it is a great factor in shaping the character and actions alike of men and nations. Public opinion may be utterly wrong; and then we must oppose it at any cost, even though we stand alone. And some of us might do well to pay a little more attention than we do to the tone of thought and feeling around us. If a man see that his acts and life are giving pain to others, that he is a stumblingblock to his neighbours, even though it only be to those whom he would consider weaker brethren; and if he go on his way recklessly, regardless of what men say or think, verily he will not be able to free himself from guilt. By such thoughtlessness we are apt to harden, to irritate, to mislead our fellows. II. **WE SHOULD NOT BE TOO CURIOUS TO KNOW WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK OF US.** Some men are selfish or obstinate. They do what is pleasant; they follow the path which in their own eyes seems right. Am I my brother's keeper? they exclaim, in answer to every remonstrance. We are all one family, closely united, and at every point we are hurting or helping one another. There are thousands, however, who err on the opposite side. They allow the opinion of the world, the fashion of the day, to shape their life and character. There are many whose life is darkened for a whole day because some one has said a severe word about them and the report of it has reached their ears. It is foolish to make so much of the world's opinion. For think how much idle gossip is floating about everywhere. Sharp words are often spoken in a passion, or under a misconception, and the speaker regrets them bitterly afterwards. He is a wise man who is not anxious to hear too much. III. **WE SHOULD ALWAYS BE ANXIOUS TO KNOW GOD'S OPINION OF US, AND TO HAVE HIS APPROVAL.**

Some one may say, I do not mind what men say of me; but, oh, that I knew God's opinion of me! It is easy to know it. "The Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me." Do you love Christ? Then you are loved by God. "He that believeth not the Son . . . the wrath of God abideth on him." Have you never trusted Christ as your Saviour? Then God's wrath has its resting-place upon you. (*W. Park, M.A.*)

Ver. 28. A woman among all those have I not found.—*Solomon's estimate of woman*:—This sentence of Solomon has been often quoted to show the utter worthlessness of the female character. It is, however, an entirely worthless conclusion as regards woman when placed in her legitimate and appropriate sphere as the one sole companion of man's life in love, cares and labours. As well might the tyrant who, by cruelty, has alienated his subjects, complain that he has failed to find loyal men, as the debauchee, who has subjected hundreds to his lust, that he had found no noble, virtuous woman. It is not thus that the commerce of love is carried on. Pearls are not to be exchanged for pebbles. The law of love which God has established is heart for heart; and the affections that are dissipated among a thousand objects must ever be without return of that which yet the soul seeks—the undivided love. Of this fact Solomon seems to have had a dim perception when he gives those never-to-be-forgotten advices to the young man, to avoid the strange woman whose steps take hold on hell, and to live joyfully with the wife of his youth. It was not given to Solomon, wise as he was, to limn the picture of the virtuous woman, but to another king whose wisdom was derived from the inspiration of his mother. The words of Lemuel are well worthy of our attention, both as neutralizing the false impression produced by Solomon's philosophy, and as showing what the true woman is (*Prov. xxxi. 10-31*). (*J. Bennet.*)

Ver. 29. God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.—*Man in his original and in his lapsed state*.—I. GOD MADE MAN UPRIGHT. Our text, then, teaches us that man was made in a state of perfect conformity to some rule. If it is asked, what rule? I answer, the law of God, for this is the only perfect, immutable and eternal rule to which God requires His creatures to be conformed, and in conformity to which rectitude or uprightness consists. 1. A state of perfect conformity to the Divine law implies the possession of an understanding perfectly acquainted with that law. 2. A state of perfect uprightness, or conformity to the Divine law, implies a memory which faithfully retains all its precepts. 3. A state of perfect conformity to the Divine law implies a conscience which always faithfully applies it. 4. A state of perfect conformity to the Divine law implies a heart which perfectly loves that law. 5. A state of perfect conformity to the law of God implies a will perfectly obedient and submissive to that law; or, in other words, to the Divine government and authority. 6. There still remains one faculty possessed by man, which it is necessary to consider—that which is usually called the imagination. When man left the forming hand of his Maker, this faculty, like the others which we have mentioned, was entirely free from moral imperfection. Instead of filling the mind, as it now does, with vain thoughts, waking dreams, and worthless or sinful fancies, it presented nothing but holy images of spiritual and heavenly objects. II. THOUGH GOD MADE MAN THUS UPRIGHT, THEY HAVE SOUGHT OUT MANY INVENTIONS. 1. Men have sought out or invented many new ways in which to walk, forsaking the good old way in which God originally placed them. 2. Men have forsaken the one living and true God, in whom they live, and move, and are, and sought out or invented innumerable false gods and created idols, to which they give that homage and attention which are due to Him alone. 3. Men have ceased to be conformed to the Divine law, and have sought out many other rules—rules more agreeable to their present sinful inclinations—by which to regulate and try their conduct. Some adopt for this purpose the laws of their country; others the opinion of some human teacher; while a third and more numerous class govern themselves by the maxims which pass currently in the society of which they happen to be members. Thus, in various ways, men measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves, and therefore are not wise; for while they follow these rules of human invention, they have lost all that uprightness, that conformity to the Divine law, which has been described. 4. Notice, among the inventions of sinful man the innumerable excuses, pleas and apologies which he has sought out to

justify his conduct, and to make himself appear unfortunate, rather than criminal. (E. Payson, D.D.) *The original state of man, and the covenant of works*.—I. THE NATURAL FORM OR CONSTITUTION OF MAN, AS MAN. The primitive bodies of our first parents were not subject to the deformities and infirmities, the fatigues of labour, and the injuries of climates, or seasons, nor to distempers, violence and death which we are now exposed to; and no doubt but they were built with various beauties of due proportions, colour and form vastly superior to all that now appear in the ruins of human nature. But the chief glory of the natural form of man lies in his soul, which is an incorporeal, invisible and immortal, intelligent, free and active being, and so bears the natural image of God, as He is a Spirit. The bands of union between soul and body, and the way of their influencing and impressing one another, lie among the unsearchable mysteries of nature of which we have no ideas. But this we know, that by their union with each other to constitute a human person, the glories of the upper and lower worlds are in a sort epitomized and shadowed out in man. II. HIS MORAL STATE OR CONDITION AS AN UPRIGHT MAN. 1. With respect to his rectitude. (1) His understanding was full of light. (2) His will was perfectly holy and free. (3) His affections and appetites were all pure and regular. 2. With respect to his happiness. (1) He was a happy creature in the very constitution of his being as an innocent, upright man. (2) He was a happy creature in his communion with God and sense of His favour. (3) He was a happy creature in the pleasure of his situation, with the free use and government of all the creatures round about him. III. THE TENURE BY WHICH OR THE TERMS UPON WHICH HE WAS TO HOLD THIS MORAL STATE. It was not entailed upon him by any absolute promise that he should continue in it; nor was it put upon a mere act of Divine sovereignty whether he should hold or lose it; the first would have left no room for a trial of his obedience, and the last would have taken away a grand article of his encouragement to that obedience and of his pleasure in it. But he was to hold it by a covenant of works, upon condition of perfect obedience to the end of that state of probation in which it became the wisdom of God to place him. IV. THE CONCERN THAT ALL MANKIND HAD THEREIN. He whom God created after His own image is to be considered as a public person, who was to hold or lose that happy state, not only for himself, but for all his natural offspring. Had he stood, we had all been blessed and confirmed in blessedness with him, as upon his fall, Scripture and experience assure us, we lost it with him. Use:—1. This shows what dreadful work sin has made in the world. 2. This shows that all good is from God, and all evil from ourselves. 3. Let us be deeply affected with the present state of human nature. 4. Let us turn our eyes to the better covenant and the better Head which God has provided for our recovery. (J. Guyse, D.D.) *The state of innocence*.—I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THIS STATE WHEREIN MAN WAS CREATED. "God made him upright." 1. This supposes a law to which he was conformed in his creation; as when anything is made regular, or according to rule, of necessity the rule itself is presupposed. Whence we may gather that this law was no other than the eternal, indispensable law of righteousness observed in all points by the second Adam, opposed by the carnal mind, and some notions of which remain yet among the Pagans, who, "having not the law, are a law unto themselves" (Rom. ii. 14). (1) Man's understanding was a lamp of light. He had perfect knowledge of the lay, and of his duty accordingly: he was made after God's image, and consequently could not want knowledge, which is a part thereof (Col. iii. 10). (2) His will in all things was agreeable with the will of God (Eph. iv. 42). (3) His affections were orderly, pure and holy. 2. From what has been said it may be gathered that the original righteousness explained was universal and natural, yet mutable. (1) It was universal, both with respect to the subject of it, the whole man, and the object of it, the whole law. There was nothing in the law but what was agreeable to his reason and will, as God made him, though sin hath now set him at odds with it; his soul was shapen out in length and breadth to the commandment, though exceeding broad; so that his original righteousness was not only perfect in its parts, but in degrees. (2) As it was universal, so it was natural to him, and not supernatural in that state. Not that it was essential to man, as man, for then he could not have lost it without the loss of his very being, but it was natural to him; he was created with it, and it was necessary to the perfection of man, as he came out of the hand of God, necessary to his being placed in a state of integrity. 3. It was mutable; it was a righteousness that might be lost, as is manifested by the doleful event.

Let no man quarrel with God's works in this; for if Adam had been unchangeably righteous, he must have been so either by nature or by free gift: by nature he could not be so, for that is proper to God, and incommunicable to any creature; if by free gift, then no wrong was done to him in withholding what he could not crave. II. SOME OF THOSE THINGS WHICH ACCOMPANIED OR FLOWED FROM THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF MAN'S PRIMITIVE STATE. Happiness is the result of holiness; and as this was a holy, so it was a happy state. 1. Man was then a very glorious creature. There was no impurity to be seen without; no squint look in the eyes, after any unclean thing; the tongue spoke nothing but the language of heaven; and, in a word, "the King's son was all-glorious within," and his "clothing of wrought gold." 2. He was the favourite of Heaven. While he was alone in the world he was not alone, for God was with him. His communion and fellowship were with his Creator, and that immediately; for as yet there was nothing to turn away the face of God from the work of His own hands, seeing sin had not as yet entered, which alone could make the breach. 3. God made him lord of the world, prince of the inferior creatures, universal lord and emperor of the whole earth. The Lord dealt most liberally and bountifully with him—"put all things under his feet"; only He kept one thing, one tree in the garden, out of his hands, even the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But you may say, and did He grudge him this? I answer, Nay; but when He had made him thus holy and happy, He graciously gave him this restriction, which was in its own nature a prop and stay to keep him from falling. And this I say upon these three grounds:—(1) As it was most proper for the honour of God, who had made man lord of the lower world, to assert His sovereign dominion over all, by some particular visible sign, so it was proper for man's safety. (2) This was a memorial of his mutable state given to him from heaven, to be laid up by him for his greater caution. (3) God made man upright, directed towards God as his chief end. This fair tree, of which he was forbidden to eat, taught him that his happiness lay not in enjoyment of the creatures, for there was a want even in paradise: so that the forbidden tree was, in effect, the hand of all the creatures pointing man away from themselves to God for happiness. It was a sign of emptiness hung before the door of the creation, with the inscription, "This is not your rest." 4. As he had a perfect tranquillity within his own breast, so he had a perfect calm without. His heart had nothing to reproach him with; conscience, then, had nothing to do but to direct, approve, and feast him; and, without, there was nothing to annoy him. 5. Man had a life of pure delight and unalloyed pleasure in this state. God placed him, not in a common place of the earth; but in Eden, a place eminent for pleasantness, as the name of it imports; nay, not only in Eden, but in the Garden of Eden; the most pleasant spot of that pleasant place; a garden planted by God Himself, to be the mansion-house of this His favourite. 6. He was immortal. He would never have died if he had not sinned; it was in case of sin that death was threatened (Gen. ii. 17), which shows it to be the consequence of sin, and not of the sinless human nature. III. THE DOCTRINE OF THE STATE OF INNOCENCE APPLIED. 1. For information. (1) Not God, but man himself was the cause of his ruin. (2) God may most justly require of men perfect obedience to His law, and condemn them for their not obeying it perfectly, though now they have no ability to keep it. In so doing, He gathers but where He has sown. (3) Behold here the infinite obligation we lie under to Jesus Christ the second Adam, who, with His own precious blood has bought our freedom, and freely makes offer of it again to us (Hos. xiii. 9), and that with the advantage of everlasting security, and that it can never be altogether lost any more (John x. 28, 29). Free grace will fix those whom free will shook down into the gulf of misery. 2. This conveys a reproof to three sorts of persons. (1) To those who hate religion in the power of it, wherever it appears; and can take pleasure in nothing but in the world and in their lusts. (2) It reproves those who put religion to shame, and those who are ashamed of religion, before a graceless world. (3) It reproves the proud, self-conceited professor, who admires himself in a garment of rags which he has patched together. 3. Of lamentation. Here was a stately building; man carved like a fair palace, but now lying in ashes: let us stand and look on the ruins, and drop a tear. Ah, may we not now say, "O that we were as in months past!" when there was no stain in our nature, no cloud on our minds, no pollution in our hearts! Had we never been in better case, the matter had been less; but they that were brought up in scarlet do now embrace dunghills. Where is our primitive glory now? (*T. Boston,*

D.D.) Man's creation in a holy, but mutable, state:—I. GOD ENDUED THE NATURE OF MAN, IN HIS CREATION, WITH A PERFECT AND UNIVERSAL RECTITUDE. 1. All created rectitude consists in conformity to some rule or law. 2. The highest rule of all created rectitude is the will of God, considered as including most intrinsically an eternal and immutable reason, justice and goodness. 3. Any sufficient signification of this will, touching the reasonable creature's duty, is a law, indispensably obliging such a creature. 4. The law given to Adam at his creation was partly natural, given by way of internal impression upon his soul; partly positive, given (as is probable) by some more external discovery or revelation. 5. Adam was endued in his creation with a sufficient ability and habitude to conform to this whole law, both natural and positive; in which ability and habitude his original rectitude did consist. II. MAN'S DEFECTION FROM HIS PRIMITIVE STATE WAS MERELY VOLUNTARY, AND FROM THE UNCONSTRAINED CHOICE OF HIS OWN MUTABLE AND SELF-DETERMINING WILL. 1. The nature of man is now become universally depraved and sinful. This Scripture is full of (1 Kings viii. 46; Ps. xiv. 1; Rom. iii. 10-19, 23; v. 12, 13, 17-19; 1 John v. 19, etc.), and experience and common observation put it beyond dispute. 2. The pure and holy nature of God could never be the original of man's sin. This is evident in itself. God disclaims it; nor can any affirm it of Him without denying His very being (Deut. xxxii. 4; Ps. v. 4; 3 John 11). 3. It is blasphemous and absurd to talk of two principles (as the Manichees of old); the one good, and the cause of all good; the other evil, and the cause of all evil. (1) This would suppose two Gods, two independent beings. (2) It would suppose an evil God. 4. It was not possible that either external objects, or the temptation of the devil, should necessitate the will of man to sin. 5. The whole nature of sin consisting only in a defect, no other cause need be assigned of it than a defective; that is, an understanding, will, and inferior powers, however originally good, yet mutably and defectively so. 6. Man, being created mutable as to his holiness, must needs be so as to his happiness too. And that both upon a legal account (for the law had determined that if he did sin he must die), and also upon a natural; for it was not possible that, his soul being once depraved by sin, the powers of it vitiated, their order each to other and toward their objects broken and interrupted, there should remain a disposition and aptitude to converse with the Highest Good. (*John Howe, M.A.*) *Man's fall:*—I. MAN'S PRIMITIVE INNOCENCE. II. MAN'S ACQUIRED SIN. 1. It is striking to observe that "many inventions" is in the plural. Righteousness is spoken of as oneness, singleness of heart. But the ways of sin are many. 2. These ways are of man's seeking—sought out. All men have followed the example of Adam, seeking ways of happiness beyond what God has prescribed for them. True happiness is only to be found in His service, and if man seeks it elsewhere he will be disappointed. III. LESSONS. 1. The folly of palliating our condition, or assuming a character we do not possess. A man's character may possess much that is lovely, but the best are fallen creatures. 2. The folly of casting the blame of our sinfulness on God. God originally made man upright. 3. The folly of supposing that we can recover ourselves from the fall. 4. The blessedness of comparing our own folly with the wisdom of God, and our present wretched condition with that which He has provided. He can restore and recover us through the sacrifice of Christ, and His vicarious atonement on our behalf. (*Homilist.*) *The fall:*—At first sight it would seem almost incredible that a being endowed and circumstanced as was Adam, probably informed that not only his own happiness, but that of an unnumbered posterity, depended on his obedience to a single command, should have signally failed in his probation, and provoked a curse which the least steadfastness might have averted. Our only business now, however, in examining this matter, is with the truth that "God made man upright," and that in making him upright He had done enough for His creature. You may, indeed, say that God might have so constituted Adam that he should have been incapable of falling, and you may ask, "Why was he not thus constituted?" If you mean that human nature might have been such that to sin would have been impossible, we believe you to assert what is altogether incorrect. An incapacity of sinning is the property of no finite nature. The archangel, sublime in his prowess, is nevertheless finite—and what is finite may be measured and matched by temptation; and you must pass from the created to the uncreated, and bow down before Him who is every way infinite, ere you can find a being of whom to declare that he cannot sin because by nature inaccessible to evil. But then you will say, "If not by nature, undoubtedly by grace, our first parents might have been prevented from yielding;

grace in sufficient measure to maintain them in their obedience had been granted to many angels, and might, if God had seen fit, have been granted to man." Yes, it might; but grace, from its very nature, must be altogether free; God may give it or withhold it, according to His pleasure; and if there was no flaw in the original constitution of Adam, his powers having all that perfectness which consisted with creatureship, it could not have been at variance with any attribute of God to withhold that grace which should have kept him from falling. That God should have placed His creature in a state of probation, the trial being quite within the strength, and the reward of obedience unspeakably magnificent, you can imagine nothing more equitable, nothing more worthy every way of Deity; but there can be no probation where there is that prevention which you think might have been extended to Adam; if you allow it worthy of God to place His creature on trial, you make it indispensable that He should suffer him to fall. But if there still lurk a feeling in your minds—a feeling not to be met by argument—that it was unlike a merciful God to permit His creature to work out for himself a heritage of woe and of shame, why, then, we call upon you to remember that, whilst allowing the evil, God had determined the antidote. I doubt not the glory of an unfallen man, I question not the splendour and loveliness of an unblighted paradise; very noble must Adam have been, and beautiful amidst the surrounding creation, when God conversed familiarly with man, and earth was as the shrine of its Maker; and sublime, indeed, would have been the spectacle, and majestic our inheritance, had each of us been born in the image of God, and secured against losing the resemblance; but I would not exchange what I am, if linked by faith with the Mediator Christ, for what I should have been had Adam never transgressed. I know not what place would then have belonged to our nature amongst the orders of creation, but this I know, that now it is associated with the Divine, and imagination itself fails to measure its dignity. I know that by occupying my place, suffering and obeying in my stead, the Son of God has done vastly more than reinstate me in my forfeited possession: He has set me "far above principalities and powers"; He has opened to me happiness which is not to be reached by aught else created; He has brought me into a relationship with Deity, which could not have resulted from creation. Oh! then, to murmur because Adam was allowed to destroy us by his apostasy is to forget or deny that Christ redeemed us by His agony; to make it matter of complaint that we were suffered to fall is to repine at being placed unspeakably higher than we originally stood. It was not through any fault in his original constitution that Adam fell away. That constitution was, indeed, mutable, because Adam was a creature, and no created nature, not the very highest, can in itself be immutable. But there was no defect in Adam, unless you choose to reckon it a defect that he was finite. The understanding could immediately distinguish truth from error; the will was prompt to follow the verdict of the understanding; and the passions were all held in thorough subordination; so that, comparing the circumstances and the endowments of Adam, you may see that he possessed sufficient power for passing successfully through his probation, and that, having been created, he might, had he chosen, have continued in uprightness. Just, then, and true, and merciful was God in His dealings with the father of our race, for man could not have fallen had he not of his own will "sought out inventions." This brief description has been applicable from the first. It was that they might "be as gods," that they might "know good and evil," that they might advance themselves in the scale of intelligence, for this it was that Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit and set at nought the positive command. They tried the experiment, and, with all the consequences of failure, bequeathed to their children the fatal wish to invent good for themselves rather than seek it in God. The many inventions which we seek out; the schemes, even where there is the light of revelation, for being ourselves the authors, either in whole or in part, of our own deliverance, these are continued evidences that we are the children of those who even in paradise planned their own exaltation and thought to be wiser than God. We imitate our forefather, resolving to be ourselves the architects of our greatness, and therefore building on the quicksand; neglecting, as he did, the simple declarations of revelation, we take our own way of acquiring knowledge and learn it by being lost. Oh! for the spirit of St. Paul—"I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." I read the history of human transgression and ruin. I read it in the pages of Scripture; I read it in the throes and the convulsions of a disorganized world. I then turn to the record of

redemption. I find that God has graciously taken into His own hands the work of my salvation. I learn that, though fallen, He is ready to exalt me; though corrupted, He is willing to purify, though worthy of condemnation, He offers me forgiveness and pardon. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

VER. 1. A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine and the boldness of his face shall be changed.—*The human face*:—In all the works of God there is nothing more wonderful than the human countenance. The face is ordinarily the index of character. It is the throne of the emotions, the battlefield of the passions. It is the catalogue of character, the map of the mind, the geography of the soul. Whether we will or not, physiognomy decides a thousand things in commercial, and financial, and social, and religious domains. From one lid of the Bible to the other there is no science so recognized as that of physiognomy, and nothing more thoroughly taken for granted than the power of the soul to transfigure the face. The Bible speaks of the "face of God," the "face of Jesus Christ," the "face of Esau," the "face of Israel," the "face of Job," the "face of the old man," the shining "face of Moses," the wrathful "face of Pharaoh," the ashes on the face of humiliation, the resurrectionary staff on the face of the dead child, the hypocrites disfiguring their face, and in my text the Bible declares, "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine and the sourness of his face shall be sweetened." And now I am going to tell you of some of the chisels that work for the disfiguration or irradiation of the human countenance. One of the sharpest and most destructive of those chisels of the countenance is—I. **CYNICISM**. That sours the disposition and then sours the face. It gives a contemptuous curl to the lip. It draws down the corners of the mouth and inflates the nostril as with a mal-odour. It is the chastisement of God that when a man allows his heart to be cursed with cynicism his face becomes gloomed, and scowled, and lachrymosed, and blasted with the same midnight. II. But let **CHRISTIAN CHEERFULNESS** try its chisel upon a man's countenance. Feeling that all things are for his good, and that God rules, and that the Bible being true the world's floralization is rapidly approaching, and the day when distillery, and bomb-shell, and rifle-pit, and seventy-four pounders, and roulette-tables, and corrupt book, and satanic printing press will have quit work, the brightness that comes from such anticipation not only gives zest to his work, but shines in his eyes and glows in his cheek, and kindles a morning in his entire countenance. The grace of God comes to the heart of a man or woman and then attempts to change a forbidding and prejudicial face into attractiveness. Perhaps the face is most unpromising for the Divine Sculptor. But having changed the heart it begins to work on the countenance with celestial chisel, and into all the lineaments of the face puts a gladness and an expectation that changes it from glory to glory, and though earthly criticism may disapprove of this or that in the appearance of the face, Christ says of the newly-created countenance that which Pilate said of Him, "Behold the man!" III. Here is another mighty chisel for the countenance, and you may call it **REVENGE**, or **HATE**, or **MALEVOLENCE**. This spirit having taken possession of the heart it encamps seven devils under the eyebrows. It puts cruelty into the compression of the lips. You can tell from the man's looks that he is pursuing some one and trying to get even with him. There are suggestions of Nero, and Robespierre, and Diocletian, and thumbscrews, and racks all up and down the features. Infernal artists with murderers' daggers have been cutting away at that visage. The revengeful heart has built its perdition in the revengeful countenance. Disfiguration of diabolic passion! IV. But here comes another chisel to shape the countenance, and it is **KINDNESS**. There came a moving day, and into her soul moved the whole family of Christian graces, with all the children and grandchildren, and the command has come forth from the heavens that that woman's face shall be made to correspond with her superb soul. Her entire face from ear to ear becomes the canvas on which all the best artists of heaven begin to put their finest strokes, and on the small compass of that face are put pictures of sunrise over the sea, and angels of mercy going up and down ladders all a-flash, and mountains of

transfiguration and noon-day in heaven. Kindness! It is the most magnificent sculptor that ever touched human countenance. It makes the face to shine while life lasts, and after death puts a summer sunset between the still lips and the smoothed hair that makes me say sometimes at obsequies, "She seems too beautiful to bury." V. But here comes another chisel, and its name is **HYPOCRISY**. Christ with one terrific stroke in his Sermon on the Mount described this character: "When ye fast be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast." Hypocrisy having taken possession of the soul it immediately appears in the countenance. Hypocrites are always solemn. They carry several country graveyards in their faces. They are tearful when there is nothing to cry about. A man cannot have hypocrisy in his heart without somehow showing it in his face. All intelligent people who witness it know it is nothing but a dramatization. VI. Here comes another chisel, and that belongs to the **OLD-FASHIONED RELIGION**. It first takes possession of the whole soul, washing out its sins by the blood of the Lamb and starting heaven right there and then. This is done deep down in the heart. Religion says, "Now let me go up to the windows and front gate of the face and set up some signal that I have taken possession of this castle. I will celebrate the victory by an illumination that no one can mistake. I have made this man happy, and now I will make him look happy. I will draw the corners of his mouth as far up as they were drawn down. I will take the contemptuous curl away from the lip and nostril. I will make his eyes flash and his cheeks glow at every mention of Christ and heaven. I will make even the wrinkles of his face look like furrows ploughed for the harvests of joy. I will make what we call the 'crow's feet' around his temples suggestive that the dove of peace has been alighting there." There may be signs of trouble on that face, but trouble sanctified. There may be scars of battle on that face, but they will be scars of campaigns won. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Gospel of the shining face* (with Matt. xvii. 2):—Note the variation of the Douay version: "The wisdom of a man shineth in his countenance." We would have been glad to stand with the disciples on the mountain to see Jesus when His face shone. I. **WHAT IS THE FINAL SECRET OF A RADIANT FACE LIKE THAT OF JESUS?** 1. "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine." The genuine radiance of wisdom is not an outside application. Outward polish desirable, but not to be substituted for inward character. 2. There is a human wisdom in man that comes up through nature that seems to have some radiating quality. The reign of life begins with the creature flat on his face. Ascending orders are, on the whole, increasingly erected, until man comes, the only creature with wisdom to turn his face upward. He is the "being with the upturned face." 3. But the light of nature in man was not that which shone in the transfigured face of Jesus. This light does not come up through nature, but down from God. Entering man, it changes the qualities of the nature light. It is only when it streams out again that we also get transfiguration experiences. This light in us is the "wisdom" that makes the face shine. II. **HOW MAY WE HAVE AND SHOW THIS SHINING FACE?** 1. **COMPANYING WITH CHRIST.** The true disciple's face will always reflect the Master's light. 2. **BUSY INTEREST IN A GREAT AIM PURSUED FOR JESUS' SAKE.** In cheerful work the face will shine. 3. **FAITH IN THE COMING TRIUMPH OF THE KINGDOM.** 4. **THE IMMORTAL HOPE.** Upon the disciple's face the light is always that of the eternal city. Dying saints in pain comfort us with shining faces when we go hoping to comfort them. "Let your light shine." (*Homiletic Review.*)

Ver. 2. **I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.—Obedience to the civil government:**—Notwithstanding men differ so much in their several opinions concerning human authority, and entertain such various notions about the rise and original foundation of civil government: yet it is generally agreed upon by all sides that it is absolutely necessary that there should be such a thing as government; and the common voice of reason (as well as the practice of all ages) plainly declares that the universal good of mankind can in no wise be carried on without it. From hence it appears to be the interest of mankind in general that government should be kept up and maintained; but because men are so partial to themselves, as through pride, ambition, or revenge, to overlook and disregard the public good, when it stands in competition with their own private advantage: God in His wisdom has thought fit not to leave us to the guidance and direction of natural reason only, but has also

by His revealed will more strongly enforced our obligation to contribute in our several capacities towards promoting the public good and common welfare of society. In discoursing upon which words I propose to consider them—I. As THEY RELATED PARTICULARLY TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. They may admit of this paraphrase: I advise and counsel you to pay all dutiful submission to your king and governor, to obey his commands in all instances which are not contrary to God's laws; and thus I counsel thee to observe the king's commandment, not only in point of prudence and humane policy, because he can do whatsoever pleaseth him, and has an absolute power to inflict punishment upon such as shall dare to disobey his commands; but upon a more weighty and religious account, because your disobedience will not only render you obnoxious to the wrath and displeasure of a powerful earthly prince, but provoke to anger the great God of heaven and earth, in whose presence you have obliged yourself by an oath to bear true allegiance to your sovereign; and who (as you very well know) has denounced severe threatenings against all such as shall presume to swear falsely by his name, and has positively declared that he will not hold him guiltless who is not careful to perform unto the Lord his oath. II. As CONTAINING THE GROUND AND REASON OF OUR OBEDIENCE TO GOVERNMENT. That obedience is due from subjects to their governors is a truth fairly deducible from natural reason; and that it is the duty of all men to comply with the laws of the particular constitution of the place where they live, the Scriptures evidently declare. They acquaint us that governors are the ministers of God, appointed for the common good of society, that whosoever resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God. As for the grounds and reasons upon which our obedience to government is founded, they are many and various; some take their force from those laws which the voice of reason dictates; some from those precepts and commands which are contained in the books of Scripture; some from that personal security which it has been the custom among many nations for the supreme authority to require of the several members which are under its jurisdiction; and from those engagements and promises which subjects have given the government to which they belong, that they will obediently submit to such rules and orders as the legislative power shall think fit to enjoin them to observe. An oath is a solemn appeal to Almighty God, as a Witness and Avenger. As a Witness to the truth of what we affirm, and the sincerity of our resolution to perform and do what we promise. As an Avenger in case we deliver for a truth what we know or believe to be false, and do not actually design to perform what we promise. It is therefore a most shameful and abominable practice to play fast and loose with things of so sacred a nature: it is one of the vilest as well as most dangerous sins a man can commit, one of the greatest indignities he can offer to his Creator; it is in a manner as enormous a crime as the calling in question God's infinite truth and knowledge, and near as hazardous a provocation as that of bidding defiance to His almighty power. (*T. Payne, M.A.*)

Ver. 4. **Where the word of a king is there is power.**—*The king's word*:—The reference is, doubtless, to certain kings who lived in ancient times, perchance, for instance, to Solomon himself. But we speak to-day not of an earthly ruler, but of a heavenly. There is another King, one Jesus, who shares with His Father the throne of the universe, whose word stands fast for ever. May we love Him so well, and trust Him so perfectly, that His word, whatever it is, shall have due power with us. There is power in it, and we shall do well to yield to it at once. Happy the subjects of this holy King whose word while it is powerful is always sweet, and true, and tender. I. THROUGHOUT HIS VAST DOMINIONS THE WORD OF GOD AND CHRIST EXERCISES INDISPUTABLE AND IRRESISTIBLE INFLUENCE. How small are the kingdoms of this earth, how great and glorious are the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. I know that as yet we see not all things put under Him, but even now the sun never sets upon His kingdom, and countless worlds, for aught we know, are rolling towards His feet. He is already "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords." Alike in nature, providence and grace, He sits supreme. He is ordaining and ordering all things. Let your doubts and fears be gone; He fainteth not, neither is He weary, He is neither sleeping nor hunting, nor journeying. His sceptre is still in His hand, and the hand is not shrunken nor feeble. While God lives and reigns all is well! II. THE WORD OF A KING HAS POWER—SPECIAL POWER, PERHAPS—IN HIS THRONE ROOM. If God's word and Christ's have power in any place, they may be supposed to have

special influence in the very centre of His palace. There He sits at His Father's side, sharing the Father's glory, rejoicing in His well-deserved renown; His word has power there if nowhere else. Elsewhere, rebellion may seek to lift its hideous head, but not there. The angels wait upon Him, bright servitors, whose only joy it is to fly at His command, to do His bidding, whatever it may be. The spirits of just men made perfect circle round Him, serving Him day and night in His temple; men and women, aye, and little children too, rejoice to run the errands of the King, and so to show their love; while mysterious living creatures bow before His face and help to swell the anthem that ever rises to His praise. III. EVEN WHEN THE KING WAS TRAVELLING IN DISGUISE THERE WAS STILL POWER IN HIS WORD. He was King of hearts; He summoned men to join His train with just that irresistible "Follow Me." He was King of the elements, so that the winds and waves hearkened to His voice, and laid themselves to rest like cowed beasts within their lairs. He was King of disease, so that however virulent or long-standing, it fled and ceased at His command. He was King of death: "Lazarus, come forth," He cried, with a loud voice, and Lazarus came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes. He was King of Satan, for though the devil bade Him fall at his feet and worship him, Christ got the victory again and again. He was King of sin, for only He could say to those who had long been dead in trespasses and sins, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee." He was a King, every inch of Him, from His cradle to His grave. IV. THE WORD OF A KING HAS SPECIAL POWER IN HIS AUDIENCE CHAMBER. In the palace of which I speak, there is an apartment set aside for the special purpose of holding interviews with those who would petition the king. To its subjects of every name, and race, and degree, are always welcome; nay, our King, if I may so say, sits even in the gate, so that applicants who have not boldness to venture to the palace can still approach Him. There He stretches out His silver sceptre, welcoming all who have petitions to present and pleas to urge. In this audience chamber the word of the King has power. He permits you to pray, and that permit none can cancel. He gladly hears your arguments, and if they are such as He has prompted, they will avail with Him. There is power in His word of promise; He has never recalled one. He has never failed to fulfil one. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." He may keep you waiting a little while, according to His wisdom, but the blessing is already on the wing. If your heart is open for it, it will soon come fluttering in. V. THE WORD OF A KING IS HEARD IN HIS BANQUETING HALL. Jesus is never so happy as when He feasts His saints. He loves them to commune with Him, he rejoices when their meditation of Him is sweet, and when, instead so much of speaking to Him, they employ their spiritual powers in hearing and listening to His voice. There is power in every word He speaks, power in the invitation that He issues, and in the welcome that He utters to all. What a knack He has of making His guests feel at home. How readily He sets them at their ease. How charmingly He makes them understand that all that He has is theirs, that the good things on the table are not for ornament, but can be taken, tasted and enjoyed. VI. THERE IS POWER IN THE KING'S WORD, MORE-OVER, ON THE BATTLEFIELD. "The Lord is a Man of war; the Lord is His name." He fights, as we do, with weapons that are not carnal but spiritual. There is a sword that goeth out of His mouth, that is the word of the King's power. It strikes terror like a barbed arrow into the hearts of the King's enemies. When He sounds His battle cry, even Midian is put to confusion and to flight. On this same battlefield He inspires His followers. If He says "Up guards and at them," though we be but a thin red line, we will charge the serried ranks of the enemy. If He bids us lie in the trenches, though it may not be such congenial work, we will do it, for there is a power in His word we dare not resist. There is, moreover, enabling power in it. We can hold ourselves in reserve if God bids us do so. If He sends us out on pioneer work, or on sentry-go—this is lonely work—we will do either, for there will be sufficient grace whatever the King's orders are. His very word is omnipotent, and we are omnipotent if we obey it! VII. THERE IS POWER IN THE KING'S WORD IN FOREIGN COURTS. We talk about "the Great Powers of Europe." Comparatively speaking they are powerful, with their armies and their navies and their armaments and exchequers, but oh, there is a greater Power than all of these of both worlds rolled into one. And we are servants of that great Power, ambassadors of God who, in Christ's stead warn and rebuke and beseech. (T. Spurgeon.) *The word of a king:*—Kings in Solomon's day had a vast amount of power, for their word was absolute. When

such a monarch happened to be wise and good, it was a great blessing to the people; for "a king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes." But if he was of a hard, tyrannical nature, his subjects were mere slaves, and groaned beneath a yoke of iron. We do not sufficiently give thanks for the blessings of a constitutional government. There is, however, one King whose power we do not wish in any degree to limit or circumscribe. God doeth as He wills amongst the armies of heaven, and amongst the inhabitants of this lower world; none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou? In this we greatly rejoice. I. First, we would see the power of the word of the Lord in order to EXCITE OUR AWE OF HIM. What are we poor creatures of a day? Man proposes, but God disposes; man resolves, but God dissolves; that which man expecteth, God rejecteth; for the word of the Lord standeth for ever, but man passes away and is not. Think of the day before all days when there was no day but the Ancient of Days, and when God dwelt all alone; then He willed in His mind that there should be a world created. "He spake, and it was done: He commanded, and it stood fast." When the Lord created He used no hand of cherubim or seraphim: all that we read in the sublimely simple record of Genesis is, "God said, let there be," and there was. His word accomplished all, and when He wills to destroy either one man or a million His word is able to work His will. Oh, how we ought to worship Thee, thou dread Supreme, upon whose word life and death are made to hang! I might in another division of this part of my subject remind you of the power which attends both His promises and His threatenings. God has never promised without performing in due time to the last jot and tittle. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Hath He commanded, and shall it not come to pass? There is power in God's word to foretell, so that, when He tells what is to be in the future, we know that it shall come to pass. "Seek ye out of the book of the Lord, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate." Thus saith the Lord, "I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it." In the word of the Lord also there is power to predestinate as well as to foretell, so that what He decrees is fixed and certain. "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Let us worship the great Ordainer, Benefactor, and Ruler, whose every word is the word of a King, in which there is power. II. Secondly, we would think of the power of God's word in order to ENSURE OUR OBEDIENCE TO IT. Whenever God gives a word of command it comes to us clothed with authority, and its power over our minds should be immediate and unquestioned. The sole authority in the Church is Christ Himself: He is the Head of His Church, and His word is the only authority by which we are ruled. Every precept that He gives He intends us to keep; He does not ordain it that we may question it; He commands that we may obey. Let me refer you to what Solomon says in ver. 2: "I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment." This is admirable counsel for every Christian: if the commandment were of the wisest of men, we might break it, and perhaps do right in breaking it; but if it be the King who gives the command, even the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the King in Zion, then the advice of the Preacher is wise and weighty. Solomon goes on to say, "Be not hasty to go out of His sight." There is such power in God's word that I would have you also obey this precept, and seek to remain in His presence. Walk in communion with Christ in whatever path He may point out to you. Never mind how rough it is: do not imagine it is the wrong road because it is so rough; rather reckon it to be right because it is rough, for seldom do smoothness and rightness go together. Oh, to abide in Christ the Word, and to have His word abiding in us! Solomon then says, "Stand not in an evil thing." There is such power in the word of God that He can readily destroy you, or heavily chastise you, therefore be quick to amend, and "stand not in an evil thing." Repent, obey, submit, confess, seek pardon at once. III. And now, thirdly, TO INSPIRE OUR CONFIDENCE, let us think that "where the word of a king is, there is power." If there is a heart here that is seeking mercy, if you can go before God with such a promise as this in your mouth, "Let the wicked forsake his way," etc., that word of His is not a mere sound, there is the power of truth in it. If you do what He there bids you do you shall find that He can and will abundantly pardon. Do you tell me that you cannot conquer your evil passions and corrupt desires? Here is a promise from the word of the Lord, "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit

will I put within you." Now come and plead these precious promises, there is power in them, they are the words of a King, and if you plead them at the mercy-seat you shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus: old things shall pass away; all things shall become new. And are there any of you who are struggling at this time with a remaining corruption which you cannot conquer? Now come and lay hold of the promise that you shall overcome, and plead it before the mercy-seat. If you do but get any promise of God suited to your case, make quick use of it, for there is power in it; it is the word of a King! Then, also, are there any of you in great trouble? Remember His word, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Go and tell him that He has thus spoken, and that He has therein pledged Himself to deliver you out of all afflictions: and be sure of this, He will be as good as His word. Do you expect soon to die? Are you somewhat distressed because sickness is undermining your constitution? Be not afraid, for His Spirit teaches you to sing, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." IV. I address myself to all people of God who are associated in Church-fellowship, and striving to do the Lord's service; and to you who will be so associated here. My text is to be used to DIRECT YOUR EFFORTS. You need power; not the power of money, or mind, or influence, or numbers; but "power from on high." All other power may be desirable, but this power is indispensable. Spiritual work can only be done by spiritual power. I counsel you in order to get spiritual power in all that you do to keep the King's commandment, for "where the word of a king is, there is power." Whatsoever you find in Scripture to be the command of the King, follow it, though it leads you into a course that is hard for the flesh to bear: I mean a path of singular spirituality and nonconformity to the world. Remember that, after all, the truth may be with the half-dozen, and not with the million. Christ's power may be with the handful as it was at Pentecost, when the power came down upon the despised disciples, and not upon the chief priests and scribes, though they had the sway in religious matters. If we want to win souls for Christ we must use the Word of God to do it. Other forms of good work languish unless the Gospel is joined with them. Set about reforming, civilizing, and elevating the people, and you will lose your time unless you evangelize them. Then again, if you want power, you must use this Word in pleading. If your work here is to be a success, there must be much praying; everything in God's house is to be done with prayer. Give me a praying people, and I shall have a powerful people. The Word of the King is that which gives power to our prayers. There is power in accepting that Word, in getting it into you, or receiving it. You never keep the truth till you have received this Word of a King into your spiritual being, and absorbed it into your spiritual nature. Oh, that you might every one of you eat the Word, live on it, and make it your daily food! And then, there is power in the practising of it. Where there is life through the King's Word, it will be a strong life. The sinner's life is a feeble life; but an obedient life, an earnest Christian life, is a life of strength. Even those who hate it and abhor it cannot help feeling that there is a strange influence about it which they cannot explain, and they must respect it. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 5. A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.—A watchnight meditation.—Of all seasons of the year the present one inclines us most to thought. If, when the old year is dying, or when the new is being born, men will not think, it is very doubtful if they will ever think at all. I. A MAN WHO IS NOT UTTERLY UNWISE WILL SEE THAT THIS IS A TIME FOR REVIEW. It is said of the Emperor Titus that he used to review each day as it drew to its close, and if he could not recall anything which he had done for the good of others he set it down in his note-book that he had lost a day. It was not a bad rule for a heathen king, but hardly good enough for a Christian man. And yet some of us who live in the mid-day of the Gospel do not aim so high, with the poor result that we hit something very much lower than the mark set before us. We come short of the glory of doing the Divine will. It is bad enough to lose one day, but how about losing three hundred and sixty-five? Yes, unless it has been lived in God, consciously in Him and for Him, we may set it down as lost. Let us all find opportunity for a quiet, earnest talk with the hours of the year that has gone. Look well at the old before you greet the new. It will make the new all the better, and when in its turn it becomes old the task of reviewing it will not be so

unpleasant. II. A MAN OF WISDOM WILL SEE THAT THIS IS AN APPROPRIATE TIME FOR RECONCILIATIONS. Has there been a little rift in friendship's lute? Now is a good time for mending the instrument and bringing back the harmony, music for the King of kings. Take the tide of good feeling at the flood, and be reconciled to those whom for a while thou mayest have been alienated. "When death, the great reconciler, has come, it is never our tenderness we repent of, but our severity." Let us see to it that we enter the new year at peace with God. He is reconciled in Christ to us. Why should we stand out? III. THE WISE MAN WHO OBSERVETH TIME AND JUDGMENT WILL HEAR A VOICE AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME APPEALING TO HIS GENEROSITY. Yea, there is more than one voice speaking to us on this behalf. There is the very voice of poverty itself speaking in plaintive tones to those who have the sympathetic ear. There is the voice of our own joys and comforts reminding us of the distress of those who are devoid of these things. IV. THIS IS A TIME FOR CONSECRATION. To consecrate ourselves to God is to recognize the supreme fact of our existence and to act upon it. This is the time of all times for consecration, while the goodness of God is passing before us. As the mercies of the year marshal past us in grand and swift review let us listen to their pleading and present ourselves to God. (*T. Jackson.*) *The wise man's improvement of time:—I. THE CHRISTIAN'S SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT OF TIME.*

1. The wise man marks with a discerning eye the successive developments which time has made of God's gracious purposes towards our guilty race. 2. The man who is spiritually "wise," and divinely taught, solemnly ponders the devastations of time. And how fearful have been his ravages! He has overturned the mightiest empires, sapped the loftiest towers, and laid low the proudest cities. But above all, time has with irresistible flood swept away in succession the countless millions of our race. Tamerlane the Tartar reared a vast pyramid, formed of the skulls of those victims whom he had slain in battle; but death wages a more fatal contest over a wider field; and for us "there is no discharge from that war." Diseases in all their sad variety are his ministers; and were a pyramid to be erected by him of human bones, it would pierce the clouds of heaven. 3. The Christian marks and ponders the shortness of time. What are six, or ten, or a hundred thousand years? They are but units in eternity's countless reckoning; they are but drops in eternity's unfathomable and shoreless ocean. But when we reckon time by the period of man's life, "the days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength" in some "they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for we are soon cut off, and we flee away." Life is truly like the bridge which the moralist describes; a mighty multitude presses to cross it, but it is filled with openings through which the passengers are continually dropping into a dark and rapid river beneath, and but a few are left; and as these approach the other side they, too, fall through and perish. The Christian, "knowing the time," learns to die daily; he cherishes more and more of the pilgrim spirit, and in all his plans and prospects he acts continually under the practical influence of the apostle's appeal (*James iv. 13-15*). Ye merchants and busy tradesmen, I ask, is it thus in your case? Is such wise discernment of the shortness of time yours? 4. The wise man's heart also discerneth the swiftness of time. And thus it is that human life is compared to "a tale that is told," to "the weaver's shuttle" flying rapidly across the web. 5. Finally, the Christian discerns that time is a precious talent for which he must give an account. II. THE LESSONS AND DUTIES SUGGESTED BY THE YEAR THAT IS PAST, AND THAT WHICH HAS NOW BEGUN. 1. In a public and national sense this has been a truly memorable year. 2. The past year is memorable in the review of it, in your history as families. 3. How solemn and affecting to you as a congregation is the review of the past year! III. IN REFERENCE TO THE YEAR ON WHICH WE HAVE NOW ENTERED, WHAT IMPORTANT DUTIES DEVOLVE UPON US! 1. Let us never forget that as we live in a world of change, it becomes us to expect changes and trials, and to calculate upon the probability of being called away by death, ere the year has closed. 2. Let the disciples of the Lord Jesus remember their solemn responsibility to live for the glory of God. 3. Finally, let us unite our prayers with those of the people of God of every name who are met at this season to supplicate, with one accord, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Church and the world. (*John Weir.*)

Ver. 8. **There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit.—Death an unpreventable exit of the spirit:—1.** It is implied that man has a spirit.

2. Man's power over his spirit is not absolute. He has some power over it; power to excite it to action, direct its thoughts, control its impulses, train its faculties, and develop its wonderful resources. Self-government is the duty of every man. But whatever the amount of power he may have over his spirit, he is utterly unable to "retain" it here, to keep it in permanent connection with the body. From this fact I deduce three practical lessons. I. WE SHOULD TAKE PROPER CARE OF THIS "SPIRIT" WHILE WE HAVE IT WITH US. II. WE SHOULD KEEP THIS "SPIRIT" EVER IN READINESS FOR ITS EXIT. It requires to have its errors corrected, its guilt removed, its pollutions cleansed away. III. EFFORTS FOR THE PERMANENT ENTERTAINMENT OF THIS "SPIRIT" HERE ARE TO THE LAST DEGREE UNWISE. What are men doing here? On all hands they are endeavouring to provide for their spirits a permanent entertainment. "Soul, thou hast much goods," etc. "Wherefore do ye spend your labour for that which satisfieth not?" (*Homilist.*) *The uncertainty of life*:—Autumn, with its tinted leaves, its slanting shadows, and brief sunshine, points out the same truth as the text. Man is powerless—much as he might wish it—to check the fast falling shower of faded foliage, or to throw back the shadows of the sundial. The fortune of the world could not procure a moment's respite from that silent and regular work of decay which is going on in the surrounding world. So, likewise, "No man hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit." Each one of us must gradually pass away from the visible universe. When that solemn moment arrives, there will be those who would long to retain us by their side—those who have yet to learn that the "communion of saints" is not broken by the accident of death. And yet it cannot be; we must let go our hold of the departing soul. Others will long and vainly struggle to remain behind themselves. As we contemplate the prospect of death, a new stimulus should be given to duty and action. For it has been well said, "Duty is done with all energy then only when we feel 'the night cometh when no man can work' in all its force." Let me lead your thoughts then for a brief space in this direction. "Redeem the time." This is the precept, the echo of a past inspiration, which the Holy Spirit of God would still sound in our ears as we look forward to the termination of present life. Spend the life in earnest, and as if the whole future depended upon it. Spend to-day as if there were no certain to-morrow. Be watchful about little things, and especially the brief moments of time. The few pence and the fragments of food have their value. (*A. Williamson, M.A.*) *There is no discharge in that war.*—*The battle of life*:—The leaves are always falling from the forest trees in autumn-time. Unheard, unnoticed, they flutter every morning to the ground, but anon there is a crash in the forest as a giant tree, decayed, comes headlong to the earth, and the winds that helped to bring it down seem to moan among the trees that still stand firm. "Howl, fir-tree, for the cedar has fallen." Sometimes even the falling of a leaf is noticed, if it happens to tumble down exactly at one's feet, or even the falling of a little branch or twig will startle one, should it chance to light upon one's head or hand. It is even so with mortals in the matter of death. I. THERE IS NO "CASTING OFF" OF WEAPONS IN THE WAR. In every other war there is, for one or other of the contending parties obtains a return in triumph, a blowing of the trumpet and a beating of the drums, an unharnessing of armour and a laying by of sword and spear and shield, a tide of congratulations flowing in from king or queen, and from a grateful country that has been delivered from impending danger. "But," says the Procher, "there is no casting off of weapons in that war." It must be fought out to the bitter end, it must be waged till the vanquished combatant at last surrenders at discretion to the Black Prince of death. The struggle begins at birth. What tussles the infants have for life! Have we not seen them from their earliest breath fighting with the dragon that, as it were, waited for their birth? Fight, little stranger, fight! Fight thou must if thou wouldst live at all, for there are, even in thy weakest days, a thousand enemies who fain would drain thy life away! Moreover, the fight is specially fierce at times. When sickness threatens, and disease invades, and when we are called to pass through places specially unwholesome, or to engage in occupations peculiarly perilous, oh, how hot the battle then becomes. II. Another rendering of this remarkable expression will give us this idea, THERE IS NO "CASTING OF" WEAPONS IN THAT WAR. By this, I understand that there is not in any mortal hand a weapon, of whatsoever a description, that is likely to avail against this king of fears. You know how it is in the present day with the art of war, as some are pleased to call it. If one man invents a gun

of special calibre, or a bullet of peculiarly penetrating powers, another forthwith invents an armour that resists them both; this has no parallel in the matter of life and death. There can be found for death's shot and shell no armour that can resist it. Goliath's spear, though it be like a weaver's beam, will not defend him from the stroke of death; Saul's javelin, though he aim it better than when he cast it at active David, is not likely to pierce death to the wall; and the gilded sword of bribery, with its jewelled hilt, is vain against this adversary. Elizabeth exclaimed, "All my possessions for a moment of time!" but there was no casting of the weapons in that war, even for the virgin queen. We are virtually defenceless. "It is appointed unto man to die." III. Yet, again, there is this rendering of the passage. "THERE IS NO SENDING OF A SUBSTITUTE IN THAT WAR." I believe that the conscription, where it obtains, allows for substitution; that one may, at least on certain conditions, send another in his place to serve his country; but there is no such provision here. There is, indeed, the possibility of one taking another's place temporarily. A brave miner, for instance, has said to another in equal peril with himself, "Only one of us can get out of this: you may go, and I will die." "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." If this be true, is it not very marvellous how unconcerned most are! It was enjoined upon the ancient Thebans that before they erected a house they should build a sepulchre in its neighbourhood, and the Egyptians were wise enough to bring round at their feasts an image of death, that the guests might be reminded of their mortality. "Ponder, O man, eternity," for "there is no sending of a substitute in that war." IV. THERE IS NO EXEMPTION FROM FIGHTING IN THIS BATTLE—no excuse from joining in this campaign. We all are hastening to the bourne from which no traveller returns. You know that in the days of Moses there were certain exemptions and excuses in connection with the military service. Such was the mercy of God that He arranged that, if a man had built a new house, he was not called to take up arms, he must go and dedicate it. After the house-warming he might go to the battle, but not before. Or if one had planted a vineyard, he should wait till he had eaten of it, lest another should reap the result of his labours. 'Twas the same with the newly-married man; and for the faint-hearted there was this kind provision made, that they should go back to their homes; not, indeed, so much for their own sakes, as lest their brethren should become faint-hearted too. There are no such considerations in this case: there cannot be. I heard only last week of one who was married for two short days, and was taken under heartrending circumstances from his bride. We sometimes talk about sudden death, and it is awfully sudden for those who are looking on and living still, but I believe there should be no such thing as sudden death to any who know the power of death and the certainty of it. (*T. Spurgeon.*)

Christian life-service:—I would use our text as an illustration of the Christian life and the Christian's life allegiance: "There is no discharge in that war." I. SO RUNS THE SUMMONS. Now, this Book of God is full of sentences which bind the conscience of every believer, and compel an irrevocable self-consecration. But, aside from all the direct expressions of Scripture, is the spirit of the Christ life to which we are conformed, commanding in the consecration which it exhibits and influences. Oh, how soon the soldier comes to mirror his captain! There was somewhat of Napoleon in every member of the Old Guard—somewhat of his fortitude, his steadfastness, his untiring perseverance, whatsoever might be the harassing or hindering circumstances of the march. Even so does he who has given his pledge to Christ, and who persistently avows his relationship to Him, come to receive somewhat of the spirit of Christ and His constancy of devotion. There are no vacations, there are no furloughs, there are no personal interests. "If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me"—day by day, year by year, even unto the end—saith the Lord who hath redeemed us. II. BUT beyond the summons, "There is no discharge in that war," so GLADLY RESPONDS THE SOLDIER. There is no joy like that of those who go forth to those daily battles against sin in the name of the God of Israel. Their battle songs would befit a banquet, and their triumph of spirit is a presage and earnest of their triumph of possession. 1. Gratitude inspires consecration. "There is no discharge in that war," responds the soldier gladly. "What shall I render unto the Lord?" is the constant self-inquiry. Such a grateful soul is covetous most of all of opportunities. He does not check the calls upon him for exertion. He seeks everywhere for occasions to manifest the love which swells and rulos within him. 2. But hope expects coronation! It is the mainspring of the wheel.

It is the life-preserver on the tide. It is the double wing of the soul in its effort to rise above the things restraining and hindering it. And every believer responds, "There is no discharge in that war"; I want none; for hope expects coronation. It is not presumptuous hope, because it is founded upon the purposes of the Word of God. III. So **REQUIRES THE SERVICE**. Thus does our Divine Saviour sum up the work He does for us, in us, and by us. That which He makes the great impulse of our hearts is also a necessity of our work. 1. We have the conflict with evil about us. John Wesley's old motto is the grand talisman of success: "We are all at it; we are always at it." Such steadfastness in Christian example and influence is that for which the times most imperatively cry. 2. But beyond that there is the conquest of sin in thine own soul to which thou art called; for "better is he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city." Time after time God's people are tempted to return to the city from which they have set out, and there is that within them which is constantly hinting, suggesting, constraining them to return. Now, if thou art to meet this, thou must battle by little and by little. Character is not built up in a day; it is a very slow process, even as God changes the contour of the earth. No volcanic action in the sudden manifestation of power is to be expected. No man grows instantly very good or very bad. By steps we descend, and by steps we ascend in our tendency towards God. But there is never a time when we outgrow this necessity of conflict in this world. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. **All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun.**—*The contemplation of human life*:—The writer means, by "applying his heart," the exercise of his attention and his judgment. He observed, thought, and formed opinions on the works of men spread over the earth. We are placed in a very busy world, full of "works," transactions, events, varieties of human character and action. We witness them—hear of them—think of them—talk of them. Now, it is a matter of great importance that we should do this wisely, so as to turn these things to a profitable account. In the first place, if this attention to the actions and events of the world be employed merely in the way of amusement, there will be little good. It is so with many. They have no fixed, serious interest and purpose to occupy their minds; no grand home-business within their own spirits. Yet they must have something to keep their faculties in a pleasant activity, or call it play. The mind, therefore, flies out as naturally and eagerly as a bird would from an opened cage. The attention rambles hither and thither, with light momentary notices of things; great and small;—here, there or yonder; it is all one; "welcome!" and "begone!" to each in turn. Now, how useless is such a manner of "applying the heart"! But there may be another manner much worse than useless. For attention may be exercised on the actions, characters and events among mankind in the direct service of the evil passions; in the disposition of a savage beast, or an evil spirit; in a keen watchfulness to descry weakness, in order to make a prey of it:—in an attentive observation of mistake, ignorance, carelessness, or untoward accidents,—in order to seize, with remorseless selfishness, unjust advantages;—in a penetrating inquisition into men's conduct and character in order to blast them; or (in a lighter mood) to turn them indiscriminately to ridicule. Or there may be such an exercise in the temper of envy, jealousy or revenge; or (somewhat more excusably, but still mischievously) for the purpose of exalting the observer in his own estimation. But there would be no end of describing the useless and pernicious modes of doing that which our text expresses. Let us try to form some notion of what would be the right one. In doing so there is one most important consideration to be kept in mind; that is, the necessity of having just principles or rules to be applied in our observation of the world. With the aid of those we are to look on this busy mingled scene of all kinds of actions and events. And we might specify two or three chief points of view in which we should exercise this attention and judgment. And the grand primary reference with which we survey the world of human action should be to God; we should not be in this respect "without God in the world." We are exercising our little faculty on the scene; let us recollect One whose intelligence pervades it all, and is perfect in every point of it! Let us think, again, while we are judging He is judging! "There is at this instant a perfected estimate in an unseen mind of this that I am thinking how to estimate!—if that judgment could lighten on me, and on its subject——!" Our minds, also, should be habituated, in looking at this world

of actions, to recognize the Divine government over it all; to reflect that there is one sovereign, comprehensive scheme, proceeding on, to which they are all in subordination. Again, our exercise of observation and judgment on men's actions should have a reference to the object of forming a true estimate of human nature. How idle to be indulging in speculative and visionary theories about this in the midst of a world of facts! In connection with this, we may add that the observant judgment of the actions of mankind should have some reference to the illustration and confirmation of religious truths. These truths may thus be embodied, as it were, in a substantial form of evidence and importance. We may just name, for instance, the doctrine of the fall and the depravity of man. Look, and impartially judge, whether "the works done under the sun" afford any evidence on that subject! The necessity of the conversion of the soul. For whence does all the evil in action come from? Is the heart becoming drained into purity by so much evil having come from it? Alas! there is a perennial fountain, unless a Divine hand close it. We may name the doctrine of a great intermediate appointment for the pardon of sin—its pardon through a propitiation, an atonement. We look at the life of a sinner, a numerous train of sins. Think intently on the malignant nature of sin; and, if there be truth in God, it is inexpressibly odious to Him;—then if, nevertheless, such sinners are to be pardoned, does it not eminently comport with the Divine holiness—is it not due to it—that in the very medium of their pardon, there should be some signal and awful fact of a judicial and penal kind to record and render memorable for ever a righteous God's judgment, estimate, of that which He pardons? The necessity of the operating influence of a Divine Spirit is also illustrated. A faithful corrective reference to ourselves in our observation of others is a point of duty almost too plain to need mentioning. The observation should constantly turn into reflection, which yet it is very unapt to do, except when self-complacency can be gratified. Might we suggest one other point of reference in our looking on the actions of men, namely the comparison and the difference between what men are doing "under the sun," and what they will all, ere long, be doing somewhere else? Think of all that have done all "the works under the sun," ever since that luminary began to shine on this world,—now in action in some other regions! Think of all those whose actions we have beheld and judged—those recently departed—our own personal friends! Have not they a scene of amazing novelty and change; while yet there is a relation, a connecting quality between their actions before and now. Lastly, our exercise of attention and judgment on "every work that is done under the sun" should be under the habitual recollection that soon we shall cease to look on them; and that, instead, we shall be witnessing their consequences; and in a mighty experience also, ourselves, of consequences. This thought will enforce upon us incessantly, that all our observation should be most diligently turned to the account of true wisdom and our own highest improvement. (*J. Foster.*)

Ver. 10. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity.—*The wicked man's life, funeral and epitaph.*—I. In the first place, **HERE IS SOME GOOD COMPANY FOR YOU**; some with whom you may walk to the house of God, for it is said of them that they did come and go from the place of the holy. By this, I think we may understand the place where the righteous meet to worship God. God's house may be called "the place of the holy." Still, if we confine ourselves strictly to the Hebrew, and to the connection, it appears that by the "place of the holy" is intended the judgment-seat—the place where the magistrate dispenses justice; and, alas! there be some wicked who come and go even to the place of judgment to judge their fellow-sinners. And we may with equal propriety consider it in a third sense to represent the pulpit, which should be "the place of the holy"; but we have seen the wicked come and go even from the pulpit, though God has never commanded them to declare his statutes. Happy the day when all such persons shall be purged from the pulpit; then shall it stand forth "clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners." "I have seen the wicked come and go from the place of the holy." II. **And now we are going to his funeral.** I shall want you to attend it. There is a man who has come and gone from the place of the holy. He has made a very blazing profession. He has been a county magistrate. Now, do you see what a stir is made about his poor bones? There is the hearse covered with plumes, and there follows a long string of carriages. The country

people stare to see such a long train of carriages coming to follow one poor worm to its resting-place. What pomp! what grandeur! Will you just think of it, and who are they mourning for? A hypocrite! Who is all this pomp for? For one who was a wicked man; a man who made a pretension of religion; a man who judged others, and who ought to have been condemned himself. But possibly I may have seen the wicked man buried in a more quiet way. He is taken quietly to his tomb with as little pomp as possible, and he is with all decency and solemnity interred in the grave. And now listen to the minister. If he is a man of God, when he buries such a man as he ought to be buried, you do not hear a solitary word about the character of the deceased; you hear nothing at all about any hopes of everlasting life. He is put into his grave. As for the pompous funeral, that was ludicrous. A man might almost laugh to see the folly of honouring the man who deserved to be dishonoured, but as for the still and silent and truthful funeral, how sad it is! We ought to judge ourselves very much in the light of our funerals. That is the way we judge other things. Look at your fields to-morrow. There is the flaunting poppy, and there by the hedge-rows are many flowers that lift their heads to the sun. Judging them by their leaf, you might prefer them to the sober-coloured wheat. But wait until the funeral when the poppy shall be gathered and the weeds shall be bound up in a bundle to be burned—gathered into a heap in the field to be consumed, to be made into manure for the soil. But see the funeral of the wheat. What a magnificent funeral has the wheat-sheaf. "Harvest home" is shouted as it is carried to the garner, for it is a precious thing. Even so let each of us so live, as considering that we must die. But there is a sad thing yet to come. We must look a little deeper than the mere ceremonial of the burial, and we shall see that there is a great deal more in some people's coffins besides their corpses. If we had eyes to see invisible things, and we could break the lid of the hypocrite's coffin, we should see a great deal there. There lie all his hopes. The wicked man may come and go from the place of the holy, but he has no hope of being saved. He thought, because he had attended the place of the holy regularly, therefore he was safe for another world. There lie his hopes, and they are to be buried with him. Of all the frightful things that a man can look upon, the face of a dead hope is the most horrible. Wrapt in the same shroud, there lie all his dead pretensions. When he was here he made a pretension of being respectable; there lies his respect, he shall be a hissing and a reproach for ever. But there is one thing that sleeps with him in his coffin that he had set his heart upon. He had set his heart upon being known after he was gone. He thought surely after he had departed this life he would be handed down to posterity and be remembered. Now read the text—"And they were forgotten in the city where they had so done." There is his hope of fame. I have often noticed how soon wicked things die when the man dies who originated them. Look at Voltaire's philosophy; with all the noise it made in his time—where is it now? There is just a little of it lingering, but it seems to have gone. And there was Tom Paine, who did his best to write his name in letters of damnation, and one would think he might have been remembered. But who cares for him now? Except amongst a few, here and there, his name has passed away. And all the names of error, and heresy, and schism, where do they go? You hear about St. Austin to this day, but you never hear about the heretics he attacked. Everybody knows about Athanasius, and how he stood up for the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ; but we have almost forgotten the life of Arius, and scarcely ever think of those men who aided and abetted him in his folly. Bad men die out quickly, for the world feels it is a good thing to be rid of them; they are not worth remembering. But the death of a good man, the man who was sincerely a Christian—how different is that! And when you see the body of a saint, if he has served God with all his might, how sweet it is to look upon him—ah, and to look upon his coffin too, or upon his tomb in after years! III. We are to WRITE HIS EPITAPH; and his epitaph is contained in these short words: "this also is vanity." And now in a few words I will endeavour to show that it is vanity for a man to come and go from the house of God, and yet have no true religion. Why, although you must deplore a wicked man's wickedness as a fearful crime, yet there is some kind of respect to be paid to the man who is downright honest in it; but not an atom of respect to the man who wants to be a cant and a hypocrite. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The funeral of the wicked:*—I. WICKED MEN BURIED. 1. A truly sad scene. Wicked men going to their graves, their probation over, the means of improvement ended. 2. A common scene.

Death does not wait for a man's repentance. II. WHO WERE ONCE IN CONNECTION WITH RELIGIOUS ORDINANCES. "Who had come and gone from the place of the holy." This suggests:—1. The religious craving of human nature. The soul everywhere is restless for a God. All feel the want, whatever their character. 2. The power of man to resist Divine impressions. 3. The surest way to contract guilt. "It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah," etc. 4. There is no necessary power in religious means to improve men. III. PASSING FROM THE MEMORY OF THE LIVING. There is a greater tendency in the living to forget the wicked than the good. It is true that some giants of depravity have stamped their impress on the heart of ages; such as Nero, Caligula, Napoleon, etc.; but the great mass of wicked men sink into oblivion, whilst the "righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance." What are the powers of mind that prompt men to remember the departed? 1. Gratitude is a commemorative power. Men instinctively remember the good, but what benefits have the wicked wrought? 2. Love is a commemorative power. Those who have had power to draw out the esteem and admiration of the soul will not easily, if ever, fade from the memory. The mystic hand of love will hold them close to the heart. But who can love in a moral sense the wicked? 3. Hope is a commemorative power. Those from whom we anticipate good we do not easily forget. What good can be anticipated from the wicked? Future meetings, should they ever take place, will be very fearful things. (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 11. **Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.**—*Present forbearance no argument against future retribution*:—Solomon had looked abroad, and had seen sin abounding;—men revelling in iniquity, vainly counting that, because God kept silence, He would never awake to judgment. Who can deny that this is true of our own day? I. THE OPERATION OF THE PRINCIPLE. 1. It has its influence amongst merely professing Christians. It lies at the root of their indecision. 2. It has its influence upon the religiously indifferent. To them there is nothing threatening in the horizon. What may come they know not, nor are they much concerned to know. They hope to be prepared for things as they turn up upon the wheel of fortune. To them there is a powerful argument in—"All things as they were." A change may come, certainly, but there is no promise of such change coming now. Were the penalty of transgression suspended over their heads, ready to fall upon the commission of sin, they might be restrained; but it is in the future,—how far they know not, nor do they care to inquire. 3. There is yet another class by whom the principle is embraced, and held as a part of their determined creed—the professedly infidel (2 Pet. iii. 3, 4). To the eye of one who cares not to analyze the past, or to indulge in serious thoughts of the future, things appear to be now as they have been, and as they must ever be; and thus present, living, undeniable facts are made to give the lie to everything predictive of a change. II. THE EVILS OF THE PRINCIPLE. 1. It erects a false standard between right and wrong. Punished or not punished, now or in the future—or, if such a thing might be, never punished at all—such a fact could in no way affect the character of an essentially evil deed. 2. It argues a deplorable ignorance of, or dishonesty towards, other parts of the Divine administration. If God be the universal Lawgiver; if the same hand which penned the Decalogue impressed upon Nature her laws, and fixed the principles of her movements; then there is something to be apprehended from a course of sin, even though a just recompense may be long delayed. Our sky may be bright, but our sins, in the meantime, may be gathering into one big thunder-cloud on the horizon, which is destined to break upon us in one overwhelming torrent of direst woe. Even so when this life and another are taken as the periods. We may sin for a season—"sentence against an evil work" may not be "executed speedily"—but all nature joins testimony with the Bible in declaring that sin shall not go unpunished. 3. The conduct is opposed to the entire economy under which we live. Man is sinful: human nature is fallen. God designs to raise it; but in a manner consistent with His own character and the character of man. Moral agents have to be dealt with;—He therefore employs moral means. Divine patience and longsuffering are essential to probation; and thus we see that the forbearance which God exercises toward a sinner is fundamental in that gracious economy under which we live. According to the terms of the evangelical covenant, sin cannot adequately be punished at once. It would be to frustrate His own designs—to do violence to

His own arrangements. 4. The conduct is abusive of the richest mercy, and the highest privileges of Heaven. We pity the blindness and impenitence of the antediluvians, who, in spite of the warnings of a righteous God, brought down the death-floods of a awakened wrath;—but ours is a more fearful portion; and a bitterer verdict awaits us if, “because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, our hearts are more fully set in us to do evil.” (*J. H. Ryland.*) *The longsuffering of God with individuals*:—The wise man points out in the text one general cause of the impenitence of mankind. “The heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.” Why? “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily.” This shameful, but too common, inclination we will endeavour to expose. What are the perfections of God? They are, ye answer, truth, which is interested in executing the threatenings that are denounced against sinners: wisdom, which is interested in supplying means of re-establishing order: and particularly justice, which is interested in the punishing of the guilty. I reply, your idea of truth is opposite to truth: your idea of wisdom is opposite to wisdom: your idea of justice is opposite to justice. The delay of the punishment of sinners, ye say, is opposite to the truth of God: on the contrary, God hath declared that He would not punish every sinner as soon as he had committed an act of sin. The delay of the punishment of sinners, ye say, is opposite to the wisdom of God: on the contrary, it is this delay which provides for the execution of that wise plan which God hath made for mankind, of placing them for some time in a state of probation in this world, and of regulating their future reward or punishment according to their use or abuse of such a dispensation. The delay of the punishment of sinners, ye say, is repugnant to the justice of God. Quite the contrary. The delay of the punishment of sinners will not seem incompatible with the justice of God unless ye consider that perfection detached from another perfection, by which God in the most eminent manner displays His glory—I mean His mercy. What would have become of David if Divine mercy had not prolonged his days after he had fallen into the crimes of adultery and murder; or if justice had called him to give an account of his conduct while his heart, burning with a criminal passion, was wishing only to gratify it? It was the longsuffering, the patience of God that gave him time to recover himself, to get rid of his infatuation, to see the horror of his sin, and to say under a sense of it, “Have mercy upon me, O God,” etc. What would have become of St. Peter if God had called him to give an account of himself while, frightened and subverted at the sight of the judges and executioners of his Saviour, he was pronouncing those cowardly words, “I know not the man”? It was the longsuffering and patience of God that gave him an opportunity of seeing the merciful looks of Jesus Christ immediately after his denial of Him. What would have become of St. Paul if God had required an account of his administration while he was breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord? It was the longsuffering of God that gave him an opportunity of saying, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” It was the patience of God which gave him an opportunity of making that honest confession, “I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy.” (*J. Saurin.*) *The impunity of bad men in the world*:—I. SHOW SOME VERY DANGEROUS MISTAKES THAT ARE ABOUT THIS MATTER. 1. This has been the great objection of atheists in all ages against the being of a God. The story of Diagoras is well known, who, seeing a wretch forswear himself and remain unpunished, became a professed atheist. 2. Others admit the being of a God, but deny His providence in the administration of human affairs, because they see bad men unpunished in the world. 3. Bad men that own a God and a providence, seeing their crimes unpunished, fall into another error. It raises them to a great confidence about the nature of those actions, which, because God does not punish, they think cannot be bad. Dionysius said the gods were pleased with his sacrifice when they sent him a prosperous voyage after he had robbed their temples. 4. There is a fault incident to many otherwise good men. They are uneasy at the impunity of bad men in the world. They repine at the patience and longsuffering of God towards them. And this undoubtedly is a sin. Ought they not to acquiesce in the Divine methods and dispensations and adore the righteousness of God’s ways in the world, although, perhaps, they cannot comprehend them? 5. But the great and common evil that is among men, arising from the impunity of bad men in the world, is that there are very few that from thence do not take encouragement to go on securely in their sins, not dreading that punishment which some think will never come;

others look on at such a distance that the apprehension of it is not strong enough to make them turn from their evil ways. II. **EXPOND THIS RIDDLE OF PROVIDENCE, THE IMPUNITY OF BAD MEN IN THE WORLD.** 1. Public societies or bodies of men are punished in this world, though particular persons may not. By public societies I mean kingdoms, nations, and states, and churches; these being also considered as societies of Christian men, who have special rules set them for their conduct in that relation wherein they stand to each other. National judgments for national sins are immoderate droughts, excessive rains and inundations of waters, contrary seasons, and a conflict in the elements, all which cause famines and barrenness in the earth; pestilences, and other contagious and malignant distempers. 2. As for particular bad men, they are a punishment to themselves. A bad man always bears a secret punishment within him. Every ill action he does exposes him to the severe rebukes of his own conscience. Moreover, the tumult and disorder of his passions, which clash with each other, and often meet with exasperating difficulties in the pursuit of unlawful objects, his restless desires, his awakening fears, and jealousies, and distrusts, and thirst of revenge, these, and a thousand things more of the like nature, disturb the peace of his soul. 3. Nor are bad men secure even against outward punishment. For wickedness and vice are not always prosperous in the world. 4. The end of Divine punishment in this world must be the correction or the destruction of the offender. But there are very good reasons why God does not always punish bad men in this world with respect to either of these. (1) With respect to the first, God does not always punish bad men in this world, because He considers men as rational creatures, and who ought therefore to be dealt with by rational methods. Present and frequent punishments would not be congruous to the nature of man. The rod and the whip are only fit for beasts, creatures void of understanding, but of quick sense, not to be argued but lashed into duty by the pungency of present pain. God does not always punish bad men in this world, because man is a free agent; but present punishment would bring a force and a compulsion upon him inconsistent with that freedom; and his obedience to God would not be voluntary, because it were not free. (2) With respect to the second, God does not always punish bad men in this world, because He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. God does not always punish bad men in this world that He may set mankind an example of longanimity, and meekness under injuries, and of mutual forbearance to each other. And the world needs such an example. God does not always punish bad men in this world, that they may have time to repent and grow better. God does not always punish bad men in this world because this world is a state of probation and trial, and such a state will not admit of present punishment. For in order to be proved men must be left in a manner to themselves. God does not always punish bad men in this world because they are to have their portion in it. Thus, the wicked rich man was told in hell that in his lifetime he had received his good things. God does not always punish bad men in this world because they are so intermixed with the good that the one cannot be punished but the other must participate in their punishment; God therefore spares the bad in pity and compassion to the good. God does not always punish bad men in this world that He may exercise the faith of good men. God does not always punish bad men in this world because, says Plutarch, He reserves them to be a punishment to others. Even good men may need correction. When they do so, and God will have the hands of good men to intervene in it, He does not usually employ the ministry of other good men to chastise them; He employs bad men, as fittest for that work: and He makes the bad punish one another. God does not always punish bad men in this world because their sins are not yet ripe for punishment. God does not always punish bad men in this world because He has appointed a day wherein He will pass a strict and impartial judgment upon all men, and will finally render to every one according to his works. (*P. Fallo.*) *Abused goodness*:—I. **GOD'S FORBEARANCE.** Though strict to mark iniquity, He is slow to punish it. The crimes of the old world cried long to heaven. Drunkards, blasphemers, extortioners, murderers, and sinners of all sorts, are permitted to live on and sin on for years, whilst their richly-merited doom is not visited upon them. II. **MAN'S PERVERSENESS.** We would suppose that such displays of Divine forbearance would be softening and restraining to men's hearts; and some it does lead to repentance. There is a potency in kindness. The roughest natures often surrender to its power, and even the maniac's madness often yields to its softening

touch. But, alas for poor human nature! the very leniency of God is often turned into licence for crime. As a vessel at sea, headed for the destined port, with sails set, canvas filled, and speeding on in one unvarying course, so the sinner, because he is not at once dashed upon the rocks, or beaten back by judgments, all the capacities of his being are bent on evil. III. **THE CERTAINTY OF RETRIBUTION.** The sentence against every evil work has been passed where nothing is ever taken back. Even for the saved Christ had to suffer and die. The trampled Law will assert its dignity and avenge its insults some day. As Jehovah lives, His decrees must go into effect. For every soul, and for every sin, judgment must come. It cannot be otherwise. God is just and holy, and can in no wise clear the persevering guilty. We may question, equivocate, and disbelieve; but that will not serve to stay the chariot-wheels of an avenging God. There is mercy now, but mercy despised is certain death. (*Joseph A. Seiss, D.D.*) *The abuse of Divine forbearance*.—I. Sin is deservedly called an **EVIL WORK**. It is "the work of the devil. It is folly, ingratitude, rebellion, treason. It degrades and defiles the soul. It robs us of the likeness, the presence, the favour of God. How deplorable are its consequences! It cannot go unpunished. There is a sentence denounced against it. God is the governor of the world. But there is no governing without laws, and laws are nothing without sanctions—from these they derive their force and their efficacy. Laws issued by a legislator, unaccompanied with threatenings, would be harmless, and, inspiring no terror, would be trifled with or considered only as advice. Thus the notion of punishment follows from the very constitution of law. Accordingly, a sentence the most tremendous is denounced against every transgressor. Do you ask where it is recorded? Look within thee, O man, and read it there: read it in the trouble, the remorse, the forebodings of thy own conscience. Examine the history of mankind, and read it there. See it in the expulsion of the happy pair from Paradise; in the flood which destroyed the world of the ungodly; in the fire and brimstone which consumed the cities of the plain. Open the Bible, and peruse it there. There you read that the soul that sinneth, it shall die. II. Sentence against an evil work is **NOT SPEEDILY EXECUTED**. With much longsuffering God endures the provocations of the ungodly, and delays from day to day the wrath which they have deserved. Patience is one of the distinguishing glories of His character: it is often ascribed to Him in Scripture; and the exercise of it appears in numberless instances. And are not you, are not all of you examples? Can you consider the time of your provocation—the number of your offences—the aggravations of your iniquities, and not say, with wonder and admiration, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not"? We are obviously intended for a social state: but the intercourse we are required to maintain with our fellow-creatures exposes us to innumerable provocations and offences; and the effects of sudden and uncontrolled resentments would be fatal to ourselves and others. Hence we are commanded to be "slow to wrath"; and to be "patient towards all men." And in this forbearance God places Himself before us as our example. If the commission of sin were always immediately followed with the punishment of it, this world would not be a state of probation, His "judgments" would not be "a great deep," and the whole nature and design of religion would be subverted. If the wrath of God instantly crushed every transgressor, He would be the destroyer rather than the governor of the world. To destroy is comparatively easy, and discovers little perfection: but the wisdom of God appears in reigning over the extravagance of the world; in making the wrath of man to praise Him. It is also worthy of our remark that many who deserve destruction are useful in the present state of the world; they are able to promote the arts and sciences, and are qualified to render great services to a country. Such men are links in the chain of Providence, and their destiny secures them. There are also purposes which the wicked can only accomplish. God calls the Assyrian the rod of His anger and the staff of His indignation; and says, "I will send him against an hypocritical nation; and against the people of My wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire in the streets." The ungodly, by their continuance, are useful to the righteous: they exercise their patience, call forth their zeal, and wean them from the present world. III. **THE DEPRAVITY OF MAN TURNS DIVINE CLEMENCY INTO PRESUMPTION, AND ABUSES THE PATIENCE WHICH BEARS WITH HIM TO PURPOSES THE MOST VILE.** 1. Nothing is more common than this abuse. Perhaps many of you are examples of it. To decide this I ask, Would you have continued in your

sinful courses to this hour, had you not been persuaded that God would bear with you? Would you now perpetrate another crime if you supposed that God would instantly destroy you for it? 2. Nothing can be more vile and base than this abuse. Clemency affords you a shelter from the storm, and you enter, and then wound your kind Benefactor, and wound Him because He had pity upon you. 3. Be assured nothing will be more fatal. Mercy is your final resource; and, when this is provoked, to what can you turn? (*W. Jay.*) *God's delay of executing the sentence of condemnation against ungodly men often miserably abused by them.*—I. THERE IS A SENTENCE PASSED IN THE COURT OF HEAVEN, AND STANDING, AGAINST UNGODLY MEN, EVIL-WORKERS, HOWEVER EASY THEY BE UNDER IT FOR A TIME. To explain the nature of this sentence, consider, Every evil work is a breach of God's law; and every sinful thought, word, or action is an evil work (1 John iii. 4). The grounds of it more particularly are—1. The sin of nature, original sin imputed (Rom. v. 12). 2. The sins of the heart (Ps. xxiv. 4; Matt. v. 28, 29). 3. The sins of the tongue (Matt. xii. 37). It is a channel by which the heart vents much of its inbred corruption, contempt of God, etc. 4. The sins of the life, wicked actions, whether of impiety against God, unrighteousness against men, or intemperance against ourselves (Jude 15). II. THE LORD OFTEN-TIMES DOES NOT SOON COME TO THE EXECUTION OF THE SENTENCE AGAINST UNGODLY MEN, EVIL-WORKERS; BUT DELAYS IT FOR A TIME. 1. We shall take a view of the method of Providence in this matter. (1) There is a swift method the Lord sometimes takes with sinners (Mal. iii. 5). Sometimes the sinner has an ill work in design, and the Lord counts his will for the deed, and prevents by a speedy execution; as in Haman's case. He hatched the mischief, but he did not see it come forth. Sometimes the sinner is in actual motion to the ill work, and execution is done on him ere he get it performed. So it fared with the rebellious Israelites, in their attempting to go into the promised land (Num. xiv. 44, 45). And so it fared with Jeroboam, putting forth his hand to lay hold on the prophet (1 Kings xiii. 4); and with Uzziah having the censer in his hand (2 Chron. xxvi. 19). Sometimes the execution trysts with the very doing of the ill work, so that the sinner is taken away with the stroke in his sin. Thus fared it with Nadab and Abihu offering strange fire (Lev. x. 1, 2); with Zimri and Cozbi cut off in the act of uncleanness (Num. xxv. 8); and with Herod, who was eaten up of worms for his atheism and blasphemy (Acts xii. 23). Sometimes as the ill work is done out and ended, the execution begins. So it fared with Sennacherib's blasphemous letter (2 Kings xix. 14, 35). Sometimes the execution keeps pace with the ill work, and the one goes on as the other does; judgment in the several degrees following hard at the heels of the sin. So it fared with Hiel in his building of Jericho (1 Kings xvi.). Sometimes execution begins with the sinner's beginning to reap the fruit of his sin when he leans upon his wall, a serpent bites him. So it fared with Ahab taking possession of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings xxi. 18, 19), and with the lusters in the wilderness (Ps. lxxviii. 30, 31). Sometimes when one's sin begins to work, in its bitter fruits and effects on others, it recoils on the sinner himself. So it fared with Judas the traitor (Matt. xxvii. 3, 4, 5). (2) There is a slow method the Lord takes oftentimes with sinners (Neh. ix. 17). They commit their evil works; the sentence is presently passed for them: but then the execution is delayed (Ps. l. 21). The sinner may get his evil work contrived and accomplished, without any let in this way from Heaven, by any execution against him. The ill work being done without let, the sinner may also for a time pass unpunished, and as little notice may seem to be taken of it as if there were not a God to judge upon the earth (Ezek. ix. 9). Nay, sinners may prosper in an ill course. So far may they be from execution done against them, that they may thrive in the world in it (Ps. xxxvii. 35). When execution is at length begun, it may be carried on very leisurely for a time: the drops may come very few and soft before the shower (Isa. ix. 1). More than all that, the execution may be entirely put off during this life. 2. We shall account for this slow method of Providence. (1) This method is taken to bring sinners to repentance, and prevent their ruin (2 Pet. iii. 9); and it is becoming the perfections of a merciful God therefore to use it. (2) In the slow method God takes with sinners, He often has an eye to posterity. Though the slow method seems strange to us short-sighted creatures, it is not at all strange being viewed in the glass of the infinite perfections of the Divine nature. God is eternal, from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. xc. 2). If men do not soon pursue their quarrels, death may snatch them away, and they can have no access more to do it: but however long

the Lord delays pleading His quarrel, He can lose no time, for He is eternal. In God's eternal duration there are no differences of time; all is present to Him. He sees exactly the time appointed for execution against every impenitent sinner, and will not let it pass beyond that one moment (Hab. ii. 3). He knows what He intends to do, and none can hinder (Dan. iv. 37). He is infinitely blessed in Himself, and nothing the creature can do against Him can hurt Him, nor in the least disturb His repose in Himself (Job xxxv. 6, 8). There is a necessity for both the swift and slow methods being used by Providence in the government of the world; it is so corrupt and atheistical. The swift method is necessary to show that there is a God to judge upon the earth (Ps. lvi. 10, 11). The slow method is necessary to show there is a judgment to come (2 Thess. i. 4-7). Let sinners be spared never so long, not one of all their ill works will, or can be, forgotten. The longer sinners are spared, their counts will be the greater, and all will come on at once (Luke xi. 50, 51; 1 Sam. iii. 12). When it comes on the impenitent sinner, God will charge both the interest and the principal sum together. III. GOD'S DELAY OF EXECUTION IS OFTEN MISERABLY ABUSED BY SINNERS, TO THE FILLING OF THEIR HEARTS TO DO EVIL, AND SINNING MORE AND MORE. 1. I shall point out the abuse of God's patience in the delay of execution that ungodly sinners make, to the filling of their hearts to do evil. (1) They abuse it to carnal security (Ps. x. 6). (2) They abuse it to a sensual life, wherein their aim is not to keep a clean conscience, but to gratify their senses, as their circumstances in the world will permit, as the rich man did (Luke xii. 19). (3) They abuse it to impudence in sin (Jer. vi. 14, 15). (4) They abuse it to contempt of God and all that is sacred (Ps. lxxiii. 9). (5) They abuse it to sinning more diffusely, giving loose reins to their several lusts (Jer. vii. 9, 10). (6) They abuse it to sinning more eagerly (Eph. iv. 19). (7) They abuse it to incorrigibleness and obstinacy in sin (Jer. xxii. 21). 2. How comes it to pass that sinners so abuse God's patience with them? (1) Sin reigning in the ungodly, fear of wrath is their highest motive to good, and most forcible restraint from evil: and so when that restraint is taken off by the delay of execution again and again, the heart naturally goes to its own bias, and is like the wild ass's colt snuffing up the wind at her pleasure. (2) They mistake the design of Providence. They construe it as if God approved of their ways, or had such a regard for them that He will not be so angry with them as one would make them believe; they cannot think that He is so very angry at their sin while they prosper in it by His providence. (3) There is a root of atheism in the hearts of all men naturally, and it reigns in the ungodly (Ps. xiv. 1). (4) The Lord often in that way carries on a holy hardening work. In which case Satan and the evil heart conspire to this abuse. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *Sin and its sentence* (with Num. xxxii. 23):—I. THE APPARENT SLOWNESS OF GOD TO PUNISH SIN. "Sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily." That is how it seems to be. It seems as if sin were not the dangerous thing it is represented to be; as if it were a harmless thing, and one might commit it without any consequence being forthcoming. And this is one way in which people are ensnared to go on sinning. They are misled and deceived by appearances. They think they will have nothing to pay now for what they are doing. You all know what an alluring thing credit is to some people. There are plenty of people who buy things which they would not buy if they had to pay for them at the time. Now, just as credit in worldly affairs is to some people a snare, so in relation to sin some people think that they can sin upon credit; that they can sin and have nothing to pay at once. Then, too, there is the thought that there may be even exemption from penalty. People think that they will get off altogether. They think "there is a kind of miscarriage of justice in the moral world; there are some who escape; why may not I?" II. THE CERTAINTY OF PENALTY. "Be sure your sin will find you out." 1. Every sin has its appropriate penalty. A man suffers according as he transgresses. Sometimes this penalty for sin is twofold in its nature. It is outward; that is to say, a man suffers in his body, in his circumstances, in his social position, in his reputation. He suffers, also, inwardly; that is, in his character, in his spirit, in the higher life of the man. Sometimes both these penalties go together, hand in hand, and visit the transgressor. 2. The penalty begins with the beginning of sin. The dropping of water wears away a stone. You see the stone crumbled and disintegrated. When did the process of wearing away begin? Did it begin with the thousandth drop? No, it began with the first drop. If, perhaps, you had looked at that stone when the first drop had fallen, you would not have detected anything, but, nevertheless, the impression

was made. It began to wear away as much after the first drop had fallen upon it as after the thousandth or ten thousandth. And it is like that with the penalty for sin. As we commit the sin the penalty follows close upon its heels. The sentence is never divorced from the evil work. They go together step by step, hand-in-hand. They are twin companions. They are never broken or separated from each other. 3. The penalty increases as we go on sinning. God is inexorable in this matter. Follow out the history of those who sin by thoughtless indulgences, such as idleness, drunkenness, love of pleasure, gambling, and what do you behold? Situations are lost, self-respect is gone, social respect is withdrawn, poverty comes in at the door and at the window, too; the body gets enfeebled, begins to tremble, unequal to its work; the brain ceases to have its vitality and vigour; memory becomes a poor decrepit thing, and sometimes reason loses its balance and is overthrown. There is the man, in himself and in his surroundings, ruined. (*T. Hammond.*) *The longsuffering of God*.—I. THAT MEN ARE VERY APT TO ABUSE THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD, TO THE ENCOURAGING AND HARDENING OF THEMSELVES IN AN EVIL COURSE, THE EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD, IN ALL AGES, DOES GIVE ABUNDANT TESTIMONY. II. WHENCE THIS COMES TO PASS, AND UPON WHAT PRETENCE AND COLOUR OF REASON MEN ENCOURAGE THEMSELVES IN SIN, FROM THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD. And there is no doubt but this proceeds from our ignorance and inconsiderateness and from an evil heart of unbelief, from the temptation and suggestion of the devil. All these causes do concur to the producing this monstrous effect: but that which I design to inquire into is, from what pretence of reason, grounded upon the longsuffering of God, sinners argue themselves into this confidence and presumption. I shall endeavour to show what those false conclusions are, which wicked men draw from the delay of punishment, and to discover the sophistry and fallacy of them. 1. Those conclusions which are more gross and atheistical, which bad men draw to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, from the delay of punishment (which we, who believe a God, call the patience or longsuffering of God), are these three: either that there is no God; or, if there be, that there is no providence; or that there is no difference between good and evil. 2. But because those who are thus are but few, in comparison, there being not many in the world arrived to that degree of blindness and height of impiety as to disbelieve a God and a providence; and I think none have attained to that perfect conquest of conscience as to have lost all sense of good and evil; therefore I shall rather insist upon those kind of reasonings which are more ordinary among bad men, and whereby they cheat themselves into everlasting perdition; and they are such as these:—(1) Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore sin is not so great an evil. (2) Therefore God is not so highly offended and provoked by it. (3) God is not so severe in His own nature as He is commonly represented. (4) Therefore the punishment of sin is not so certain. (5) It is at a distance, and may be prevented time enough by a future repentance in our old age or at the hour of death. III. IF THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD BE THE OCCASION OF MEN'S HARDNESS AND IMPENITENCY, THEN WHY IS GOD SO PATIENT TO SINNERS, WHEN THEY ARE SO PRONE TO ABUSE HIS GOODNESS AND PATIENCE? And how is it goodness in God to forbear sinners so long, when this forbearance of His is so apt to minister to them an occasion of their further mischief and greater ruin? It should seem, according to this, that it would be much greater mercy to the greatest part of sinners not to be patient toward them at all. 1. I ask the sinner if he will stand to this: wouldest thou, in good earnest, have God to deal thus with thee, to take the very first advantage to destroy thee, or turn thee into hell, and to make thee miserable beyond all hopes of recovery? 2. It is likewise to be considered that the longsuffering of God towards sinners is not a total forbearance: it is usually so mixed with afflictions and judgments of one kind or other, upon ourselves or others, as to be a sufficient warning to us, if we would consider and lay it to heart, to "sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon us." And is not this great goodness to warn us, when He might destroy us? to leave room for a retreat, when He might put our case past remedy? 3. Nothing is further from the intention of God than to harden men by His longsuffering (2 Pet. iii. 9). 4. There is nothing in the longsuffering of God that is in truth any ground of encouragement to men in an evil course; the proper and natural tendency of God's goodness is to lead men to repentance, and by repentance to bring them to happiness (Rom. ii. 4). 5. That through the longsuffering of God sinners are hardened in their evil ways is wholly to be ascribed to their abuse of God's good-

ness; it is neither the end and intention, nor the proper and natural effect of the thing, but the accidental event of it through our own fault. And is this any real objection against the longsuffering of God? 6. But because this objection pincheth hardest in one point, viz. that God certainly foresees that a great many will abuse His longsuffering, to the increasing of their guilt, and the aggravating of their condemnation; and how is longsuffering any mercy and goodness to those, who He certainly foreknows will in the event be so much the more miserable for having had so much patience extended to them? Therefore, for a full answer, I desire these six things may be considered:—(1) God designs this life for the trial of our obedience, that, according as we behave ourselves, He may reward or punish us in another world. (2) There could be no trial of obedience, nor any capacity of rewards and punishments, but upon the supposition of freedom and liberty; that is, that we do not do what we do upon force and necessity, but upon free choice. (3) God, by virtue of the infinite perfection of His knowledge, does clearly and certainly foresee all future events, even those which are most contingent, such as are the arbitrary actions of free and voluntary agents. (4) The bare foreknowledge of things future hath no more influence upon them to make them to be, than the sight and knowledge of things present hath upon them to make them to be present. (5) Consequently, foreknowledge and liberty may very well consist; and, notwithstanding God's foreknowledge of what men will do, they may be as free as if He did not foreknow it. (6) God doth not deal with men according to His foreknowledge of the good or bad use of their liberty, but according to the nature and reason of things; and therefore, if He be longsuffering toward sinners, and do not cut them off upon the first provocation, but give them a space and opportunity of repentance, and use all proper means and arguments to bring them to repentance, and be ready to afford His grace to excite good resolutions in them, and to second and assist them, and they refuse and resist all this; their wilful obstinacy and impenitency is as culpable, and God's goodness and patience as much to be acknowledged as if God did not foresee the abuse of it; because His foresight and knowledge of what they would do laid no necessity upon them to do what they did. IV. SOME INFERENCES FROM THIS WHOLE DISCOURSE UPON THIS ARGUMENT. 1. This shows the unreasonableness and perverse disingenuity of men, who take occasion to harden and encourage themselves in sin from the longsuffering of God, which, above all things in the world, should melt and soften them. 2. This may serve to convince men of the great evil and danger of thus abusing the longsuffering of God. It is a provocation of the highest nature, because it is to trample upon His dearest attributes, those which He most delights and glories in, His goodness and mercy; for the longsuffering of God is His goodness to the guilty, and His mercy to those who deserve to be miserable. 3. To persuade us to make a right use of the patience and longsuffering of God, and to comply with the merciful end and design of God therein. (1) It is the design of God's longsuffering to give us a space of repentance. (2) The longsuffering of God is a great encouragement to repentance. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*)

Vcr. 12. Yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God.—The Christian's welfare certified:—In this verse the character and condition of sinners are contrasted with those of the righteous. However long the sinner lives in sin, and however prosperous he may seem to be, yet it shall be ill with him; but however it may seem sometimes to be with the righteous man, in the long run, it shall be well with him. The text is well calculated to check the folly and presumption of the sinner, and to comfort the righteous man in the trials of life; and especially in the apparent delay of justice in permitting the triumphs of the ungodly. I. THE PERSONS WHO ARE HERE DESCRIBED—"them that fear God." This is in the Word of God a common designation of the people of God. The fear of the Lord is emphasized as the beginning of wisdom. What is meant by this fear? What kind of fear is it? It is not servile fear. It may have that characteristic in its beginning; but it will not long continue in that atmosphere. The man who is learning a new language, or to speak his own correctly, speaks for a time laboriously under the fear of violating some grammatical rule; but after a time the knowledge of the language becomes a part of his very nature, and he rises above the fear of violating the rules of grammar and comes into the love of correct speech. So, starting in the Christian life on the low plane of fear in its lower senses, we rise into the perfect love of God which casteth out all fear; we

love truth, holiness and God for their own sake; we would serve God if there were no hell to be shunned and no heaven to be won; we think little of either; the love of Christ constraineth us. We fear simply lest we may offend God, our Father, Friend, and Redeemer. This fear is filial. It is the fear of a son, and not that of a slave. II. **THE PROMISE CONCERNING THE PEOPLE OF GOD:** "It shall be well with them." It is not said that believers shall not have their share in the ordinary trials of life. The Bible nowhere promises us exemption from these trials. It does not assure us that we shall not go into the furnace, nor into the deep waters; but it does promise that the fire shall not consume us and the waters shall not overflow us. It is not said that Christians shall not have extraordinary trials. Christianity develops manhood; vastly enlarges the sphere of life. It gives a broader surface across which the winds of adversity may sweep. It gives greater possibilities of enjoyment; and these make greater trials certain. A Christian man is higher, deeper, and broader than other men are. He has more fully developed all his capacities both for joy and sorrow. The more our natures are developed, the greater, also, will be our responsibilities. Loyalty to God put Joseph into prison; made Elijah face cruel Ahab and wicked Jezebel; drove Daniel into a den of lions; hurled the three faithful Hebrews into the seven-times heated furnace; put Peter into the common prison, and Paul and Silas into the inner prison, with their feet fast in the stocks. But it was still well with them. This fact is the glory of our faith; this is the joy of our life in God. Joseph finds his prison the vestibule to the palace of the Pharaohs; Elijah's fiery mission is but the prelude to the chariot of fire which carried him to glory and to God. III. **THE ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY HERE EXPRESSED.** "Yet surely I know." The inspired preacher had good grounds for his knowledge. Because of God's character men may be sure that it will be well with those who fear Him. God must be right, God must do right. (*R. S. MacArthur, D.D.*) *Well with those who fear God:*—I. **THE CHARACTER HERE MENTIONED**—"them that fear God." The fear of God is that principle which reverences God and respects His authority. It is one of the great blessings of the new covenant, produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit. 1. This fear is the result of regeneration. An unregenerated man does not fear God (Rom. iii. 18). But regeneration turns the heart from unlawful objects to God as the chief good. 2. This fear is the result of adoption. God is regarded as a Father, worthy of reverence and love. 3. This fear is manifested by hatred to that which is hateful to God. 4. Manifested by delighting in that which is pleasing to God. The fruits of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22, 23). Delight in His house, in His people, in His service, etc. 5. This fear is submission to His will. Their will is revealed in His Word; it is manifested in His appointments. As to doctrines, ordinances and precepts, I do not follow my own mind. In afflictions I do not resist or repine. "It is the Lord; let Him do as seemeth good in His sight." II. **THE HAPPINESS HERE REFERRED TO**—"It shall be well with them." 1. It is well with them already. Are they not saved from guilt and condemnation? Have they not hope? They "fear God," and from that principle arises their happiness. 2. It shall be well with them hereafter. They are under the conduct of Divine providence. God appoints the bounds of their habitations. It shall be well in adversity. Well in death. The retrospect of life will give no pain. "The righteous hath hope in His death." Well in the resurrection. The fearers of God will be raised to immortal life (Rom. viii. 11; Phil. iii. 20, 21). Well in the judgment day. It shall be well with them then. It shall be well with them for ever—"Their sun shall no more go down." III. **THE CERTAINTY HERE AFFIRMED**—"Surely I know." 1. I know from experience. I never found happiness in sin—I have found it in the fear of God. 2. I know it from observation. "Mark the perfect man." "Let me die the death of the righteous." (*Homilist.*) *Five fears:*—Now, you will notice that fear may be yoked into the service of God. True fear, not fearing, but believing, saves the soul; not doubt, but confidence, is the strength and the deliverance of the Christian. Still, fear, as being one of those powers which God hath given us, is not in itself sinful. Fear may be used for the most sinful purposes; at the same time it may be so ennobled by grace, and so used for the service of God, that it may become the very grandest part of man. In fact, Scripture has honoured fear, for the whole of piety is comprehended in these words, "Fear God"; "the fear of the Lord"; "them that fear Him." These phrases are employed to express true piety, and the men who possess it. I. There is, first, **THE FEAR CAUSED BY AN AWAKENING CONSCIENCE.** This is the lowest grade of godly fear; here all true piety takes its rise. We shall never

forget, to our dying day, that hour of desperate grief when first we discovered our lost estate. Sinner, it shall be well with thee if thou art now made to fear the wrath of God on account of thy sin; if God the Spirit hath poured forth the vials of Almighty wrath into thy soul, so that thou art cast down and sore vexed. Think not thou shalt be destroyed; it shall be well with thee. Your distresses are very painful, but they are not singular; others have had to endure the same. But I will tell thee something else to comfort thee; I will put this question to thee—Wouldst thou wish to go back and become what thou once wast? Sins are now so painful that thou canst scarce eat, or drink, or sleep. II. There are many who have believed, and are truly converted, who have a fear which I may call **THE FEAR OF ANXIETY**. They are afraid that they are not converted. They are converted, there is no doubt of it. Sometimes they know they are so themselves, but, for the most part, they are afraid. First, they will tell you they are afraid they never repented enough; the work in their hearts, they say, was not deep; it was just superficial surface-ploughing, and never entered into their souls. Then they are quite sure they never came to Christ aright; they think they came the wrong way. How that can be no one knows, for they could not come at all except the Father drew them; and the Father did not draw them the wrong way. They say they can trust Christ, but they are afraid they do not trust Him aright; and they always, do what you may, come back to the old condition; they are always afraid. And now, what shall I say to these good souls? Why, I will say this, "Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him." Not only those who believe, but those who fear, have got a promise, I would to God that they had more faith; I would that they could lay hold on the Saviour, and had more assurance, and even attain unto a perfect confidence; but if they cannot, shall I utter a word that would hurt them? God forbid; "Surely it shall be well even with them that fear God, with them that fear before Him." III. And now, in the next place, there is a **FEAR WHICH WORKS CAUTION**. When we get a little further advanced in the Christian life, our present state is not so much a matter of anxiety as our future state. These persons say, "I dare not join the Church, because I am afraid I shall fall." That fear is good, in itself. But do you think that you would not bring disgrace on Christ's cause as it is? You are always at the place of worship; you are never away. You were always looked upon as being one of the Church, though you have not made a profession. Now, if you were to sin, would it not dishonour the Church even now? And then I will ask you this question, Where do you think a man is safest—in the paths of obedience, or in the paths of disobedience? You are afraid you will fall into sin—"Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him." If you should tell me you were not afraid of falling, I would not have you in the Church for the world; you would be no Christian. I love your fear, and love you, too, for it; you are my brother and sister in Jesus if you can truly say that you fear lest you should sin. Seek then, my friends, to grow in this fear of caution; obtain more and more of it; and whilst thou dost not distrust the Saviour, learn to distrust thyself more and more every day. IV. I notice, in the next place, the fear which I may call **THE FEAR OF JEALOUSY**. Strong love will usually promote jealousy. The true believer, when he gets his Saviour in full possession, and in blissful communion, is so jealous lest any rival should intrude in his heart; he is afraid lest his dearest friend should get more of his heart than the Saviour has. He is afraid of his wealth; he trembles at his health, at his fame, at everything that is dear to him, lest it should engross his heart. Oh, how often does he pray, "My Lord, let me not be of a divided spirit; cast down each idol—self-will, self-righteousness." And I tell you the more he loves, the more he will fear lest he should provoke his Saviour by bringing a rival into his heart, and setting up Antichrist in his spirit; so that fear just goes in proportion to love; and the bright love is congenial, and must walk side by side with the deepest jealousy and the profoundest fear. V. I will conclude by just mentioning that fear which is felt **WHEN WE HAVE HAD DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS**. Did you never, in the silence of the night, look up and view the stars, feeding, like sheep on the azure pastures of the sky? Have you never thought of those great worlds, far, far away, divided from us by almost illimitable leagues of space? Did you never, whilst musing on the starry heavens, lose yourself in thoughts of God? and have you never felt, at such a time, that you could say with Jacob, "How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and the very gate of heaven"? Now, this kind of fear if you have ever felt it, if it has been produced in your heart by con-

templation of God, is a high and hallowed thing, and to you this promise is addressed—"Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before Him." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 14. **There be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked.**—*Apparent discrepancy between character and circumstances:*—There is doubtless a law for everything in heaven and on earth; a systematic connection between cause and effect, alike in the physical, moral and spiritual existences. Our wise men acknowledge this, and find in the heavens above and the earth beneath, as far as their intellects can penetrate, a sequence and an irrevocable destiny in everything they study. But as for the laws that morally govern the world, that give rise to its convulsions and preserve its peace, that dismay us now and overjoy us then, that frustrate our plans or help us to attain our desires, from the dismemberment of a kingdom to the trivialities of existence—these laws are unwritten. The Almighty has set the machinery of nature in motion, and its action is unchangeable till its destiny is attained. But He sits with the sceptre of His moral government in His hands, and the rules by which He governs, and the ends He means to attain, we know not; and it is this ignorance of the Almighty's plans which baffles our little hopes. It is with this dissimilitude of events as they occur with those we had hoped and striven for, and by probability led ourselves to expect, that our text has to do. It deals with the apparent reversal in many cases of an ordinary law, and shows the utter impossibility of human minds gaining any clue to the moral events which happen, or may happen, around us. Men make use of their limited wisdom to produce a desired effect. If that effect is not gained they abandon their attempts. The initiative is their own, and they abandon it as they please. Far otherwise is it, however, in matters of moral or spiritual import. The initiative is not man's, but the Almighty's. Eternal life is not a bait held out for our greed to clutch at, but rather a spontaneous reward for our obedience and love. That this is clearly a principle, our text teaches, and everyday life verifies. The good man in this world often meets with the treatment, and is placed in the circumstances, which attend the career of the vilest; while the wicked man oft sits in the highest place, and mockingly sways his prostrate courtiers with the arrogant pretentiousness of a usurped power. He thinks his position is the reward of his genius, and scoffs at the idea of anything having to do with his elevation but himself. These reversed positions clearly show that the reward or punishment of the good or wicked does not necessarily begin, and clearly does not end, with this mortal life. This, to a good man, is a source of joy. He forgets his present ignominy in his future hopes: the present calamity he takes as an earnest for his future bliss. The wicked man, however, often has somewhat of his own way in the world. He takes the present as his all, and is satisfied therewith. He wants no future reward: his enjoyment now is ample, and instead of taking warning from the position of the good man as indicative of what his position ought possibly to be, his gratified senses and pampered vanity stifle his reason and destroy his conscience, and he descends to the grave in a false position to open his appalled eyes in the one belonging to him. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 15. **Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry.**—*The benefits of wholesome recreation:*—Viewed by itself, and apart from its context and from the rest of the argument of the wise king, this sentiment might seem to partake very much of the spirit of the Epicureans, so strongly condemned by St. Paul—"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die"; but when we come to look closely into it, we find that it would be a manifest perversion of the whole passage to apply it in any such Epicurean sense. The man to whom he refers, as the one who is encouraged "to eat and to drink and to be merry," is not the idle drone whose whole life is spent in self-indulgence, or in the pursuit of pleasure; not the Dives who fares sumptuously every day while so many around have scarcely wherewithal to purchase the scanty meal—but he, whose whole attention has been hitherto absorbed in some toilsome and laborious pursuit; he who has, so to speak, been the slave of wealth, or ambition, or pleasure, or business—the seeker after worldly wisdom—or, in fine, the man so filled with anxiety and care about the objects of his desire, as to need this salutary warning how better to employ his days. Thus, if we might venture to paraphrase the passage, we should assume it to bear some

such an import as the following:—"Be not so wrapt up in the cares or concerns of this life, oh! ye foolish sons of men, as to forget the grand end and aim of your being. There are, indeed, many things well worthy of your attainment, but none of so solid and enduring a character as to justify your total absorption in the pursuit of them. Lose not the real enjoyment of life by devoting it thus unremittingly to any earthly end. While thus toiling to secure some fancied good, you are really allowing to escape those fleeting moments which should be devoted to some loftier purpose. Aim first and chiefly to attain the heavenly wisdom, for 'this alone will bring peace at the last.' And then, with regard to all earthly schemes of happiness, let not your pursuit of the problematic future deprive you of the lawful enjoyment of present good, but 'having food and raiment be therewith content.' 'Eat, drink and be merry.' Cultivate a cheerful and a happy frame of mind, as opposed to that gloomy, over-anxious, ever-toiling disposition, which you now possess—as is the cold, cheerless mantle of night to the glow and warmth of the midday sun—for this calm and tranquil state shall abide with you, and give you enjoyment in the midst of your labour all the days of your life which God giveth you under the sun." And who does not perceive the consonance of this advice with the more plain and direct teaching of our Lord and His inspired apostles? Who does not recognize in this Old Testament warning the foreshadowing of those deep and wholesome truths which Christ announced in His famous sermon from the Mount? "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" But rather "seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Who does not trace in the language of Solomon the workings of that same Spirit which inspired St. Paul to say, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"—"Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice"? Not, then, in antagonism to the spirit of the New Testament, but in perfect accordance with it, does Solomon, in the words of my text, recommend the rational enjoyment of the good things of this life. In what, then, does rational enjoyment or recreation consist? I think we may safely answer this question by the obvious reply—"In the moderate use of all the gifts of God's good providence, and in the healthful cultivation of all those faculties, the improvement of which can tend to His honour or glory." Under this head, then, as you will perceive, so far as bodily refection is concerned, we should include the temperate use of all healthful articles, whether of food or of drink. "Not that which entereth into the mouth defileth a man." God makes no distinction either of meats or drinks, provided we use all lawfully, to the just refreshment and strengthening of the body, not to its undue pampering, or mere carnal gratification. And so, also, with regard to questions of bodily or mental recreation. Healthful exercise, whether for the body or mind, may allowably be included under the Preacher's commendation of rational "mirth." The Scriptures have not prescribed to us what species of mirth to select, nor what to avoid. They have evidently left it as a matter of conscience, to the feelings and experience of every Christian, to choose his own most appropriate mode of rejoicing, provided, as in the former case, that even allowable mirth be not carried beyond the limits of moderation, and degenerate into senseless hilarity. It is true that St. James exhorts, "Is any merry? let him sing psalms"; but this advice is more of the nature of a permission than a command; and it is clearly evident, that with very many the literal interpretation of this precept, if it be correctly translated, would be impracticable, seeing that they are altogether devoid of musical tendencies. This passage, then, so far from limiting, as it has been supposed to do, the exhibition of our cheerful tendencies to psalm-singing alone, seems to me to make quite for the opposite view, and would apparently sanction the employment of any musical agency, and, by a parity of reasoning, of any other equally harmless and humanizing source of amusement as a justifiable mode of exhibiting a mirthful spirit before the Lord. (F. F. Statham, B.A.)

CHAPTER IX.

VER. 1. The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God.—*In the hand of God.*—This is the sober second thought of a wise man who has been sorely troubled in his mind by dwelling on the mysteries of Providence. But the darkness begins to disappear as soon as he allows his mind to rest on the thought of God and of His work in eternity, the end of which no man can see. The first thought suggested is the negative one that "the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hands of God," and, therefore, withdrawn from the sight of men. It is of great importance for our peace of mind firmly to grasp the thought that we cannot at all infer what God thinks or intends concerning any person or his works from the outward circumstances we observe. Is this man prosperous in the world? It does not by any means follow from this that God regards him with special favour (Luke xiii. 1-5). But there is a positive truth also in the words of the text—"The righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God"—not only in the sense that they are withdrawn from the sight of men, but in this far better sense, that they are safe. Being in the hand of God they are in the best hand. It is not with the onlookers here that the righteous and the wise have to do. It is with Him who looks on from the side of eternity, and who makes all things work together for good to them that love Him. Are you and your works in the hand of God? First, and most important, are you yourselves in His hand? Are you dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty? And you, who yourselves are in the hand of God, see that your works are there also. We know on the best authority that a man may belong to the righteous and not to the wise; he may himself be saved and yet his work be lost. Our work, as well as ourselves, must be built on Christ. (*J. M. Gibson, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. All things come alike to all.—*The impartiality of Providence.*—Of what service is a religious life to man since Providence treats all alike? This statement is—I. PHENOMENALLY TRUE. To all outward appearance the good and the bad are treated alike. All are subject to the same diseases, bereavements, disappointments, all go down to the grave alike. 1. This a perplexing fact. Antecedently one might have supposed that the God of holiness and rectitude would, in His providence, have treated men according to their moral character, that happiness and misery would be measured out according to the merits and demerits of mankind. 2. This fact is significant. It shows—(1) The unalterableness of God's laws. They pay no deference to moral character. (2) The high probability of a future state. II. SPIRITUALLY FALSE. "All things" do not "come alike to all." 1. They do not come in the same character. (1) To the wicked the trials of earth are either blind casualties or penal inflictions. But to the godly they are chastisements of fatherly love. (2) To the wicked the prosperity and enjoyment appear as the results of their own skill, industry, and merit. To the godly they appear as the unmerited favours of a merciful God. 2. They do not come with the same influence. Trials irritate the spirit of the wicked; they purify the godly. Prosperity feeds the vanity and ambition of the wicked; but inspires the godly with devout humility and holy gratitude. The same soils, dews, and sunbeams that fill the hemlock with poison, fill the wheat with food for nations. And the same events which transform some men into devils, transform others into seraphs. (*Homilist.*) *Providence.*—I. FOR THE SAME THINGS UNCERTAINLY AND INDIFFERENTLY TO BEFALL THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED IN THIS LIFE IS UNAVOIDABLY NECESSARY. 1. Because men have the dominion over their own actions, and do that which themselves choose to do. 2. Because a great deal of prosperity and affliction befalls men, not as the reward or the effect of anything done by themselves, but by descent from their parents, whose virtues and vices have great influence upon the persons and fortunes of their children by the providence of God, and by the laws of men, and by the course of nature. 3. Because they are so mixed together in their persons, interests, employments, and places of abode, that they cannot be distinguished in the events that befall them. 4. For the more evident and certain distinguishing of them one from another. II. THEY WHO MAKE THIS OBJECTION AGAINST PROVIDENCE ARE NO COMPETENT JUDGES IN THE CASE, AND SUPPOSE IN THEIR OBJECTION THAT WHICH

IS FALSE. It is supposed in this objection that the righteous endure so much grief, and the wicked enjoy so much pleasure, as cannot consist with God's love to the righteous and anger at the wicked, if He take notice and be concerned in that which happens. The better to judge of this supposition, let two things be considered. 1. That by the outward estate of men we know very little of their present grief or pleasure. 2. If we did know their present grief or pleasure, we cannot infer from thence which is the good, and which is the bad condition. III. HOWEVER, THE DAY OF JUDGMENT IS A SUFFICIENT ANSWER TO THE OBJECTION. St. Paul, when he felt the smart of his present afflictions, called them light afflictions, for a moment, not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed. (*Z. Cradock, D.D.*) *The sufferings of good men*.—1. God permits the sufferings of good men for the advancement of the honour and interest of religion. A passive state is the proper sphere of action for the noblest virtues of Christianity; and for this reason the Son of God, when He took our nature upon Him, chose to appear in such a state that His example might be of more powerful and general influence to mankind. And indeed, next to the miracles, whereby the truth of the Christian religion was established, nothing contributed more to the propagation of it than the invincible patience and constancy of its possessors. 2. God has this further wise and religious end in the sufferings of good men: that we may learn by them to moderate our affections to this deceitful world; and to cast our views forward upon a more durable state of happiness, and better suited to the noble faculties and inclinations of human nature. 3. The sufferings of good men are designed to remind us both of our duty and our danger; when it is observed that the righteous fall and no man layeth it to heart, it is implied that this is a proper season of inquiring into the occasions of God's public judgments, and reforming those sins which provoked them; and this is the more incumbent upon us in proportion to the dignity of the person and the character he sustains. 4. There is no man so good but he is conscious to himself he deserves what he suffers. The world perhaps cannot charge him with any visible or notorious escapes; yet he need only put the question to his own heart concerning the reasons of his sufferings, and it will acquit the justice of heaven in them. (*R. Fiddes.*)

Ver. 3. *The heart of the sons of men is full of evil.*—*Scriptural statement of the doctrines of human corruption, and of the renewal of the heart to holiness*.—I. MAN'S NATURAL CORRUPTION. 1. One prevailing misconception on the subject of human corruption respects the seat of the disorder. What is the daily language of numbers? "Our lives, it is true, are not exempt from blame. We are guilty of many indiscretions. But our heart is good." In opposition to this language, the text asserts that the origin of all the evil is within. "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil." Not the streams alone are filthy and defiled; but the fountain is polluted (*Gen. viii. 21; Jer. vii. 24; xvii. 9; James iv. 1; Matt. xii. 34; xv. 19*). 2. Another ground of misconception on the subject of human corruption respects the degree and extent of the disorder. The text says that this corruption is not only radical but total. Generosity, gratitude, fidelity, and the exercise of many other pleasing qualities between man and man; the spontaneous applause of virtue; the decided condemnation of immorality may all exist, without any tendency in man to what is truly good (*Isa. i. 5, 6; Rom. vii. 18; viii. 7; Gen. vi. 5*). 3. The declaration in the text is also absolute. No exception is stated or implied on account of any difference of outward dispensation under which mankind may be placed. The Gospel uniformly proceeds on the supposition that man is born in sin; that his corruption is not accidental, but innate; not acquired, but hereditary. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." II. THE RENEWAL OF THE HEART TO HOLINESS. If, as the Scriptures teach, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," then every text which points out the nature and extent of human corruption, points out by implication the nature and extent of that moral change which man must undergo. 1. Let us thankfully receive the information vouchsafed. 2. Let us also profitably use the information vouchsafed. While the text sets before us the picture of mankind in general, let us remember that it sets before us our picture in particular. Let us seek to acquire a deep, an experimental conviction of the truth. Let our experience of the inveteracy of the malady lead us earnestly to seek for help from Him who alone can heal our disordered souls. (*E. Cooper.*) *The unconverted world*.—I. THEIR GUILT. "The heart—full of evil" (*Mark vii. 21*). It applies to all. The most peaceable man alive has often probably committed murder in his heart. The man of purity and

chastity may often, in the heart, have been guilty of adultery. Passions, vile and loathsome as the pit from which they spring, only wait their opportunity. Is the man provoked? He is enraged. Is he admired? He is proud and puffed up. Does God afflict him? He is rebellious. Does God cross him? He is discontented and impatient. II. **THEIR MADNESS.** 1. It is a well-known symptom of natural madness that the poor creature who is thus afflicted is apt to entertain most extravagant notions of his own greatness and importance. Whilst the chains are on his hands, whilst he is confined within the narrow limits of his gloomy cell, he often struts about, and thinks himself a king. Is this acknowledged to be madness? and is there none, then, in the conduct of those men who, being spiritually "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," are saying of themselves, "I am rich and increased with goods, and I have need of nothing"? 2. Men who are mad, in the ordinary sense of the expression, are, for the most part, utterly insensible of danger, and incapable of fleeing from it. They walk on unconcerned, where men possessed of reason and of foresight would be shifting for their safety. Are those men, then, to be set down for sober who show an equal unconcern when the danger is eternal? 3. But mark another painful symptom of the man who labours under a natural derangement, he knows not his best friend. Those whom, were he in his senses, he would hasten to embrace, he looks on with a cold, unfeeling eye. Nay, perhaps he turns away from them, he counts them enemies. It is also the worst symptom of that spiritual derangement with which the men of this world are afflicted. They also know not their best Friend. They "turn away from Him who speaketh to them from heaven." III. **THEIR MISERABLE END.** "After that, they go to the dead." After what? After all the evil and the madness of their earthly course—after having wasted all their years in worldliness and folly—then, "they go to the dead." Their souls are gathered to the place where all who lived and died like them are gone before. And what place? Can we doubt that hell is meant? Where else do they go "who forget God"? What other wages hath sin, the worldly man's master, to bestow upon its servants? (*A. Robertson, M.A.*) **Madness is in their heart while they live.**—*Moral madness*:—There is a worse madness than mental. Many men intellectually sane are moral maniacs. Wherein does the madness of the unregenerate appear? I. In practically ignoring the greatest BEING. II. In ignoring the greatest INTERESTS. III. In ignoring the greatest DIGNITIES. The dignity of a pure character, moral conquests, and self-sacrificing deeds. These they never recognize. (*Homilist.*) *Moral insanity*:—This affirmation is not made of one or two men, nor of some men merely; but of "the sons of men," as if of them all. 1. The insanity spoken of in the text is moral, that of the heart. By the heart here is meant the will—the voluntary power. 2. Who are the morally insane? Those who, not being intellectually insane, yet act as if they were. The conduct of impenitent men is the perfection of irrationality. You see this in the ends to which they devote themselves, and in the means which they employ to secure them. An end madly chosen—sought by means madly devised; this is the life-history of the masses who reject God. 3. This moral insanity is a state of unmingled wickedness. (1) It is voluntary—not from the loss but from the abuse of reason. (2) It is often deliberate. (3) It is a total rejection of both God's law and Gospel. The law he will not obey; the Gospel of pardon he will not accept. He seems determined to brave the Omnipotence of Jehovah. Is he not mad upon his idols? Is it saying too much when the Bible affirms—"Madness is in their heart while they live"? Remarks:—1. Sinners strangely accuse saints of being mad and crazy. Yet those very sinners admit the Bible to be true, and admit those things which Christians believe as true to be really so. 2. If intellectual insanity be a shocking fact, how much more so is moral? Suppose the case of a Webster. His brain becomes softened; he is an idiot! There is not a man in all the land but would feel solemn. What! Daniel Webster—that great man, an idiot! How have the mighty fallen! What a horrible sight! But how much more horrible to see him become a moral idiot—to see a selfish heart run riot with the clear decisions of his gigantic intellect—to see his moral principles fading away before the demands of selfish ambition—to see such a man become a drunkard, a debauchee, a loafer. Intellectual idiocy is not to be named in the comparison! 3. Although some sinners may be externally fair, and may seem to be amiable in temper and character, yet every real sinner is actually insane. Eternity so vast, and its issues so dreadful, yet this sinner drives furiously to hell as if he were on the high-road to heaven! And all this

only because he is infatuated with the pleasures of sin for a season. (C. G. Finney, D.D.).

Ver. 4. **A living dog is better than a dead lion.**—*Sinners, living and dead:*—**I. SOME SINNERS ARE MORE CONTEMPTIBLE THAN OTHERS.** There is as much difference between some and others as there is between the "dog" and the "lion." 1. Some sinners are baser in nature than others. There are some who are constitutionally low, and mean, and sordid—like the dog. 2. Some sinners are in baser circumstances than others. Some tenant the hovels of pauperism, others dwell in palaces. Some wear the wretched appearance of starving curs, others the majestic bearing of lions. **II. THE LEAST CONTEMPTIBLE OF SINNERS MUST DIE.** There is the "dead lion." The sinner, however noble in nature or circumstances, must die. Death to the sinner is a terrible thing. 1. It detaches him from all good. 2. It connects him with all evil. **III. THE MOST CONTEMPTIBLE SINNER, WHILST LIVING, HAS AN ADVANTAGE OVER THE LEAST CONTEMPTIBLE WHO IS DEAD. WHY?** 1. He is living in a world fitted for happiness. Everything in the natural world is intended and suited to minister pleasure to man. 2. He is living in the sphere of redemptive mercy. (*Homilist.*) *The delusion of common life rebuked and corrected:*—Life is an immense advancement over death. Organization is greatly in advance of inorganized matter; life is an advancement over organization, for one may exist without the other. But a rational life is as superior to simple life in itself, as life is in advance of simple lifeless organization. Reason cannot exist without life, for it is its first and essential condition; but it is different from it, and superior to it; it is an addition to it, an adornment and completion of it, it makes life great, grand, powerful, and Divine-like. The distance and difference between life and death are the difference and extreme distance between principles, viewed in their moral character, relation, and result. As life is superior to death in the power of consciousness, action, and advancement, so are true principles and good character to the false and the bad. On this ground, "a living dog is better than a dead lion." **I. SOME OF THE PRINCIPLES THE WORDS OF THE TEXT SUGGEST.** 1. Life is the period within which all is possible that is requisite and required. A dead lion is helpless and hopeless, a living dog is able and hopeful. 2. Little real goodness is better than much nominal and fanciful. A small living spark will produce a flame, which cannot be done by a large dead charcoal; a small mustard-seed will grow into a beautiful and useful tree, whereas a forest of dead roots cannot produce such results. 3. The small used rightly is better than the great unused. A small candle that gives light is better than a sun covered with darkness. A little water that can be used by the dying or thirsty is better than a river which cannot be so used. We constantly hear complaints and excuses of small possessions, of small means, of small opportunities, and of small powers, and these are made the causes of neglect and misery in the lips of those who make them. What we need, first of all, is not greater quantity, but the power of using faithfully what we have. 4. The past of life will not satisfy and meet the present demands of human need and Divine requirements. Every day creates its duties—every day brings its wants; the provision of the day covers the need of a day, as the work of the day covers the obligation of a day. The present will not cover the future, no more than the future can cover the present—every day must provide for itself; if it does not, it is a day of want, for the blessings of yesterday and to-morrow are partly dead things to us to-day. 5. The small, with evidence and security, is better than much with groundless hope and uncertainty. A little goodness done is better than much in vows and promises; a small portion of solid and real happiness is better than great superficial and uncertain pleasure; a little producing power is better than much that is unproductive; a little of actual reality possessed of truth, virtue, and religion is of far higher worth than much in boastful fancy. 6. The small with contentment is better than the great without. The value and importance of a thing to us is in the fitness of it to satisfy our heart and mind; it may be small and insufficient in its outward form or in the estimate of people relative to it, but it is better than the possession which people call, in outward appearance, grand and glorious. With contentment, which comprehends peace of conscience and tranquillity of mind, a humble position and a small possession are better than a lofty station and magnificent possession. **II. THE APPLICATION AND THE REBUKE OF THE TEXT TO COMMON LIFE.** 1. It rebukes that class who trust in fortuitous chances more than in the right conduct of life. It may indeed be, in many instances, that true

conduct is often slow in bringing success and happiness, and that the contrary, in many cases in this life, leads to what many call success sooner and with greater certainty; because wrong, in a world of falsehood, has more means and ways at its disposal than truth and law have, for the means and ways of truth must be all true, or else it is no longer true itself. But the success and happiness got any way apart from a right conduct or the order of law, are neither true nor real, they are but things of wrong and misconception, and are neither to be desired nor enjoyed by the true, nor held long by the deluded wrong. 2. It rebukes another class in society, namely, those who trust more in appearance than in high principles of real life. When appearance is sought and loved for its own sake as an end, it is vanity; when it is made to conceal and deceive others, it is hypocrisy. These feelings are found everywhere in society, deforming its beauty and eating up its life and reality; they are the dead lions of society, beginning in vain appearance and ending in death. 3. It rebukes those who will not do the little they can, because they have no means or opportunities to do the great and illustrious. To bury the one talent because we are not possessors of five, or not to use the one until the other four will be possessed, is a vain delusion; and better is the man who uses his little faithfully, than he who thus vainly hopes until he possesses more: one is conscious of life and gives expression to it; the other is dead in heart and action, and notwithstanding his plans and promises, a living dog is better than his dead lion. 4. There is a rebuke here to those who neglect present duties until future time. The thing which should be done to-day, but left until the morrow, is undone, and is virtually never done. The probability is that it will never be actually done; but if it will, it will have lost some of its virtue and beauty, because it ought to have been done before. But everything in the form of a present duty, thus neglected until a future time, is virtually dead, for the future is uncertain; and if the time ever comes, our views and feelings instead of being more inclined to do the thing which thus was neglected in the past, will be more disinclined to do it, and will probably be inclined to throw it to a greater future still. 5. The words rebuke human folly that trusts in shadowy unreality rather than in reality. It is not seldom that people give away their present position and happiness because they fancy something greater and far better, and thus give up the real for the vain, and the certain for the things which too often prove unattainable. This is exemplified religiously in different forms, but is the same thing in character and result. One tries to make a good show to gain approval and applause, or conceal some purpose which is not made known, which is hypocrisy. In such a case, inward principle is not sought, conscious enjoyment is not known; all is outward appearance, which is not life and reality, but a formal and hard affectation. There is another class, again, who make feeling all their aim. With these, knowledge is of no value, principle of truth and integrity is of no importance; unless a state of vague and excited moral intoxication absorbs all, everything is worthless. Others there are who make all their religious reality dependent upon some few points of belief, which may be nothing better than opinion, and when it comes to the test, there is neither life nor reality in them. There are others, again, who depend upon some secret purpose in God's mind for all their salvation and heaven, exclusive of all goodness by and in themselves. 6. There is here a rebuke to those who desire their possession to consist in form and magnitude rather than in quality. How feeble and foolish are we! We allow sense to control our reason, and not reason our sense; we too frequently allow fancy to govern conscience rather than conscience fancy; we submit our best judgment to sentimental delusion, rather than be governed according to the laws of truth and equity. How long shall we and others be guilty of pursuing the dead lions of vain ambition and delusive blindness, and be rebuked and punished by justice for the folly of our conduct? III. THE LESSONS OF INSTRUCTIONS INTENDED TO COMMON LIFE. 1. One important lesson here intended is not to trust in the helpless. The earthly and material are helpless, for they are unfit for our moral and spiritual nature. The perishable cannot help us, for they die behind us, and are insufficient from their nature to satisfy our immortal hope and aspiration. The sinful, whatever it is, is helpless; for instead of improving, it deteriorates, and instead of adding to resources and happiness, it diminishes and destroys. The thing which is not in unity with God's will and order, with the advancement of truth and happiness, cannot help us, and must not be trusted in. No finite thing must have all the confidence of our soul, for everything and everybody are insufficient to meet the wants of the soul in

all its relations and conditions. We must have a living God, a living Saviour, a living Comforter, a living faith, a living hope, a living love—these will comfort and be sufficient when everything else fails and dies. 2. Another lesson intended to teach us, is not to judge things from their forms, but from their character. If we judge from appearance, we go wrong in the most common matters of life. In childhood we should put the penny above the sovereign because it is larger; and judging from outward strength and swiftness we should put the horse above man. Outward appearance, when natural and true, is an index of the inward character and meaning of things; but we must not take it alone as a final test, for it may not be genuine, and moreover, we may by something not right in us misinterpret it; it must be taken in connection with other things more safe and true as tests of quality and character. 3. We are taught to use faithfully the means and powers we possess, and not excuse our virtue upon the chance of things. What we need is not so much more power, but the use of what we possess more faithfully. In this God has given us useful lessons in the ant, the bee, and the bird; they use what they have, and they answer successfully the purpose of life. 4. There is another lesson of sacred importance taught us, namely, that God looks at the vitality of things in their nature, and not on their outward form of grandeur and greatness. God accepts of a humble publican, with his unassuming manner and confession, rather than the boastful prayer of the Pharisee. He looks at the vitality of the heart, and not at the gorgeous outward manifestation. He accepts the attitude of the inward spirit. He is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. What a comfort and encouragement is this to us all! What God thinks of us is the great thing belonging to us all alike. He demands a living thought, a living love, a living faith, and a living devotion; they are suitable in themselves, and accepted by God from all alike. 5. Another lesson of importance given us here is, that the secret of happiness is to enjoy the little we have. However small our blessings, we have more than we use to our own advancement and happiness; the reason of our misery is the non-application rightly of what we possess, and not deficiency in the quality and degree of our possession. This is often beautifully illustrated in life, you often see more happiness in the cottage than in the palace, in poverty than in wealth, in pain and affliction than in ease and health. How is this? It is because one applies and enjoys his little better than the other his greater and richer blessings. 6. I mention one more lesson taught us in the text, namely, that our goodness should be an active, growing thing; our goodness must live to be active, and active to live. A little living seed is better than all the dead flowers in the country; so a little progressive goodness is more hopeful than all past life of virtue and religion. Growth is a preparation for the future, arising from present life and deep-rootedness. It is not the majesty and largeness of the lion that makes it undesirable, but its dead condition; as such, it is a condition of inactivity and decay rather than one of action and strength. It is not the smallness of the dog that makes it an object of desire, but its life. Under this condition it is competent of useful service, and of growth and activity. The lesson intended to be conveyed to us is, that life, action, and growth are united; and that it is needful to have life before the others can exist. The teaching of truth is, Grow in grace; let us go hence; let us not be weary in well-doing; and these things are incompatible with inactivity, stultification, and death. IV. THE ENCOURAGEMENT AND COMFORT INTENDED TO COMMON LIFE. Most things contain in them an element of comfort, if we are able to find it, and in a fit state to receive and apply it. All comforts are not of the same kind; they vary in form and diversity, in common with other things. When you assist a man in distress with your material means, it is a comfort, or soothe his bodily pain, or restore him from the verge of death into health and vigour, it is a high comfort. When you tell a friend the way to success, or restore a wanderer from a path of danger and wrong, and put and direct him on in safety, it is comforting. When you solve any difficult problem, or dissipate some doubt and fear, or soothe a heart depressed and cast down, it is no small comfort you impart to their subjects. When you show new light upon any dark picture, or give new means to conquer difficulties, or discover new hope to vanquish the common foes of life, these are no small comforts to those who need them. These are some of the various form of comforts, and they are all valuable and needed, and accepted with gratitude by those who are in such conditions. We have in the text an encouraging comfort for the true and humble ones who are depressed and dejected by reason of their state and condition, or from the small-

ness of their sacrifice, or the little they can do. They look at the lofty station, splendour, power, and great gifts of others, and are discouraged and ready to flag in the path of duty, and think they have neither a plea nor a hope to be accepted of God, and be among the successful competitors of religion and heaven. But He looks not as man looks, He accepts the small and unadorned sincerity before dead splendour and outward dignified grandeur. You humble dejected ones, be then comforted, that the Lofty One looks on the humble and true ones, and accepts the mean in outward appearance, if it be true, before the most illustrious grandeur and the greatest outward ornament which a combined universe could offer Him. (*J. Hughes.*) *Reality versus Show*:—In the estimation of an Oriental, the lion was the symbol of all that was brave and kingly—the dog, of all that was base and contemptible. Between the living dog and the living lion there could be no comparison, any more than you could compare a Christian philosopher with an African slave—there was only a contrast; but the lion dead changes the whole aspect of the thing. Its regal bearing, its voice of thunder, its courage, are gone, and nothing but the appearance is left behind. Than that, the wise man says, the living dog is better. It seems to me that the writer of Ecclesiastes has set before himself the purpose of scourging the people for their vain, pretentious, and foolish display. The great outstanding sin of the nation was a love of mere show. They set little store on the reality of the thing if they were only feasted with the appearance. There must be pomp, pageantry, glare, dazzle, grand outward show—never mind how hollow, never mind how unreal. Artificiality was ruining the nation. They had set up the dead lion, and spurned the living dog. A very foolish nation, certainly, that nation of Jews; and it does seem astonishing that grown-up men and women could have been so childish. But wait; let us ask if there is not something of this here, and now, among ourselves. Here in this Western world, among a people not poetic, not dreamy—now in an age that claims to be intensely practical—it seems to me that we are given over to appearances, and sham is lord of the ascendant. Is it difficult to prove that? I think not. Look at dress. Simple garments with simple lines, simple ornaments, plain but real; nature's grand simplicity—where will you find it? Only here and there. It is built up with fold upon fold, gaudy extravagance, glaring tinsel, diamonds of pure carbon, or diamonds of cut-glass; ornaments of gold, or ornaments of aluminium; flowers from the garden, if not, then flowers from the toy shop; anything and everything for show. Rich and poor alike are rushing into this foolish extravagance of dress. Simplicity is gone—banished to the wilds of Siberia or elsewhere, and we are given over to the gaudy and the unreal. Then, again, take our social life and customs. In certain circles, party-going and party-giving fill up a large portion of the time. The day is but a wearisome waiting or toilsome preparation for the evening's festivities. Then there will be songs and laughter—for the most part foolish, sentimental songs, and the most forced and silly laughter. And the secret of much of this party-going and party-giving is the love of display. A week's honest earnings wasted in a night; charities to the poor and deserving lessened or cut off; children defrauded of a part of their rightful inheritance: and all to show up a dead lion. Better the living dog, I am sure. See all this hard work about you; all this wear and tear of body and mind; all this straining and striving. What does it mean? It means money, money. Men make haste to be rich, that they may have more display, and in their blind eagerness fall into many snares and divers temptations. The hardy virtues are dying; the brave, simple, manly men—the heroes, the giants—are becoming extinct. Let there be some grand effort made to rescue society from this threatened danger; let us put forth our hands, and grasp again those simple, hardy virtues which were the foundation of England's greatness. Our feasting is destroying us; our luxury is wasting our manhood. Better poverty than this; better the living dog than the dead lion. Take, again, our commercial world, and you will find much worship of the dead lion, and much contempt of the living dog there. It is a maxim that if a man would succeed, he must make a show. A small house in an unpretending place will gain little or no credit. There must be display, or it is nothing. And so you have it all around you—this dead lion worship—this appearance, this shameful and fraudulent display. Everywhere people are asking for brilliance, and care little for the reality. The dead lion is enthroned—that is king, that is priest, that is philosopher, that is statesman; while the living dog, the unostentatious reality, is passed by with contempt or thrust out of sight. But what about the Church—that representative of God's

kingdom on the earth—that grand and heaven-formed institution, which has nothing to do with condition, but everything to do with character? Has she protested against this love of show? Has she stood forth a reality in a world of unrealities, pure gold as compared with things of tinsel, a flower bright and fragrant, unfolding in divinest beauty under the rays of the central sun as against the cut and painted paper of man's invention? Or has she, too, drank in the spirit of the world and taken the dead lion to her arms? Splendid organizations, elaborate theologies, well-defined creeds, and a goodly array of dogmas, those are the things we have busied ourselves about. We have set too great store upon mere profession and orthodoxy, and too little store upon personal life. "What a good man is Mr. Screw! what a great Christian!" Mr. Screw never had a doubt about religion in his life, and never will. Orthodox! if he were to live through all the changes a thousand years will see, he would never have the charge of heresy preferred against him. Tell him the creed, and he will subscribe it. But he holds his money as dearer than his faith. He is devout on Sunday, and on Monday morning will pull a string and set in motion a whole organization of fraud, and then devour a widow's house, and say grace after the meal. No matter, he is orthodox, and the Church will have him. Ah! better a living dog than that dead lion. Better a widow's mite in the box and an honest, loving heart throbbing in the pew. The cry is raised in all our churches for a revival. But the revival will not come until there is more reality in our church life. We must take a pure religion into the streets. The shop, and the warehouse, and the mill, must be conducted upon principles of Christian integrity. (A. J. Bray.)

Lion or dog.—I. IN RESPECT TO THE POSSESSION OF LIFE, we conclude, even under the greatest disadvantages, EXISTENCE IS BETTER THAN NON-EXISTENCE. To live is to be conscious. To think, to know, to reason, to act is elevation. To possess powers of estimating even misery is a matter for thankfulness. The difficulties of life should be faced courageously. "If we faint in the day of adversity our strength is small." We should always cherish hope; hope will give life. We should not yield to envy, for that is the foundation of despair. The rich have their annoyances, disappointments, trials, social ignorings and terrible losses; the poor can have their simple pleasures and healthful rest. Where there is the desire to make the best of circumstances it is wonderful how much of joy may be even found in positions that appear most pitiable. We are not wishing to imply that those under conditions of poverty should be content always to remain therein. On the contrary, we wish them ever to be seeking to improve their surroundings and their minds, but ever to remember that "a living dog is better than a dead lion."

II. IN RESPECT TO THE DECISIONS WE MAY HAVE TO ARRIVE AT IN VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES the truth of the text may guide us. If a man seeking employment should find a task that appears to be below his dignity, or the pay below his deserts, it is better to accept such a position than to be workless and go perhaps starving, or subsisting on charity. The poor say, frequently, "Half a loaf is better than none," and this is common sense. Further, in respect to some enterprise in which a man may be tempted to embark by the promise of great profits or interest, but for which he must sacrifice some steady, but less promising occupation, it would be well for him to remember the text. Better the certainty, though small, than the profits of alluring amount, but which are problematical. In bearing certain difficulties, misrepresentations, and evils we may remember that efforts to remove them may only increase them. It is "better to bear the ills we have than to fly to others that we know not of."

III. IN JUDGING OF CERTAIN SYSTEMS the principle of the text is applicable. To-day we have to choose either rationalism, agnosticism, ultimate despair, universal suicide, or religion of some kind. We say better any form of religion than none, any vitality rather than death. Even if we have to decide between various forms of religion, we should seek that which promotes intellectual and spiritual life combined; but if we cannot find the spiritual advanced, and only cold formalism or intellectualism cultivated, then we must accept that which has life and warmth and love in it. Christianity is a system of doctrines concerning God and immortality. Anything that will keep alive the knowledge of the one and hope for the other is better than allowing it to die out.

IV. The principle of the text applies in respect to THE POSSESSION OF SPIRITUAL LIFE. To have it in however low degree is better than to have to confess to its absence. Spiritual life is characterized by peace through faith in the one great sacrifice, effort after purity, love of the Word, and practice of prayer and charity toward all. Many of the poor and

unlearned are rich in this possession. They have that which is a permanent possession, too—something which will not be destroyed at death or dissipated by one's heirs. Better be the poorest and most despised on earth, with this spiritual life, than the "lion of society" without it. He that is "least in the kingdom of heaven" is greater than the lordliest worldlying. Lord Byron sent to a lady who once wrote to him, pressing upon him the necessity of religion, a reply which is in harmony with what we have been saying. He said: "I thank you for your interest in me. I am bound to say that all who entertain a belief in God and religion have a tremendous advantage; for it not only affords consolations in this life, but even if there is no hereafter it smooths the downward course of life and takes from death its darkness and fear." Yet, knowing that the "living dog was better than the dead lion," that erratic, that proud, that highly-talented genius turned away and lived for the world and for misery. Alas! many imitate him even now. (*F. Hastings.*)

Ver. 5. For the living know that they shall die.—A funeral sermon.—I. WHENCE IT IS THAT THE LIVING ATTAIN THE SURE AND INFALLIBLE KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR OWN DEATH. 1. There be many things from whence we may collect the necessity of dying. (1) We may collect it by those harbingers and forerunners of death, diseases, pains, and natural decays which are incident to all men. (2) The observation of death's universal empire over all other things, and over all other men, may give us a certain knowledge that we also must shortly die. (3) We may certainly know ourselves mortal by knowing ourselves sinful creatures. There is a double necessity of death on account of sin. As a punishment. As a purgation of it. 2. Now, though, by these and other such-like considerations, we may arrive at a certain knowledge that we shall die; yet the particular circumstances of the time and manner of our death are known to God only. (1) He only knows the critical and punctual time of our death; for He hath determined it, to a very moment. (2) In what manner our death will appear to us, we know not: this is a secret of God's own breast. II. WHENCE IT PROCEEDS, THAT MEN ARE SO STUPIDLY IRRATIONAL, THAT, THOUGH THEY ALL KNOW THEY SHALL DIE, YET SO FEW SERIOUSLY PREPARE THEMSELVES FOR IT. 1. Men are generally so immersed in the businesses and pleasures of life, that these swallow up all serious thoughts of death and preparations for it. They are employed about other things: like a heap of ants, that are busily toiling to get in their provision, without regarding the foot that is ready to crush them. Such are the impertinent and vain cares of men! The riches and honours, which are but the dust and smoke of this world, have so blinded our eyes, that we cannot discern the near approaches of death; and thus, while we, Archimedes like, are busily drawing projects and designs in the dust, and are wholly intent about vainer speculations than his, we mind not the alarm, nor perceive the enemy is upon us, till we are stricken dead through the reins. 2. Men delay serious preparations for death, because they generally look upon it as afar off. (1) Men reckon old age a vast while off. (2) Most men presume that they shall live to extreme age. (3) Men think a few of their latest days and thoughts are enough to prepare them for death. Think you your souls can then vigorously bestir themselves when they are grown stiff with age; when your faculties are benumbed, and your spirits congealed past the thaw of a fire? 3. Men generally put off serious thoughts of dying because of the terrors and insupportable dread which such apprehensions bring with them. And therefore death is called (Job xviii. 14) "the king of terrors"; a king that comes attended with a thousand phantoms and frightful apparitions. III. APPLICATION. 1. If we all certainly know that we must die, this might teach us so much wisdom as not to set our affections eagerly upon anything in this present world; a world which we must shortly leave. 2. Since we all know that we shall die, let this serve to exhort us seriously to prepare for our death. Some sad instances there have been of those who, having neglected this great work till the end of their life, have then spent that little remnant of time which they had in crying out for more. But if we have carefully prepared ourselves for death, it will be to us a repose instead of a terror. (*Bp. E. Hopkins.*)

Vers. 7, 8. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.—Festive joy:—This is one of those passages, so remarkable in the writings of Solomon, in which the words of sinful men in the world are taken up by the Holy Ghost, to be applied in a

Christian sense. As they stand in Ecclesiastes, they are intended to represent the sayings of sensual, careless people, indulging themselves in their profane ways, their utter neglect of God and goodness, with the notion that this world is all. It is much the same as the unbeliever's saying, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But see the ever-watchful goodness and mercy of God. The words which the dissolute, wild-hearted sinner uses to encourage himself in his evil, inconsiderate ways, He teaches us to take up, and use them in a very different sense; to express the inward joy and comfort which God's people may find in obeying Him. As thus: suppose a person giving himself up, with his whole heart, to the service and obedience of God; suppose him really withdrawing himself from the sins which had most easily beset him; suppose him making some great sacrifice, parting with what he held very dear, or submitting to pain or grief for Christ's sake: then the holy and merciful Comforter seems to say to him in the words of the text, "Go thy way now, thank God, and take courage; the blessing of God is now restored to thee, and will be upon all thou hast, and upon thine ordinary employments and refreshments: now thou mayest eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart, for God now accepteth thy works." What a heavenly light it would throw over our ordinary works and refreshments, if, being always careful to set about them with a good conscience, we could seriously bring it home to ourselves, that they are so many tokens of heavenly and eternal love; so many reasonable grounds of hope, that God really accepteth our works. But there is yet a higher, a Christian sense of these words. The bread and wine, the white garments, the ointment for the head, are figures and types of our Christian privileges, the blessings and favours of the kingdom of heaven. It is, then, as if the Holy Word had said to us, being, as we are, Christian men, members of the mystical Body of our Lord and Saviour, "Now you have been brought into the communion of saints; now God has set His seal upon you; now you are washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. Go your way, then; use your privileges with all reverence, joy, and fear." And it would seem that if Christians were at all such as they ought to be, the words might be well and profitably understood with a particular reference to this sacred season of Whitsuntide. This is the last of the holy seasons; it represents to us the full completion of God's unspeakable plan for the salvation of the world. The words have a sound most comfortable to penitents, as well as to those who, by God's help, have kept themselves from wilful, deadly sin. They sound like words of absolution: "Go thy way, return again to that holy Table, from which thy transgressions had for a time separated thee: eat thy Bread and drink thy Wine with a courageous and hopeful heart; for now there is hope that God accepteth thy works; that He hears thee, since thou hast left off inclining unto wickedness with thine heart. Thy case indeed is alarming, from the continual danger of a relapse; and thy loss at best is great, penitency instead of innocence being thy portion; yet go on steadily and cheerfully." Observe, however, the words which follow, which to the hearing of a thoughtful Christian convey a very serious admonition, telling us on what these unspeakable privileges depend, so far as our own conduct is concerned: "Let thy garments be always white, and let thine head lack no ointment." To say, therefore, to Christians at Whitsuntide, "Let thy garments be always white," was the same as saying, "Take care that at no time you stain or sully the bright and clear robe of your Saviour's righteousness, which has just been thrown over you: according to the apostle's saying, 'As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.' As much as possible keep it clear from all spot of wilful sin." Again, says the wise man, "Let thine head lack no ointment"; and this again is an allusion which would come with a particular meaning in early times to the new-baptized Christians, and those who had been present at their baptism. And oil is in Scripture the constant token of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to say, "Let thy head lack no ointment," would mean, "Take care that thou stir up, cherish, and improve the unspeakable gift of which thou art now made partaker. Use diligently all the means of grace which Christ has provided for thee in His kingdom, whereof thou art now come to be an inheritor." (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to the "Tracts for the Times."*) **Let thy garments be always white.**—*White robes*.—One of the most common beliefs of men concerning heaven is that all are to be robed in white; and it is no idle fancy, for the Bible warrants such a belief. The priestly robes worn in the temple service were white; the apocalyptic vision was filled with the white-robed; the poetry of the

Bible teaches that purity and joy in life are symbolized by snowy raiment—"Let thy garments be always white." "Thy garments." This is a personal matter. The command is to the end that each is to see that his own dress is clean. The neighbour will take care of his own. And now the emphasis comes on "always." There must not be a single careless moment. Why is the colour of our garments to be white? Why? Because everybody looks well in white. All complexions can stand white. The plainest are adorned and the most beautiful are made more angelic by wearing it. We love white garments because they are so pure. No impure dyes have disfigured the cloth, and all of Nature's tints the bleachers have taken away. So white robes remind us constantly of purity. And did you ever think how important it is? The springs that furnish the thirsty with water must be in their fountain-heads pure, or who will dare to use it? The usefulness of anything depends upon its purity. The white garment is an object lesson, then, teaching the vital importance of purity in heart and life. To be able to look God in the face with steady eye and unblanched cheek. O, that is worth all the sacrifice that it may demand! "But it is so hard to keep pure and sweet," they say. I may be tempted by the allurements of the world. Money, with its shining sunbeams, may twine its fingers about my heart to woo it. Ambition, with her lofty and imposing mien, may awe me to obey her. Shall I give up the white raiment of my soul? I would not dare to soil my raiment now, for the spots in such a light the whole world could see, and how could I ever again look up and cry "Abba, Father," if on my heart was the stain of evil? But white raiment is the symbol of another quality in the true life. It is joy. Always dependent upon purity for its life, yet a separate quality. No impure life is ever a truly happy life. We put on our clean raiment to honour the joyful occasion. Children, I believe that pure heart is always happy. Then there is a duty attached, the duty to be joyful in being and doing good. How different the world would be to-day if the command about our spiritual toilet were heeded! Let us try hereafter to live in such a way as to teach our friends how blessed it is to have pure, and, therefore, happy hearts. White robes bring great responsibility. They soil so easily. The clean garment shows the dirt at the slightest contact. Keep your hearts clean, for they will soil as easily as the white dress. The little girl who went home from a visit to a neighbour's by far the longest way, in order to keep her dress from the mud of a certain street, on being asked why she did it since it made her very tired, said: "It kept my dress clean." How much better children of our Heavenly Father we should be if we were as particular to keep the raiment of our hearts free from the mud-stains of sin, even though the extra toil makes us very weary. Better be tired, even to death, than soil the raiment of the soul. (G. F. Prentiss.)

Ver. 10. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.—Of industry in general:—By industry we understand a serious and steady application of mind, joined with a vigorous exercise of our active faculties, in prosecution of any reasonable, honest, useful design, in order to the accomplishment or attainment of some considerable good. Industry doth not consist merely in action; for that is incessant in all persons, our mind being a restless thing, never abiding in a total cessation from thought or from design; being like a ship in the sea, if not steered to some good purpose by reason, yet tossed by the waves of fancy, or driven by the winds of temptation somewhat whither. But the direction of our mind to some good end, without roving or flinching, in a straight and steady course, drawing after it our active powers in execution thereof, doth constitute industry; the which therefore usually is attended with labour and pain; for our mind is not easily kept in a constant attention to the same thing; and the spirits employed in thought are prone to flutter and fly away, so that it is hard to fix them: and the corporeal instruments of action being strained to a high pitch, or detained in a tone, will soon feel a lassitude somewhat offensive to nature; whence labour or pain is commonly reckoned an ingredient of industry, and laboriousness is a name signifying it; on which account this virtue, as involving labour, deserveth a peculiar commendation; it being then most laudable to follow the dictates of reason, when so doing is attended with difficulty and trouble. 1. Industry doth befit the constitution and frame of our nature; all the faculties of our soul and organs of our body being adapted in a congruity and tendency thereto: our hands are suited for work, our feet for travel, our senses to watch for occasion of pursuing good and eschewing evil, our reason to plod and contrive ways of employ-

ing the other parts and powers; all these, I say, are formed for action; and that not in a loose and gadding way, or in a slack and remiss degree, but in regard to determinate ends, with vigour requisite to attain them; and especially our appetites do prompt to industry, as inclining to things not obtainable without it; wherefore in not being industrious we defeat the intent of our Maker; we pervert His work and gifts; we forfeit the use and benefit of our faculties; we are bad husbands of nature's stock. 2. In consequence hereto industry doth preserve and perfect our nature, keeping it in good tune and temper, improving and advancing it towards its best state. If the water runneth, it holdeth clear, sweet, and fresh; but stagnation turneth it into a noisome puddle: if the air be fanned by winds, it is pure and wholesome; but from being shut up, it groweth thick and putrid: if metals be employed, they abide smooth and splendid; but lay them up, and they soon contract rust: if the earth be belaboured with culture, it yieldeth corn; but lying neglected, it will be overgrown with brakes and thistles; and the better its soil is, the ranker weeds it will produce: all nature is upheld in its being, order, and state, by constant agitation; every creature is incessantly employed in action conformable to its designed end and use; in like manner the preservation and improvement of our faculties depends on their constant exercise. 3. As we naturally were composed, so by Divine appointment we were originally designed for industry; God did not intend that man should live idly, even in his best state, or should enjoy happiness without taking pains; but did provide work enough even in paradise itself. 4. By our transgression and fall the necessity of industry (together with a difficulty of obtaining good, and avoiding evil) was increased to us; being ordained both as a just punishment for our offences, and as an expedient remedy of our needs. 5. Accordingly our condition and circumstances in the world are so ordered as to require industry; so that without it we cannot support our life in any comfort or convenience. 6. Industry hath annexed thereto, by Divine appointment and promise, the fairest fruits, and the richest rewards: all good things are the fruits of industry; ordered to sprout from it, under the protection and influence of God's blessing, which commonly doth attend it. God indeed could not well proceed otherwise in dispensing His favours to us; not well, I say; that is, not without subverting the methods of things which Himself hath established; not without slighting and voiding His own first bounty, or rendering the common gifts of nature (our reason, our senses, our active powers) vain and useless; not without making us incapable of any praise, or any reward, which suppose works achieved by our earnest endeavour; not without depriving us of that sweetest content, which springeth from enjoying the fruit of our labour. Nothing is more grateful to men than prosperous success in their undertakings, whereby they attain their ends, satisfy their desires, save their pains, and come off with credit; this commonly is the effect of industry, and scarce ever is found without it: nothing of worth or weight can be achieved with half a mind, with a faint heart, with a lame endeavour. Plentiful accommodations for our sustenance and convenience all men will agree to be very desirable; and these are indeed the blessings of Him, who "visiteth the earth and enricheth it"; who "crowneth the year with His goodness," and "whose clouds drop fatness"; but they are so dispensed by Heaven that industry must concur therewith in deriving them to us, and sloth will debar us of them. Another darling of human affection is honour, or reputation among men: this also plainly, after the common reason and course of things, is purchased and preserved by industry: for he that aspireth to worthy things, and assayeth laudable designs, pursuing them steadily with serious application of heart and resolute activity, will rarely fail of good success, and consequently will not miss honour, which ever doth crown victory; and if he should hap to fail in his design, yet he will not lose his credit; for having meant well, and done his best, all will be ready to excuse, many to commend him: the very qualities which industry doth exercise, and the effects which it doth produce, to beget honour, as being ornaments of our person and state. Another yet more precious good, far surpassing all external advantages of our state; wisdom, I mean, or a good comprehension, and right judgment about matters of highest importance to us, is the prize of industry, and not to be gained without it; it is the offspring of watchful observation and experience, of serious meditation and study; of careful reflection on things, marking, comparing, and weighing their nature, their worth, their tendencies and consequences: these are needful to the getting of wisdom, because truth, which it seeketh, commonly doth not lie in the surface, obvious to a superficial glance, nor only dependeth on a simple considera-

tion of few things; but is lodged deep in the bowels of things, and under a knotty complication of various matters; so that we must dig to come at it, and labour in unfolding it: nor is it an easy task to void the prejudices springing from inclination or temper, from education or custom, from passion and interest, which cloud the mind, and obstruct the attainment of wisdom. What should I speak of learning, or the knowledge of various things, transcending vulgar apprehension? Who knoweth not that we cannot otherwise reach any part of that, than by assiduous study and contemplation? Who can be ignorant that no wit alone, or strength of parts can suffice, without great industry, to frame any science, to learn any one tongue, to know the history of nature, or of providence? But farther yet, virtue, the noblest endowment and richest possession whereof man is capable; the glory of our nature, the beauty of our soul, the goodliest ornament and the firmest support of our life; that also is the fruit and blessing of industry; that of all things most indispensably doth need and require it. It doth not grow in us by nature, nor befall us by fortune; for nature is so far from producing it, that it yieldeth mighty obstacles and resistances to its birth, there being in the best dispositions much averseness from good, and great proneness to evil; fortune doth not further its acquits, but casteth in rubs and hindrances thereto, every condition presenting its allurements, or its affrightments from it; all things within us and about us conspire to render its production and its practice laborious. Indeed the very nature and essence of virtue doth consist in the most difficult and painful efforts of soul; in the extirpating rooted prejudices and notions from our understanding; in bending a stiff will, and rectifying crooked inclinations; in overruling a rebellious temper; in curbing eager and importunate appetites; in taming wild passions; in withstanding violent temptations; in surmounting many difficulties, and sustaining many troubles; in struggling with various unruly lusts within, and encountering many stout enemies abroad, which assault our reason, and "war against our soul": in such exercises its very being lieth; its birth, its growth, its subsistence dependeth on them; so that from any discontinuance or remission of them it would soon decay, languish away, and perish. Lastly, the sovereign good, the last scope of our actions, the top and sum of our desires, happiness itself, or eternal life in perfect rest, joy, and glory; although it be the supreme gift of God, and special boon of Divine grace, yet it also by God Himself is declared to be the result and reward of industry; for we are commanded "to work out our salvation with fear and trembling," and to "give diligence in making our calling and election sure," by virtuous practice. It is plainly industry which climbeth the holy mount; it is industry which taketh "the kingdom of heaven by force"; it is industry which "so runneth as to obtain" the prize, which so fighteth as "to receive the crown," which so watcheth as to secure our everlasting interest to us. Thus do the choicest good things of which we are capable spring from industry, or depend on it; and no considerable good can be attained without it: thus all the gifts of God are by it conveyed to us, or are rendered in effect beneficial to us; for the gifts of nature are but capacities, which it improveth; the gifts of fortune or providence are but instruments, which it employeth to our use; the gifts of grace are the supports and succours of it; and the very gift of glory is its fruit and recompense. (*Isaac Barrow, D.D.*) *Industry*, which is recommended in the text, is a virtue of a very diffusive nature and influence, so that no business or design can be well managed without it: we ought, therefore, to conceive a high opinion of it, and inure ourselves to the practice of it on all occasions. 1. We may consider that industry is productive of ease itself, and preventive of trouble. Sloth, indeed, affects ease and quiet, but by affecting loses them: it hates labour and trouble, but by hating incurs them; but industry, by a little voluntary labour, in due place and season, saves much labour afterwards and great distress. 2. Industry begets ease by procuring good habits, and a facility of transacting things expedient to be done: it breeds assurance and courage needful for the prosecution of business and the performance of duties. 3. We may consider that it will sweeten all our enjoyments, and season them with a grateful relish. 4. Especially those accommodations prove most delightful which our industry hath procured to us; for we look on them with a special affection, as the children of our endeavours. 5. The very exercise of industry immediately in itself is delightful; the very settlement of our mind on fit objects, whereby we are freed from doubt and distraction, ministers content; the consideration that we are spending our time and talents to good advantage, in serving God, benefiting our neighbour, and bettering our own state, is very cheering and comfortable. 6. Industry

affords a lasting comfort, deposited in the memory and conscience of him that practises it. 7. Industry argues a generous and ingenuous complexion of soul: it implies a mind not content with mean and vulgar things, but aspiring to things of high worth and pursuing them with courage: it signifies a heart not enduring to owe the sustenance and convenience of life to the liberality of others. 8. Industry is a fence to innocence and virtue; a bar to all kinds of sin and vice, guarding the avenues of the heart, and keeping off occasions and temptations to vicious practices; whilst idleness is the nursery of sin. 9. Industry prevents the sins of vain curiosity, pragmatical troublesome impertinence, and the like pests of common life, into which persons not diligently following their own business will assuredly fall. 10. Industry is needful in every condition and calling of life; in all relations for our good behaviour and right discharge of our duty in them. Are we rich? then is industry requisite for keeping and securing our wealth, or managing it wisely. Are we conspicuous in dignity, honour, and good repute amongst men? then is industry requisite to keep us fast in that state; since nothing is more frail than honour, which must be nourished by worthy actions; otherwise it will languish and decay. On the other hand, are we poor and low in the world? then do we much need industry to shun the extremes of want and ignominy, and to improve our condition. 11. It may also deserve our consideration, that it is industry, to which the public state of the world, and of each commonweal therein, is indebted for its being advanced above rude barbarism: also for the invention and perfection of useful arts and sciences, the stately fabrics which we admire, and the commodious habitations which we enjoy. 12. Industry is commended to us by all sorts of examples, deserving our regard and imitation: all nature is a copy thereof, and the whole world a glass, wherein we may behold this duty represented to us: examples of all the creatures around us, of rational and intelligent natures, of our blessed Saviour, of the inhabitants of heaven, yea of God Himself. And shall we alone be idle, whilst all things are so busy? 13. If we consider, we shall find the root and source of all the inconveniences, the mischiefs, the wants of which we complain, to be our sloth; and there is hardly one of them which commonly we might not prevent or remove by industry. (*Ibid.*) *On diligence in our general and particular calling*:—I. CONSIDER THE MATTER OF THIS COUNSEL AND EXHORTATION; and that is, that we would use great diligence and industry about that which is our proper work and business in this life; and this may very probably comprehend in it these two things—1. Diligence in our great work and business, that which equally concerns every man; I mean the business of religion, in order to the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls. This consists in these two things—(1) In a sincere care and endeavour of universal obedience to God by the conformity of our lives and actions to His laws. (2) In case of sin and miscarriage, in a sincere repentance for our sins, and a timely care to be reconciled to God. 2. Diligence in that province and station which God hath appointed us, whatever it be; whether it consists in the labour of our hands, or in the improvement of our minds, in order to the gaining of knowledge for our own pleasure and satisfaction, and for the use and benefit of others; whether it lie in the skill of government, and the administration of public justice; or in the management of a great estate, of an honourable rank and quality above others, to the best advantage, for the honour of God, and the benefit and advantage of men, so as, by the influence of our power and estate, and by the authority of our example, to contribute all we can to the welfare and happiness of others. II. SOME CONSIDERATIONS TO EXCITE OUR CARE AND DILIGENCE IN THIS GREAT WORK WHICH GOD HATH GIVEN US TO DO IN THIS WORLD, I mean chiefly the business of religion, in order to the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls. 1. Consider the nature of our work, which is such as may both excite and encourage our diligence and care about it. It is indeed a service, but such as is our perfect freedom; it is the service of God, whom to serve is the greatest honour that man or any other creature is capable of; it is obedience, but even obedience, considering our ignorance and frailty, is much wiser and safer for us than a total exemption from all law and rule; for the laws which God hath given us are not imposed upon us merely for His will and pleasure, but chiefly for our benefit and advantage. So that to obey and please God is in truth nothing else but to do those things which are really best for ourselves. 2. Consider how great our work is, and then we shall easily be convinced what care it requires, what diligence it calls for from us. 3. Consider what incredible pains men will take, what diligence they will use, for bad purposes, and for ends infinitely less con-

siderable. "Thieves will rise and travel by night to rob and kill, and shall we use no care, no vigilance, to save ourselves?" 4. Consider that when we come to die, nothing will yield more true and solid consolation to us than the remembrance of a useful and well-spent life, a life of great labour and diligence, of great zeal and faithfulness in the service of God; and, on the contrary, with what grief and regret shall we look back upon all those precious hours which we have so fondly misplaced in sin and vanity! 5. Consider that the degrees of our happiness in another world will certainly bear a proportion to the degrees of our diligence and industry in serving God and doing good. And it is an argument of a mean spirit not to aspire after the best and happiest condition which is to be attained by us. 6. Consider that this life is the time of our activity and working, the next is the season of retribution and recompense; we shall then have nothing to do, but either to reap and enjoy the comfort of well-doing, or to repent the folly of an ill-spent life, and the irreparable mischief which thereby we have brought upon ourselves. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *A home mission sermon*:—If God had willed it we might each one of us have entered heaven at the moment of our conversion. He might have changed us from imperfection to perfection, He might have cut out the very roots of sin, and have destroyed the very being of corruption, and have taken us to heaven instant, if so He had willed it. Notwithstanding that, we are here. And why are we here? Does God delight to tantalize His people by keeping them in a wilderness when they might be in Canaan? The answer is, they are here that they may glorify God, and that they may bring others to know His love. Taking it, therefore, as granted that the people of God are here to do something to bless their fellow-men, our text comes in very pertinently as the rule of our life. I. First, I shall explain **THE PREACHER'S EXHORTATION**. I shall do so by dividing it into three parts. What shall I do?—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth." How shall I do it?—"Do it with thy might." And then, why shall I do it?—"For there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." 1. Are there not some who say, "I hope I love Christ; I desire to serve Him, for I have been saved by His work upon the cross; what then can I do?" The answer is—"whatsoever thy hand findeth to do." Here we will observe, first, that this refers us to the works that are near at hand. Many a young man thinks if he could stand up under a banyan tree, and discourse to the black faces in India, how eloquent he might be. My dear fellow, why don't you try the streets of London first, and see whether you are eloquent there? Many a lady imagines that if she could move in a high circle she would no doubt become another Lady Huntingdon, and do wonders. But why cannot you do wonders in the circle in which God has placed you? He does not call you to do that which is leagues away, and which is beyond your power; it is that which your hand findeth to do. I am persuaded that our home duties—the duties which come near to us in our own streets, in our own lanes and alleys—are the duties in which we ought most of us mainly to glorify Christ. Many say, "I wish I could become a preacher." Yes, but you are not called to be a preacher, it may be. Serve God in that which your hand findeth present. Serve Him in your immediate situation, where you now are. Begin at home. When Jerusalem was built, every man built before his own house. Do you the same. Again, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," refers to works that are possible. There are many things which our heart findeth to do that we never shall do. It is well it is in our heart; God accepts the will for the deed. But if we would be eminently useful, we must not be content with forming schemes in our heart, and talking of them with our lips. We must get plans that are tangible, schemes that we can really manage, ideas that we can really carry out; and so we shall fulfil the exhortation, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it." Do what you can, in your workshop, or shed, or with a needle in your hand; and if ever you have a sceptre—which is not likely—and you use your needle well, you would be the most likely person to use your sceptre well also. There is another word of exhortation which seems to strike me as being very necessary when addressing God's people, it is this: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do." Whether it be the visitation of the poorest of the poor or the teaching of the most ignorant, whether the hewing of wood or the drawing of water, the very lowest work in the Lord's house, if thy hand findeth it to do, do it. There is a story told in the old American war, that once upon a time George Washington, the commander-in-chief, was going around among his soldiers. They were hard at work, lifting a heavy piece of timber at some fortification. There stood the corporal of the regiment calling out to his men, "Heave there,

heave ahoy!" and giving them all kinds of directions. As large as possible the good corporal was. So Washington, alighting from his horse, said to him, "What is the good of your calling out to those men, why don't you help them yourself and do part of the work." The corporal drew himself up and said, "Perhaps you are not aware to whom you are speaking, sir; I am a corporal." "I beg your pardon," said Washington; "you are a corporal, are you; I am sorry I should have insulted you." So he took off his own coat and waistcoat and set to work to help the men build the fortification. When he had done he said, "Mr. Corporal, I am sorry I insulted you, but when you have any more fortifications to get up, and your men won't help you, send for George Washington, the commander-in-chief, and I will come and help them." The corporal slunk away perfectly ashamed of himself. And so Christ Jesus might say to us, "Oh, you don't like teaching the poor; it is beneath your dignity; then let your Commander-in-Chief do it; He can teach the poor, He can wash the feet of the saints, He can visit the sick and afflicted—He came from heaven to do this, and He will set you the example." Surely we should each be ashamed of ourselves, and declare from this time forward whatever it is, be it great or little, if it comes to our hand, and if God will but give us help and give us grace, we will do it with all our might. 2. How are we to do it? "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." First, "do it." That is, do it promptly; not fritter away your lives in setting down what you intend to do to-morrow as being a recompense for the idleness of to-day. No man ever served God by doing things to-morrow. If we have honoured Christ and are blessed, it is by the things which we do to-day. For after all, the ticking of the clock saith—to-day! to-day! to-day! We have no other time in which to live. The past is gone; the future hath not come; we have, we never shall have, anything but the present. This is our all; let us do what our hand findeth to do. "Procrastination is the thief of time." Let him not steal thy time. Do it, at once. Serve thy God now; for now is all the time thou canst reckon on. Then, the next words, "Do it with thy might." Whatever you do for Christ, throw your whole soul into it. Christ wants none to serve Him with their fingers: He must have their hands, their arms, their hearts. We must not give Christ a little slurred labour, which is done as a matter of course now and then; but when we do serve Him, we must do it with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and might. Serve the Master and spend yourself in your strength. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to-do, do it with thy might." But where is the might of a Christian? Let us not forget that. The might of a Christian is not in himself, for he is perfect weakness. His might lieth in the Lord of Hosts. It will be well for us if all we attempt to do is done in God's strength, or else it will not be done with might: it will be feebly and badly done. 3. Why? We are to do it with all our might because death is near; and when death comes there will be an end to all our serving God on earth, an end to our preaching, an end to our praying, an end to our doing aught for God's glory among the perishing souls of men. There is an old monkish legend told of a great painter, who had begun a painting, but did not finish it; and, as the legend went, he prayed that he might come back on earth that he might finish that painting. There is a picture, now extant, representing him after he had come back to finish his picture. There is a solemnity about that man's look, as he paints away with all his might, for he had but little time allowed him, and a ghastliness, as if he knew that he must soon go back again, and wanted his labour to be finished. If you were quite sure of the time of your death, if you knew you had but a week or two to live, with what haste would you go round and bid farewell to all your friends; with what haste would you begin to set all matters right on earth, supposing matters are all right for eternity. II. I endeavour to STIR UP ALL PROFESSORS OF RELIGION HERE PRESENT TO DO WHATSOEVER THEIR HAND FINDETH TO DO, TO DO IT NOW, AND WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT. If Christ Jesus should leave the upper world, and come into the midst of this hall this morning, what answer could you give, if, after showing you His wounded hands and feet, and His rent side, He should put this question, "I have done all this for thee, what hast thou done for Me?" Let me put that question for Him, and in His behalf. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Life the season for action:—*

I. AN EXHORTATION TO PRESENT ACTIVITY—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth," etc.

1. Based on the fact that particular work is allotted to each life. In the Divine economy nothing has been created without some sphere of usefulness. 2. Urged by the fact that opportunity once lost can never be regained. 3. Limited by the truth that the work appointed to each will take the whole season of life; hence

no man can do another's work. II. A RECOMMENDATION TO EARNESTNESS—"Do it with thy might." Because—1. To the earnest life the forces of darkness yield. 2. The work of life is of such infinite importance. 3. The workers of iniquity labour in this spirit, and set an example. 4. In proportion to our earnestness is our real success in life. 5. By this means will human attention be excited, and men be brought to thoughtfulness. 6. In proportion as we are earnest shall we be imitators of the perfect life. "I have finished the work," etc. III. A SOLEMN CONSIDERATION—"There is no work," etc. 1. The season for active work is limited. 2. In what state death finds our work will it be sealed, after which no alteration can be made. If incomplete, so will it remain to all eternity. 3. This life is a season of probation; hence our everlasting weal or woe depends upon its actions. (*J. F. Pridgeon.*) *The improvement of present time*:—I. A SERIOUS EXHORTATION. 1. The extent of the duty. 2. The manner of performing it. II. THE ARGUMENTS TO ENFORCE THIS EXHORTATION. 1. From the incapacities that will befall us in the grave. 2. From our hastening to it. (*J. Guyse, D.D.*) *Diligence in our spiritual concerns*:—I. THE SINGULAR MOMENT AND VAST IMPORTANCE OF THIS WORK. It is not possible for the mind of man to conceive a more important event than the gain or loss of a blessed immortality. II. THE EXTENT AND COMPASS OF IT. It comprehends a great variety of particulars, none of which can safely be neglected; and requires constancy and perseverance to our lives' end. III. THE SHORTNESS AND UNCERTAINTY OF THIS PRESENT LIFE. IV. HOW PRONE WE ARE TO DECEIVE OURSELVES DOUBLY IN THIS IMPORTANT AFFAIR—not only about the sufficiency of our preparation, but also concerning the security of our title. V. LET IT BE SUPPOSED THAT A MAN HAS GONE FURTHER IN THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE THAN WAS STRICTLY NECESSARY TO SECURE HIS SALVATION; how will the consequence affect him: has he misspent his time, and lost his labour? No worthy action can be fruitless to the agent, whatever it may be in other respects. Not even a pious thought or a benevolent wish can fail of some good effect. (*J. Balguy.*) *The duty of diligence and earnestness in religion*:—Soul-work is at once the most difficult, the most important, and the most urgent. I. OF THE THINGS WHICH YOUR HANDS SHOULD FIND TO DO. 1. The first thing that should engage our attention, because it is the most momentous of all, is the salvation of our souls. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," is a Divine command. There is indeed something for you to do, to secure the salvation of your soul from misery and ruin. 2. The next consideration relates to the covenant of redemption. Have you paid close and serious attention to this? Do you know what it expresses and conveys of the Divine mercy to sinful men who repent and believe? What it reveals of the Divine will for our salvation? 3. Observe, you have much to do for the glory of God, for the advancement of your Saviour's honour, and for the good of your fellow-men. You must not live to yourselves, but unto Him who died for you and rose again. You must strive to become examples unto others, patterns of purity and goodness. II. LET ME NOW EXPLAIN AND APPLY THE EXHORTATION TO DO THESE THINGS WITH YOUR MIGHT. 1. Do them cordially. Put your heart into them. 2. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it promptly. Why should you delay? There is no promise of Divine assistance, no certainty of success, unless you begin at once to act with decision and earnestness. III. CONSIDER THE SOLEMN AND IRRESISTIBLE ARGUMENT BY WHICH THE ADMONITION OF THE TEXT IS ENFORCED—"for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." If in the day of life you will not do your proper work for your salvation, then night cometh—the dark night, when no man can work. (*The Evangelist.*) *Life's duty* (with John ix. 4):—I have taken these parallel texts because the second supplements and completes the first. 1. I want to dwell upon the first verse: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," etc. We cannot read these words without feeling that they dwell very forcibly upon man's capacity for work, and his opportunities for service, in this life. The very mention of the word "hand" is significant. The hand is one of the distinguishing gifts of man. It is his hand that represents much of his power and the secret of many of his triumphs. The hand is pre-eminently the instrument for work: that with which a man tunnels the mountains, steers the ships across the mightiest seas, builds his monuments, wields the pen. The hand ought to be restless until it has found its work. It has been given to man wherewith to work. The "loafer" tells us that he has not been able to find work. Yet, after all, even his hollow excuse tells us that down deep in his heart is the consciousness that there is a work: that it is his duty to

be dissatisfied until he finds it; and that the hand is that which should find it. It is the instrument not only for work, but that of exquisite feeling and touch. Thus the figure is doubly used here—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," or, "reacheth out so as to find." The human arm comes in here in its usefulness. "Reacheth out so as to find"—whatsoever work that hand of yours, with all the advantage that the human arm gives to it, can find in its search for toil and service, do it, and "do it with thy might." Now, man's energy or might can express itself in the hand as it cannot in any physical part of his nature. No member of man's body can express human might like the hand. The hand with the arm as its lever is the universal symbol of power. This is applied even to God. The inspired writers do not hesitate to speak of "the right hand of the Most High"; and no one can mistake what is meant by that. Again, the phrase "thy might" is significant. It is the strength of your body, the force that is behind the hand, and to which the hand gives expression. Only by the dignity of labour can man rise to the true level of manhood; only by using the hand as the instrument of human industry and toil can he fulfil his mission. Observe next the hint given here concerning the transient opportunities of life in respect to life's work—"For there is no work nor device in the grave whither thou goest." We are here urged to work while we have the opportunity. The opportunity is transient and will soon be gone. When once allowed to slip, it never comes again in the same form. The greatest sorrow possible to man at the close of life is to realize that he has done nothing worth the doing, that his life is worse than a failure, and that the record of so many years does not include any service which has enriched his nature and prepared him for the higher and nobler service yonder.

2. I have taken the first words as an introduction to those still nobler words uttered by our Lord Himself: "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." Jesus Christ here identifies Himself with man in view of this common responsibility of toil. He does not claim exemption. When we view the life of Christ, even as a human life among men, we are greatly impressed with the amount of work which He condensed into so brief a space of time. Here and there, in the record of one day's toil, we gain a truer conception than we otherwise should have had of the nature of that ministry that extended over a few brief years; but which was so full of activity and so rich in toil. Moreover, we learn that in all this Christ identified Himself with our race, and thus left us an example that we should follow His steps. When the Son of God became the Son of Man, in no instance did He more fully identify Himself with us than in His consecration to duty and His consciousness of the incessant claims of service. This brings us to a new truth which is here brought into prominence by our Lord—namely, the consciousness of a mission—"I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day." Now, the consciousness of a mission is a different thing even from the consciousness of labours crowding upon one and demanding one's attention. Our Lord here emphasized the truth that there was One who had sent Him. There was not only a work awaiting Him, but that work awaited Him which the Father, who had sent Him, had given Him to do. And so there is given to life a motive force which otherwise it would lack. Now it is this consciousness of a mission—not only the consciousness that there is a work to do, but also that this work is that which the Master has appointed for him—that gives an irresistible power to the life of every consecrated man. It behoves us, therefore, not only to realize the truth which is enforced in the verse taken from Ecclesiastes, but also the supplementary truth given us by Jesus Christ in the second text—that we must not only work, but also do the works of Him who has sent us. Now what follows? If the work that we have to do is the work of Him who has sent us into this world; if the service, therefore, that we have to render is a Divine service, or is a human response to a Divine claim, then how dignified does life become, and how noble does all labour appear! Now if you and I could only master this one truth, all our grumblings at the hardness of work would vanish; and we should for ever cease to talk about our self-denials. (*D. Davies.*) *The labour of life*:—I. LIFE IS FOR LABOUR. We are not here merely to theorize, sentimentalize, dream—but to work. 1. The training of our own spirits for heaven. 2. The training of others for heaven. II. LIFE IS FOR EARNEST LABOUR. "With all thy might." 1. This work of all works is the most momentous. 2. This work cannot be performed in eternity. 3. Man is on his journey to eternity. (*Homilist.*) *Industry*:—It is not in his fallen state alone that industry is required of man. It may more

properly be said to be the law imposed upon every creature; so that, of whatsoever God hath made, in earth, sea and air, He hath made nothing to be idle. A world without labour might be adapted to a race of angels; but we are sure that a world with much toil is the only fit one for a race of men. There are considerations in abundance which might furnish any thinking mind with matter for a eulogy on industry. It is industry alone which will preserve anything like a healthful content in the spirits. The unemployed man is always dissatisfied and restless; time is a burden; and after all, he is forced to be industrious—industrious in squandering what he will live to regret his not improving. And whilst so much may be said as to the advantages of industry, there are not wanting examples and patterns of the existence and culture of this virtue—the parent of every other, or indeed the main ingredient in every other. Turn where you will, and all is industry. Of course, we must limit the direction to lawful employment; we are not to “do with our might”—for we are not to do at all—what is in any sense or measure opposed to the known will of God. But the phrase must certainly include our various worldly callings. 1. It has passed into a kind of proverb amongst us that whatsoever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well. You frequently meet with persons who on extraordinary occasions, or stimulated by some special inspection, will exert much diligence and take great pains to produce something excellent and commendable, but who at all other times are slatternly and indolent, caring nothing, so long as a duty be performed, how slovenly may be the performance. It is against this temper that our text delivers its injunction, requiring the putting forth of “might,” whether it be a great thing or a small which “the hand findeth to do.” In place of being content, provided there be diligence where there is a loud call for diligence, it demands that the diligence should be actually the habit, and seems to argue that indolence must be wickedness, let it be ever such trifles on which we are employed. And it is not by reasons of mere human policy that we must defend this position; for our text reasons, as you perceive, exclusively from the future. But there is no difficulty in making the future—the world beyond the grave—demand diligence and denounce indolence even in trifles. The truth is that what a man is in one thing, that in the main will be in another. If industrious only by fits and starts in business, he will be industrious only by fits and starts in religion. The habits which he contracts in an unconverted state will be almost sure to stamp on him corresponding habits when he is brought to the providing for eternity; so that having become sluggish and desultory, except on great occasions, in his worldly employments, he will in the main be sluggish and desultory in the high duties of piety. There cannot be an individual less fitted for the message or the business of religion than one who has formed habits of indolence and sloth; for the message is one which asks for its auditory a gathering and a centring of the mental faculties, which can hardly be obtained from the habitually indolent; and the business is one which is wholly impracticable, unless there be that individual putting forth of industry, which it is a contradiction in terms to expect from the slothful. There cannot, we are persuaded, be a greater mistake than that of dividing employments into secular and spiritual, if we mean by the division that the secular has no mixture of the spiritual, or that the spiritual would be defiled through association with the secular. The ordinance of labour, as we have shown you, is of Divine institution; and though, beyond question, our chief business on earth is the seeking the salvation of the soul, it is utterly insupportable that God would have imposed on us the necessity of labouring for the support of the body, if this business were unavoidably a hindrance to the chief—nay, if it were not even an auxiliary and an instrument. There cannot be inconsistency—there must be thorough harmony between the Divine appointments. God is served through the various occupations of life as well as through the more special institutions of religion. It needs only that a man go to his daily toil in simple obedience to the will of his Maker, and he is as piously employed, aye, and is doing as much towards securing for himself the high recompenses of eternity, as when he spends an hour in prayer, or joins himself gladly to the Sabbath-day gathering. I love to consider the manufacturer as he plies the shuttle, the statesman as he guides the wheel of government, the tradesman as he serves his customers, the sailor as he steers his vessel, the ploughman as he turns the ground, as each busied with an employment which may be virtually spiritual if he do not perversely frustrate its design: employment, which may be followed with a spiritual mind, and which, if so followed, has about it all the sanctity,

and prepares for all the glory of heaven. 2. There are, unquestionably, duties which are more openly and visibly connected than others with the saving of the soul; and we may justly employ our concluding remarks in urging our hearers to industry in these. It is not the representation of Scripture, however it may be the imagination of numbers in the world, that religion is an easy thing: so that immortality may be secured with no great effort on the part of the sinner. The Christian life is likened to a battle, in which we may be defeated; to a race, in which we may be outstripped; to a stewardship, in which we may be unfaithful. Who, indeed, that thinks for a moment of the virtues required from us as Christians—charity, temperance, meekness, patience, humility, contentment—will imagine that a believer may be idle, finding nothing in his spiritual calling to exercise his diligence? These virtues, we may venture to say, are all against nature; only to be acquired through strife with ourselves, and preserved by continued war. "Whatsoever," then, "thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Is temptation to be resisted? Resist it "with thy might": a half resistance courts defeat. Is prayer to be offered? Pray "with thy might": a languid prayer asks to be unanswered. Is a sacrifice to be made? Make it "with thy might": a tardy surrender is next akin to a refusal. Be industrious in religion. We can tolerate indolence anywhere rather than here—here where an eternity is at stake, here where an hour's sluggishness may be fatal. An indolent Christian—it is a sort of contradiction. Christianity is industry spiritualized. The sluggard in religion would be the sluggard in escaping from the burning house or the sinking ship; and who ever loiters when death is at the door? Work, then, "with your might," if you profess to work at all; "giving diligence" as an apostle exhorts, "to make your calling and election sure." "There is no work, no wisdom, no device, in the grave." The separate state, into which you will enter at death, is a state, whatever its employment, whatever its happiness, in which nothing can be done towards gaining heaven or avoiding hell. Your portion must be fixed here; your actions here, and these alone must determine on which side of the Judge you shall stand, and what your exact place in the kingdom, if you inherit it at all. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Earnestness*:—I want to show you that our great need is more earnestness in the spiritual life. 1. We want more earnestness in the reading of the Bible. What is the Bible? It is a prescription for the worst of all illness. Here is a Divine prescription. Take it and live; refuse it and die. How we ought to hold on to it, and with what earnestness we ought now to take it. It is more than that. Suppose a captain is awakened in the night. The men who have had the management of the ship have been asleep, and not minding their business. The vessel is among the breakers. The captain comes on deck with the chart. With what earnestness he looks at it now. Here is a rock and there is a rock; there is a lighthouse; here is a way of escape. So here is a map setting forth the perils of the sea in which we are voyaging: there are dangers all round about us. If the following of that chart does not get us out of the breakers, nothing will. With what earnestness we ought to examine it, and feel that it is a matter of heaven or hell whether or not we read it, and whether we read it right or wrong. 2. We need more earnestness in the matter of prayer. 3. We want more earnestness in the matter of Christian work. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Much work to be done on earth, and short time to do it*:—1. WE HAVE MUCH WORK TO DO. "Yes," some may be ready to say, "we have to labour for our temporal subsistence, we have to provide for our families, we have to push our way to wealth and station in the world, and that in the face of many obstacles, so that there is no room for trifling. But there is a work greater, more worthy of the powers of a rational and immortal being; it is that by which we may obtain deliverance from future and endless woe, and an entrance into the rest and blessedness of heaven. 1. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. There is here no work to be done by you, as that by which you may merit reward. There is nothing but the acceptance of a free gift. It does not, however, follow that faith in Christ is not in any sense a work, because it is not in reward of its performance, but on the ground of the righteousness which it receives, that we are justified. Must we not labour to get right views and humbling impressions of our wretchedness and danger as sinners? Will it cost us no struggle with our pride, self-confidence, or indifference about our spiritual interests, no watchful care lest we take up with any refuge of lies, no inward and earnest exertion of soul to place an enlightened and firm and entire reliance on Him who hath made atonement by His blood? "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him

whom He hath sent." The avenger of blood is behind you—hasten to the city of refuge. 2. Endeavour to make progress in holiness. Labour to get a deeper, more contrite sense of sin, of your own sins, and a heart turned to hate and to forsake it in all its ways, and at the same time labour to call into exercise holy principles. Is there not much here which you may find to do? This work and warfare is within; there let the fervent spirit labour. 3. Give yourselves to the works of piety and benevolence. Is there not yet much knowledge to be acquired? Should you not then give yourselves to the study of God's Word? Is there nothing to do in your families, by the religious instruction of children and servants, by the Christian discipline maintained, by the just and equal yet affectionate treatment of all under your care? Are there no poor or afflicted by you to whose wants you can in any way minister, or whom you may cheer by your sympathy in their sorrow? II. WE HAVE BUT A LIMITED TIME FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF THIS WORK. III. IF OUR WORK BE NOT DONE, THE WORK GIVEN US TO DO ON EARTH, BEFORE WE COME TO THE GRAVE, IT MUST REMAIN FOR EVER UNDONE. (*James Henderson, D.D.*) *The true idea of life*:—Some errors are harmless and hardly worth the trouble of refuting; but an error about the nature and the uses of this present life is harmful, and worth an angel's powers to refute. Why have some persons gone off into sensualism, deriding and disregarding all the claims of religion? Because they have misunderstood life. Why have others renounced the world, and sought in the heart of the desert, or the solitude of a religious house, freedom from the temptations of the world, and the agitations of society? Because they have misunderstood life. I. THIS IS THE WORLD OF SERVICE. This idea involves necessarily these things—1. Subordination. I remember that mine is a subordinate position. I am here to do something, and not to talk about doing it. "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work." 2. Work. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it." It is a doing world. "Man goes forth to his labour, and to his work, from the morning until the evening." Spiritually we need this world; all the varied scenes which make up our life were needful to the right training of our minds into that attitude of creaturely dependence, which not only befits us, but into which, by the very force of circumstances, we shall sooner or later be driven; and which, therefore, we had better make our own by voluntary choice. II. THE SERVICE OF THIS WORLD IS BUT FOR A SHORT TIME. Learn, then: 1. Moderation in all our earthly pursuits. 2. Earnestness in our religious life. Let us not throw our souls into our business, and our sleep into our religion. (*W. G. Barrett.*) *The spur*:—It is an address to men, commending to them promptness, determination, and practical earnestness: inasmuch as they have but one life here on earth, they should give diligence to accomplish all the right purposes which they have formed for this world; seeing that once dead they cannot return, neither in the grave can they carry out any of their resolves, they should do quickly what they mean to do. I. First, we shall give this passage AN EVANGELICAL VOICE TO THE UNCONVERTED; and it will be necessary for us to say that there is nothing for the unconverted man to do, by way of work or device with his hand, in order to his being saved. Salvation from sin and justification before God come to us in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit within us leading us to faith in Jesus; and so salvation is entirely and alone of the grace of God. We would say to every unconverted person, "It is high time that you should begin to think about the solemn interests of your soul, for you will soon pass from the place of saving knowledge and heavenly wisdom into the shades of forgetfulness." II. But now I have another task, and that is, to set forth my text as A STIMULATING VOICE TO GOD'S OWN PEOPLE. You have not the work to do of saving yourselves. "It is finished," says the Saviour, and that is joy for you: but now you have another work to do because you are saved. The love of Jesus to us must provoke love in our heart to Jesus, and that love must show itself by deeds of service for His name. Our text indicates the wisest course to follow. It is—Do it, do it at once. If you have not done what you should, up, man, and do what you can! Our text exhorts us to do our work now. Do not talk about doing it to-morrow, do it at once. The impetus of the text carries the thought as far as that; seeing that death may come to-night, do it now, even now. But Solomon says, "Do it with thy might." There are several ways of doing the same action. One man will do a thing, and he has done it; another has performed the same action, but has practically done nothing. Jesus Christ ought never to have our second best things—never. Our best is all too poor for Him, let us never put Him off with

our inferior fruits. Do it—"do it with thy might." And, once more, do it all; for the text says, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it"; that is to say, do it all. The pith of the text lies in the next thought, namely, that there is an argument to every earnest Christian for intense zeal in the fact of the certain approach of death; "for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." I have read of Dr. Chalmers that one evening he stayed with a company of friends at a gentleman's house, and they spent the evening, as we are too much in the habit of doing, very pleasantly, but not very profitably, talking upon general subjects, not at all to be forbidden, but at the same time not much to be commended. There was among the number a Highland chief, who had attracted Dr. Chalmers' notice, and he had talked with him, but nothing was said about the things of God. In the middle of the night a bitter cry was heard in the hospitable habitation, and there was a rush to the bedroom, where it was found that the Highland chief was in the agonies of death. Dr. Chalmers expressed (and he was not the man whom we could blame for laxity in that direction) his bitter regret that he had allowed that last evening of the man's life to pass over without having spoken to him concerning the things of God. The regret was most proper, but it had been better if it had never been necessary. Such a regret may have occurred to ourselves; do not let it occur again. If you do not die, the person whom you are concerned about may die, therefore, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it," for death may come on a sudden. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Impulse, will, and habit:—Connected with activity and practical life there are three modes or conditions of mind—impulse, will or purpose, and habit. These represent three stages of experience, and a good deal more. Impulse is a sudden development of feeling with degrees of force. The term itself carries with it, latently, an idea of outspring, of force. It is the clear, distinct working of a desire, of whatever kind, primarily of the lower form, and at last of the higher. In the order of time impulse is primitive. It was with the race primitive. There was a time when men were animals of impulse. As civilization dawned, and the civilizing elements were more and more mixed with the waywardness of life, they became creatures of purpose, of design, of will. The higher and the better of them after a time learned the secret, empirically, perhaps practically, of commutating a definite purpose into a fixed habit, which is the last step of evolution—unless you make the final step the inclusion of them altogether in still a higher sphere. Impulse comes in the children before will, and a long way before habit. In rude and early national life we see the same thing. Design is casual: impulse is universal. It works in the lower forms of national life, in the history of the unfolding of the race, as it works in the household in children. It works with fear, with combativeness, with pleasure, with mirth, and with love in its more circumscribed forms. Thus the household, being itself a miniature of that which is taking place upon national life everywhere, we see that in the earlier stages we are children of feeling, of impulse. The second element is will or purpose. What is will? I do not know. I recognize it when I see it or feel it; but what its component elements are, psychologically, I do not know; and after reading multitudes of books, I do not think anybody else does. But that there is a determining state of feeling, together with intellect, in the soul, there can be no doubt: and we may as well call it will, or purpose, or anything else. It is that which gives direction to the mind, and is itself directed by the impulses out of which, or by the combinations of which, it lives. In the state of will emotion turns to intellect, and uses experience. Now, the will, that it may not fade out, forms itself into habit. What is habit? It is to be described, but not to be defined. When a man first sets type he knows what he wants for a letter. That is one process. He is aware that it is in a particular compartment of the case, and he takes it out, and feels for the nick, to know which end up to put it, and puts it that way, performing three several operations. Little by little, as he goes on through the weary days, the process becomes, as it were, absorbed into itself, till seeing an expert compositor at the case to-day, there is no will, no intelligence in it. What is there in it? Habit. What is that habit? It is the parts that are operating it, doing it out of themselves. Without the recognition of the will, or the purpose of the will, it is automatic, self-done. And when an expert puts his hand to the case, your eye cannot follow the rapidity with which he will compose in this way. The beginning of it was at every stop a thought and a purpose, but the completion of it has abolished thought and purpose. The muscle and the mind work together automatically. The complex elements, then, necessary for

the purpose and the will acquire a tendency to go on without special stimulus. The mind, acting of itself, greatly condenses action and greatly augments facility and power. This automatic condition which lies at the root of habit is of transcendent importance in physical things, in all industrial matters, in art, in moral relations. The mind becomes like a machine, which, when first started, must have the valves opened by the engineer's hand, but which has inter-connecting rods, such that when once it has begun it opens and shuts its own valves, and runs night and day, so long as it is supplied with water and fuel. Habit, as in the case of mechanical actions, should, when applied to the foot, to the hand, to the head, or to the mind, condense in itself both emotion and will. It does. But where most we need habit is in the development of moral qualities. A true Christian is like a well-plumbed house. He has but to turn on the light, and it is there always. He has but to turn on the faucet, and rivers and wells are at his service. An untrained man is like a family in the lower countries, where he has to go to a distant spring to bring in every bucket of water that he uses for culinary purposes; and what we want is not to have to pump up right feeling at the right time, but to have the right feeling, as it were, in the very structure of the soul, so that we have it always when needed. A man who has no patience but that which comes from instant reflection will have very little; but a man who has trained his patience so that it acts through habit automatically will, perhaps, not have the reputation of being patient; but if not, it is because the work is so perfect. It is the art of art to conceal art. If this is true in regard to that part of our emotion which develops itself in society, how much more important is it that we should recognize its truth in regard to conscience, the spirit of generosity, benevolence, humility, and meekness! Now, a word or two of criticism and of suggestion arising out of this distinction between impulse, will, and habit. A revival of religion is a revival of impulse in its earlier stages. If emotion, however, is taught in any church to lead on to a higher state, and the church is drilled to it, if the extraordinary work that is performed in a revival of religion is a part of the daily and weekly routine of church life, we can conceive that a church may be in such a state that, so far as its own self is concerned, it will always live in what is better than a revival. The term revival is usually attached to the freshness of the beginning impulse; whereas a condensed methodical church-life ought to have it in the whole force and continuity of habit. I hold that where a church is living a really Christian life there is nothing so converting as for persons from without to come into the community of that church and see its piety. A man listening to the actuality of real religion has a work performed on him that no amount of pulpit exhortation could ever secure. So, impulse ripened is better than impulse raw; but impulse raw is better than nothing; and through every stage of unfolding impulse ought to be continued; there are certain elements in it that are like the leaves of a tree. The fruit could not ripen if it were not for the freshly-coming leaves. When, on the other hand, training without impulse is resorted to, where men have fixed habits of belief, of conduct, and of duty, they are apt to become hard, mechanical, uninteresting, their life being all routine, and no innovation. Indeed, they become afraid of new things. They fear variety. They love to hear the old sounds. They like what is called "sound doctrine," which, half the time, is the doctrine of sound. They are afraid of any variation for they do not know where it will lead to. It will not lead to somnolency, as what may be called the hard and fixed methods do too frequently. What we want is to unite the advantages that come from all these three elements in the machinery of the mind—ever-fresh variety, springing from impulse; then fixity, or the organization of impulse into practical results; and then will, in the form of automatic conduct. When a man has these he is built up in all the departments of life, so that he serves himself with the greatest ease, and exerts the widest influence upon others—and that, too, with agreeableness, with cheer, which is one of the most beneficent elements of Christian life. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Entire devotion to duty*.—I. How MEN OUGHT TO FIND OUT THEIR DUTY. 1. By reading the Word of God, which points out the duty of all persons in every relation of life, and is able to make all wise unto salvation. 2. By hearing the Word of God explained and enforced by religious instructors. 3. By duly regarding the dispensations of Divine providence towards them. 4. By asking counsel of God in prayer. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN MEN'S DOING THEIR DUTY, WHEN THEY DISCOVER IT, "WITH THEIR MIGHT." Might signifies power, strength and ability of every kind. 1. Men ought to employ all their powers and faculties in doing what they find they have to do. If it requires

bodily strength, then they must exert their bodily strength; if it requires knowledge, then they must exercise the knowledge they possess; if it requires wisdom, then they must exercise their wisdom; if it requires prudence, then they must exercise prudence; if it requires authority, then they must exercise authority; if it requires influence, then they must exercise all the influence they have; or if it requires the exertion of all their natural and moral abilities, then they must exert them all to their utmost extent. 2. Men's doing with their might what they find to do implies that they should surmount all the difficulties that lie in the way of doing their duty. III. WHY MEN SHOULD THUS EXERT THEMSELVES TO DO WHATSOEVER THEY FIND TO DO IN THE WORLD. 1. Because God has given them all their mental and corporeal powers and faculties for use. 2. Because He has a great deal for them to do on the stage of life—for Him, for their fellow-men, and for themselves. 3. Because they have but a short and uncertain time to do it in. They have no time to lose, nor talents to bury. Let them work while it is day, for the night of death is at hand. IV. IMPROVEMENT. 1. If men may always find out what they have to do in this world, then they have no right to plead ignorance for the neglect of a duty. 2. If men ought to employ all their powers and faculties in doing what they find to be duty, then they have no right to do anything but what they know to be duty. Whatsoever is not of duty is of sin. 3. If God requires men always to know and do their duty, then they can never retrieve any of their lost time, opportunities, or advantages of doing good. 4. If God requires men to employ all their time and talents in doing their duty, then none can be released from duty as long as their active powers and faculties are graciously continued to them. 5. If God requires men to employ all their time and talents in doing their duty, then there is reason to think they are guilty of more sins of omission than of commission. 6. If men can do nothing for this world after death, then they ought to do all they can while they live, to leave it in a better state than they found it. 7. This subject now calls upon all to inquire whether they are prepared to leave the world, and to commit their bodies to the grave, the house appointed for all living, and where there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, but darkness and oblivion. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *With your might*.—The injunction to put our might into our work may very easily be misunderstood, and that especially by young people. It does not mean that we are to work feverishly, with hot haste, and without preparation. It means work done with deliberation, with purpose, with calmness, and with strength. All these qualities are eminently illustrated in the life of Christ. 1. Christ prepared for His work. The obscure years were many in comparison with the brief period of His public ministry. Yet, when at last the time came, it was found they were not lost. Every word He spoke then, and every deed He did, tells, and will tell upon the universe for ever. Many young people who wish to give themselves to Christian work are in too much haste. Let them remember how grandly Christ waited. Let them remember that there is no true call to the ministry which is not also a call to full and zealous preparation for the ministry. 2. We must do with our might the things that seem small as well as great, for in truth we do not really know what is small or what is great. Rather, in the work of the kingdom of Christ everything is great. 3. In order to do work with our might we must rest as well as work. If we are to work with our might the energies of the body and soul must not be dulled or blunted, and for that rest is needed. 4. There is all the difference in the world between work done with the might and work that is not. John Ruskin says: "We are not sent into this world to do anything into which we cannot put our hearts." Charles Kingsley's testimony is: "I go at what I am about as if there were nothing else in the world for the time being. That is the secret of all hard-working men." 5. We may apply this principle to preparation and study. There is all the difference in the world between reading with your might and reading without it. The concentration of the mind on the subject enables us to take possession of something new, and to make it part of ourselves. When the mind is relaxed and wandering there is no permanent gain. 6. This applies eminently to preaching. Preaching in every form is impressive just in proportion as a man puts his soul into it. 7. Perhaps there is no more needed application of this lesson than to the business of prayer. Prevailing prayer is wrestling prayer. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." True intercession is the costliest of all things. Intercede for a soul in peril, and God will answer your petition by suggesting to you something you must do or give up for the sake of that soul. 8. For after all it is not with our might

that we work. It is with God's might. Everything we do that is really worth doing is in the strength of the Holy Spirit. Yet we are to put effort, and sacrifice, and longing, and intensity, and fervour, and whole-heartedness, and allegiance into our work just as if it depended upon ourselves. (W. R. Nicoll, LL.D.) *An earnest life*.—In the Peruvian Exhibit at the World's Fair there were a number of mummies and relics of the Incas supposed to be more than three thousand years old. It is plain that these ancient people never heard the words of this text—"There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave." They buried the warrior and his bows and arrows together. Beside the workman his tools were carefully placed, and with the housewife long wooden needles and coarse yarn were laid, that they might be enabled to go on with their work. Hunger and thirst were expected and provided for. Food and drink were placed in the graves with the bodies. Treasures were buried with the owners. Immense wardrobes are found incased with the body of some princess of fashion. But the weapons, the tools, the food, the ready material, the rich toilets, the wealth, have all remained absolutely unused since the day of burial. Vanity of vanities, was it not? How fruitless, how vain all their ignorant expectations! Now let us be sure of this—that no living man or woman will have a chance to use these earthly tools but once. The present is the "nick of time" with us all. None of us can pass through this life and then begin and try it over again. We cannot do that with a single day or even an hour. Ten minutes lost are lost for ever; and a day's work undone is undone for ever. Now it is this very lesson, and the effect which it should have upon us, which God meant to teach us all by this text. The effect is put first: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." That is, whatsoever thy hands find to do, do it; do it now; do it with thy might, and do it for this very reason—that you will never have another chance. Therefore, like the good old Quaker, it is for every one of us to say: "I expect to pass through this life but once; if, therefore, there is any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do to my fellow human beings, let me do it now: let me not defer or neglect it; for I shall not pass this way again." I. THE ELEMENTS OF AN EARNEST LIFE. They are just these two things, earnest faith and earnest love. A man's visible life is but the expression of his invisible modes of thought and feeling—the outcome of his convictions and his affections—in other words, of his faith and love. As a man loves so he lives; as he believes so he behaves. If he loves God he is godly; if he loves the world he is worldly. If his faith be bright his life will be shining; if his faith be dim his life will be dark. Earnest faith and earnest love—these are the mightiest principles that underlie every true and noble life. For example—given earnest faith in God and earnest love for God, and what a devoted follower of God will any man become! Given earnest faith in the truth and earnest love for the truth, and what a truth-seeker and truth-spreader will any man become! Given earnest convictions of man's ruin and earnest love for man's redemption, and what a Christian worker and soul-winner will surely develop! Given earnest faith in the mission of the Church and earnest love for that mission, and to what a degree of heroic self-sacrifice and endeavour will we not go! Earnest faith and earnest love! These are the combined elements which make up an earnest life—that is when they are living, active union and communion. But let us bear in mind that they must be combined. By itself alone neither will suffice. Faith alone makes the bigot; love alone the fanatic. The one is the engine without the balance-wheel; the other is the balance-wheel without the engine. The one is the head without the heart; the other is the heart without the head. Neither of itself produces the desirable character—neither all faith nor all love, but both. Only in the union and communion of the two will an earnest life result. There was Paul, for example. He believed man's ruin and he believed God's remedy. He believed the inevitable and irreparable destruction that hung over the sinner, and he believed, too, the atonement of Christ as the full and free and only possible salvation for him. And what then? Why, "the love of Christ constrained him" to most unceasing and almost superhuman efforts for man's salvation. These combined elements—earnest faith and earnest love—gave strength to his weakness, courage to his timidity, point to his logic and fervour to his eloquence. They enlisted him, body, mind, and soul, so that he was willing to become all things to all men that he might by any means save some. And so must it be with us all if we would accomplish much—if we would make our lives tell for God and humanity. We must have faith in something.

We must have love for something. II. THE MOTIVES LEADING TO AN EARNEST LIFE. What are they? 1. Well, first, as was intimated in the beginning, is that thought of no repair. "There is no work," no doing this life's unfinished work, "in the grave." Surely if any one thought more than another could make life seem real and earnest to us it must be found in this fact, that we can never go over the ground again to do unfinished work or rectify mistakes. As Jehovah spoke to Israel out on the road from Egypt, so He says to each of us, "Ye shall henceforth return no more that way." We are told that in one of those splendid pageants in Berlin, not long ago, the wife of the English ambassador unfortunately unfastened the necklace she was wearing and lost a costly pearl somewhere in the roadway. Perhaps it might have been regained if a serious search had been in order at such a time. But the grand procession must hurry along, and a lost place in the ranks was of more account than a lost pearl. They did not return the same way. Lost things are lost. Undone work is undone. Broken things are broken beyond repair, for there is no work, nor knowledge, nor device in the grave whither thou goest. That dropped pearl of opportunity, lost in the procession of our years, lies far back there in the dusty roadway, and we shall not return that way. 2. The second motive is the need of haste. If there is no finishing up of this life's work in the next, then how rapidly ought we to work now. Like the needle-woman sitting by her last bit of candle, how rapidly ought we to labour lest the light burn down to its socket ere the work be finished. "The King's business requires haste." "The night cometh." (G. B. F. Hallock.) *The Gospel of hard work*:—Religion won't spoil you in any kind of secular work, it will make you sacred in the midst of all the dangers of secularity. As I said to a company of working-men's wives, not long ago, so I say here: there is more polishing-paste in this text than we have ever taken out of it. It would wonderfully scour and brighten everything if we could get it extracted and applied. It is a perfect battery of energy; would God it might get into us! When we go back to our daily task—whatever you are going to do, in work, in purpose, in enterprise, do it—up and do it. Do not merely think, don't dawdle, do not idle, do not dream. Young or old, rich or poor, mistress or maid, master or man, do not spend thy time in day-dreaming, in star-gazing, in hatching schemes in your imagination, and in thinking marvellous things—of a benevolent nature, for example—that are only castles in the air, and "wee bit fuffin' lowes" (flickering flames), as our Scotch song says. The Bible gives the best rein to every legitimate ambition and power within. Let go; drive on ahead if only this is your driving-power. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Then let us apply it to spiritual work. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," from sweeping under the mats, to taking thy share in the Sacrament, "do it with thy might." For daily toil—no laziness, no mere scheming, and no jerry-building; it is all condemned in here. And for express spiritual work, the same injunction. But have you got the spiritual hand—have you? Let me illustrate what I mean by that man in the New Testament—you remember him—the man with the withered hand. Do not imagine I am sending you to spiritual work, if you have not the hand to do it, and the heart behind the hand to drive and guide it. But you may get it to-day. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," for the day is hastening to its close, everything is passing away. Do not despair, do not sigh, do not mope, do not say, "This takes all pith and stamina out of me": it does not. A horse never runs better than when it is running for the stable; and we may all be doing that through God's grace and mercy. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," for the night is coming, and God will put no man on the night-shift, not one of us. He is not a hard taskmaster. He is kind and gracious, only He knows we are lazy, my brother, and that is why He speaks like this. He knows that even the best of us need to have the spur. I knew a brother student once who dreamt that in a month's time he was going to die. He dreamt it three times over in one night, and although he was naturally as prosaic and matter-of-fact as anybody I ever knew, that dream stuck to him. It was burned into him. Now, people would say that that stopped that man's work, that he simply sat and moped; shut himself in, and sent for the doctor. He did not; he never put in such a month's work in the district where he was missionary, never. It was a pity the vision faded away. It is a pity it should fade away from any of us. It did him no harm, he never had such a month of personal holiness, and such a month of self-sacrifice; doing things with his might, both secular and sacred, for he had only a month, and then the judgment-seat, and Him who sits

thereon. Thus it always comes out, whatever way you like to turn, the great lesson from eternity is: Be diligent, and make the most of the passing day, for yourself, for your character, for your neighbour, for your God; for it will all meet you, and be part and parcel of you through eternity. This is the true "*Carpe diem*" philosophy. Of Turner, his servant used to say, "I never knew him to be idle." Oh, how some who give themselves up to what we call worldly ambitions put Christians to shame! When he got an order for a picture, he went home, and the same day on which he got the order he spread the canvas, and he had the whole thing in dead colour before he went to bed. Next morning, early, he was at it again. The Lord put into us the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of hard work. You will not kill yourself by hard work along the lines of God's Book. "The more the marble wastes, the more the statue grows." (*John McNeill.*)

The lesson of diligence.—A few years ago a gentleman who kept a large drug-shop in Boston advertised for a boy. The next day a number of boys applied for the situation. One of them was a queer-looking little fellow. He came with his aunt, who took care of him. Looking at the poor boy, the merchant said promptly, "Can't take him; he's too small." "I know he's small," said his aunt, "but he's willing and faithful. Please try him, sir." There was something in the boy's look which made the merchant think again. A partner in the firm came forward and said he "didn't see what they wanted with such a boy—he wasn't bigger than a pint pot." Still the boy was allowed to stay, and put to work. Not long after a call was made on the clerks for some one to stay through the night. They all held back but little Charley, who instantly offered his services. In the middle of the night the merchant came to the shop to see if all was right, and was surprised to find Charley busy cutting out labels. "What are you doing?" he asked. "I didn't tell you to work all night." "I know you didn't, sir; but I thought I had better be doing something than be idle." In the morning, when the merchant came into his office, he said to the cashier, "Double Charley's wages. His aunt said he was willing, and so he is." A few weeks after this a menagerie passed through the streets. Naturally enough, all the hands in the shop rushed out to see it, but Charley stayed in his place. A thief saw his chance, and entered by the back door; suddenly he found himself grabbed by the young clerk, and held down to the floor. Not only was he prevented from stealing, but things taken from other shops were found upon him and returned to their owners. "What made you stay to watch when all the others quitted their work to look?" asked the merchant. "You told me never to leave the shop, sir, when others were absent, and so I thought I ought to stay." The order was repeated, "Double that boy's wages. His aunt said he was faithful, and so he is." Before he left the clerkship he was getting a salary of £500 a year; and now he is a member of the firm. Here is an example of diligence leading to success. And no boy or girl, man or woman, will be long out of a place who learns the lesson of diligence, and practises it in this way. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Do thy best*.—A young painter was directed by his master to complete a picture on which the master had been obliged to suspend his labours on account of his growing infirmities. "I commission thee, my son," said the aged artist, "to do thy best upon this work. Do thy best." The young man had such reverence for his master's skill that he felt incompetent to touch canvas which bore the work of that renowned hand. But, "Do thy best," was the old man's calm reply; and again, to repeated solicitations, he answered, "Do thy best." The youth tremblingly seized the brush, and kneeling before his appointed work, he prayed: "It is for the sake of my beloved master that I implore skill and power to do this deed." His hand grew steady as he painted. Slumbering genius awoke in his eye. Enthusiasm took the place of fear. Forgetfulness of himself supplanted his self-distrust, and with a calm joy he finished his labour. The "beloved master" was borne on his couch into the studio to pass judgment on the result. As his eye fell upon the triumph of art before him, he burst into tears, and throwing his enfeebled arms around the young artist, he exclaimed, "My son, I paint no more!" That youth, Leonardo da Vinci, became the painter of "The Last Supper," the ruins of which, after the lapse of 300 years, still attract annually to the refectory of an obscure convent in Milan hundreds of the worshippers of art.

Ver. 11. I returned, and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.—*The event of things not always answerable to second causes*.—There are some persons so slothful in their own affairs, so hardly pre-

vailed upon to undertake anything that requires labour, so easily discouraged by any appearance of ill success, or so heedless and inactive in the prosecution of whatever they are about; as if they were of opinion, even in temporal matters, what in some systems of religion has been absurdly affirmed concerning spirituals, that God does everything in men and for men, leaving nothing for them to do for themselves; or as if they thought that precept to be literal and universal which our Saviour spake with the latitude of a moral admonition to the apostles only, and upon an extraordinary occasion, "Take no thought for the morrow," etc. There are others, in a contrary extreme, who rely with such confidence on the effects of their own wisdom and industry, and so presumptuously depend upon the natural and regular tendencies of second causes; as if they thought, either there was no superior cause at all, on which the frame of nature depended; or at least, that the providence of God did not condescend to direct the events of things in this lower and uncertain world. And these are proved in the words of my text, "I returned." Solomon turned his thoughts and observations from one subject to another. In the verse before the text he views the careless or negligent part of mankind, and exhorts them to diligence. And then, "I returned," saith he; that is, he turned his view the other way, towards the confident or presumptuous; and then he bids to take notice that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; that is, that the events of things do not always answer to the probabilities of second causes, unless the wisdom of God thinks fit by the direction of His good providence to make those causes successful. I. DOCTRINAL OBSERVATIONS. 1. What men vulgarly call chance or unforeseen accident is in Scripture always declared to be the determinate counsel and providence of God. And it is strictly and philosophically true in nature and reason that there is no such thing as chance or accident; it being evident that those words do not signify anything really existing, anything that is truly an agent or the cause of any event; but they signify merely men's ignorance of the real and immediate cause. And this is so true, that very many even of those who have no religion, nor any sense at all of the providence of God, yet know very well, by the light of their own natural reason, that there neither is nor can be any such thing as chance, that is, any such thing as an effect without a cause; and therefore what others ascribe to chance, they ascribe to the operation of necessity or fate. But fate also is itself in reality as truly nothing as chance is. Nor is there in nature any other efficient or proper cause of any event, but only the free will of rational and intelligent creatures acting within the sphere of their limited faculties; and the supreme power of God, directing, by His omnipresent providence (according to certain wise laws or rules, established by, and entirely depending upon, His own good pleasure), the inanimate motions of the whole material and unintelligent world. 2. The all-directing providence of God, which governs the universe, does not superintend only the great events in the world, the fates of nations and kingdoms; so that, without the direction of providence, the strongest and most numerous armies are not victorious in battle; but its care extends even to the concerns of single persons, so that, without the blessing of God, neither riches, nor favour, nor any temporal advantage can certainly be obtained by anything that man can do; nay, that even in matters of still smaller moment, not so much as a race is gained by the swift without the hand of Providence directing the event. 3. Things being brought about according to the course of nature by second causes is not at all inconsistent with their being nevertheless justly and truly ascribed to the providence of God. For what are natural causes? Nothing but those laws and powers which God morely of His own good pleasure has implanted in the several parts of matter, in order to make them instruments of fulfilling His supreme will. Which laws and powers, as He at first appointed them, so nothing but the same good pleasure of God continually preserves them. And they neither exist nor operate in any moment of time, but by influence and action derived to them (mediately or immediately) from His all-governing will. So that He foresees perpetually what effect every power and operation of nature tends to produce; and could (if He thought fit) exactly with the same easo cause it to produce a different effect as that which it now does. From whence it follows inevitably, to the entire confusion of atheists, that all those things which they call natural effects are in very truth as much the operation of God as even miracles themselves. And to argue against Providence from the observation of the regular course of natural causes, is as if a man should conclude from the uniformity of a large and beautiful building that it was not the work of men's

hands, nor contrived by any free agent, because the stones and the timber were laid uniformly and regularly in the most constant, natural, and proper order.

4. Since the whole course of nature in the ordinary method of causes and effects, and all those unexpected turns of things which men vulgarly call chance and accident are entirely in the hand of God, and under the continual direction of His providence; it follows evidently that God can, whenever He pleases, even without a miracle, punish the disobedient; and no swiftness, no strength, no wisdom, no artifice shall enable them to escape the vengeance which even natural causes only, by the direction of Him from whom they receive their nature, bring upon offenders. He can punish by fires and famine, by plagues and pestilences, by storms and earthquakes, by domestic commotions, or by foreign enemies. And it is the exceeding stupidity of profane men not to be moved hereby to repent and give glory to the God of Heaven, who hath power over these plagues (Rev. xvi. 9). The meaning of this whole observation is, not that these judgments are always certain signs of God's displeasure against all the particular persons upon whom they at any time fall. But whether they be punishments for sin (as they generally, though not always, are); or whether they be only trials of men's virtue (as they sometimes are designed to be); or whether they be means of weaning them from this transitory and uncertain world; or whatever other end Providence brings about thereby; still they are always effects of the same all-wise Divine providence, which ought to be acknowledged and submitted to as such, and whose designs no power or wisdom of frail and vain men can oppose or prevent.

II. PRACTICAL INFERENCES. 1. If these things be so, then let the greatest and most powerful of wicked men consider that they have nothing in this world either to boast of, or to rely upon (Jer. ix. 23). 2. If nothing happens in the world without the Divine providence, then good men have a sufficient ground of trust and reliance upon God, at all times and under all dangers. Not that God will always deliver them, or cause them to prosper in the present world; for He often sees it better to determine otherwise; but they may rely with assurance that nothing can befall them but what He judges fit, seeing all the powers of nature and of second causes are nothing but instruments in His hand, and under His direction. 3. From this notion of Providence may be given a plain and direct answer to that question of the profane fatalist (Job xxi. 15). Indeed, if the course of nature, and those things which we call second causes were independent upon Providence, there would be good reason to ask, what benefit could there be either in prayer or thanksgiving? But if, as has been shown, nature is nothing, and second causes are nothing but mere instruments; then it is very plain that prayer and thanksgiving are as much due to God for whatever is brought about by natural causes, as if He had done the thing by any other instruments instead of these, even by the most miraculous ones; which, in that case, being no less constant, would have been no more miraculous than these. (S. Clarke, D.D.) *Success not always answerable to the probability of second causes*:—Next to the acknowledgment of God's being, nothing is more essential to religion than the belief of His providence, and a constant dependence upon Him as the great Governor of the world and the wise Disposer of all the affairs and concerns of the children of men; and nothing can be a greater argument of providence than that there is such an order of causes laid in nature, that in ordinary course everything does usually attain its end; and yet that there is such a mixture of contingency as that now and then we cannot tell how nor why the most likely causes do deceive us, and fail of producing their usual effects. The sum of the Preacher's advice is this: When thou propoundest any end to thyself, be diligent and vigorous in the use of means; and when thou hast done all, look above and beyond these to a superior Cause which overrules, and steers, and stops, as He pleases, all the motions and activity of second causes; and be not confident that all things are ever so wisely and firmly laid that they cannot fail of success. For the providence of God doth many times step in to divert the most probable event of things, and to turn it quite another way; and whenever He pleases to do so, the most strong and likely means do fall lame, or stumble, or by some accident or other come short of their end. The words thus explained contain this general proposition—That in human affairs the most likely means do not always attain their end, nor does the event constantly answer the probability of second causes; but there is a secret providence which governs and overrules all things, and does, when it pleases, interpose to defeat the most hopeful and probable designs.

I. FOR THE CONFIRMATION AND ILLUSTRATION OF THIS PROPOSITION, that the most likely means do not always attain

their end; but there is a secret providence which overrules and governs all events, and does, when it pleases, interpose to defeat the most probable and hopeful designs. "The race is not to the swift." If we understand this literally, it is obvious to every man to imagine a great many accidents in a race which may snatch victory from the swiftest runner. If we understand it as the Chaldee paraphrase does, with relation to war, that the swiftest does not always overcome or escape in the day of battle; of this Asahel is an eminent instance, who, though he was, as the Scripture tells us, "light of foot as a wild roe," yet did he not escape the spear of Abner. "Nor yet bread to the wise," or to the learned. The poverty of poets is proverbial; and there are frequent instances in history of eminently learned persons that have been reduced to great straits and necessities. "Nor yet riches to men of understanding:" by which, whether we understand men of great parts, or of great diligence and industry, it is obvious to every man's observation that an ordinary capacity and understanding does usually lie more level to the business of a common trade and profession than more refined and elevated parts; which lie rather for speculation than practice, and are better fitted for the pleasure and ornament of conversation than for the toil and drudgery of business: as a fine razor is admirable for cutting hairs, but the dull hatchet much more proper for hewing a hard and knotty piece of timber. And even when parts and industry meet together, they are many times less successful in the raising of a great estate than men of much lower and slower understandings; because these are apt to admire riches, which is a great spur to industry; and because they are perpetually intent upon one thing, and mind but one business, from which their thoughts never straggle into vain and useless inquiries after knowledge, or news, or public affairs; all which being foreign to their business, they leave to those who are, as they are wont to say of them in scorn, more curious, and too wise to be rich. "Nor yet favour to men of skill." All history is full of instances of the casual advancement of men to great favour and honour, when others, who have made it their serious study and business, have fallen short of it.

II. SOME REASON AND ACCOUNT OF THIS, why the providence of God doth sometimes thus interpose to hinder and defeat the most probable designs of men:—To bring men to an acknowledgment of His providence, and of their dependence upon Him, and subordination to Him; and that He is the great Governor of the world, and "rules in the kingdoms of men." God hath so ordered things in the administration of the affairs of the world as to encourage the use of means; and yet so as to keep men in a continual dependence upon Him for the efficacy and success of them: to encourage industry and prudence God generally permits things to their natural course, and to fall out according to the power and probability of second causes. But then, lest men should cast off religion, and "deny the God that is above"; lest they should "trust in their sword and their bow, and say, the Lord hath not done this"; lest men should look upon themselves as the creators and framers of their own fortune, and when they do but a little outstrip others in wisdom or power, in the skill and conduct of human affairs, they should grow proud and presumptuous, God is pleased sometimes more remarkably to interpose, "to hide pride from man," as the expression is in Job; to check the haughtiness and insolence of men's spirits, and to keep them within the bounds of modesty and humility; to make us to know "that we are but men," and that the reins of the world are not in our hands, but that there is One above who sways and governs all things here below. III. SOME INFERENCES FROM WHAT HATH BEEN SAID UPON THIS ARGUMENT. 1. From hence we may learn not to account religion, and time spent in the service of God, and in prayer to Him for His blessing upon our endeavours, to be any hindrance to our affairs. For after we have done all we can, the event is still in God's hand, and rests upon the disposal of His providence. And did men firmly believe this, they would not neglect the duty of prayer, and behave themselves so carelessly, and unconcernedly, and irreverently in it as we see too many do; they would not look upon every hour that is spent in devotion as lost from their business. 2. From hence we may likewise learn so to use the means as still to depend upon God; who can, as He pleases, bless the counsels and endeavours of men, or blast them and make them of none effect. For as God hath promised nothing but to a wise and diligent use of means, so all our prudence, and industry, and most careful preparations may miscarry, if He do not favour our design; for without Him nothing is wise, nothing is strong, nothing is able to reach and attain its end. 3. The consideration of what hath been said upon this argument should keep us from being too sanguine and confident of the

most likely designs and undertakings; because these do not always answer the probability of second causes and means; and never less than when we do with the greatest confidence rely upon them; when we promise most to ourselves from them, then are they most likely to deceive us; they are, as the prophet compares them, like a broken reed, which a man may walk with in his hand, while he lays no great stress upon it; but if he trust to it, and lean his whole weight on it, it will not only fail him, but even pierce him through. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *Many endeavours of the creature are often frustrated of their end when there is greatest probability of success.*—Here Solomon representeth men—1. Under several accomplishments of swift, wise, strong. 2. As addressing themselves to some effect to obtain success. 3. As in the issue disappointed. None of these accomplishments alone do give the event intended and hoped for, nor doth it depend absolutely and infallibly upon them. 4. That all things intended, desired, expected by us depend upon time and chance, namely, as they depend upon God's providence, as and when God will order and determine the time and opportunity, the success and event. Therefore from the whole it appears that instruments most fitted and furnished, and most diligent in their way, are frustrated of the event which they so earnestly intended and hoped for. I. The best instruments fail out of their ignorance, oblivion, and inadvertency, from which man cannot altogether free himself in this life, not only in matters spiritual, but secular, whether economical in the disposing of ourselves and relations, or family interests and concerns. II. Because if we have sufficient knowledge, yet God can easily put some impediment from within or without to hinder the use of our wisdom, power, and knowledge. 1. Within. He can blast our excellencies in an instant, or obstruct the use of it for the time. As though He did not destroy the property of the fire, yet he suspended the burning, when the three children were in the furnace. So of a sudden can He blast our strength (*Ps. xvi. 5, 6*). 2. From without. By casting in some casual event which we foresaw not and could not think of. III. The most able instruments do often provoke God to disappoint them, whilst their abilities of counsel and strength are a means of hardening their hearts in carnal confidence, and often engage in business that proves mischievous to them; I say, in the most lawful businesses they provoke God to disappoint them, because they undertake them without God; but too often being unrenewed and unsanctified, their wit and power is used against God. IV. To say and do, or to make a thing to be, is the act and name of Jehovah, which glory He will not communicate to any other (*Lam. iii. 37*). Therefore, whatever preparation of means or likelihoods there are, we must not be too confident of future events. We cannot bring them to pass by our own power, and God doth not always work by likely means; He hides events from men (*Isa. xlviii. 7*). "Lest thou shouldst say, I knew them." Now the event could not be hidden if the Lord went on in a constant course, giving the race to the swift, etc. God carrieth on His providence so as to leave no footsteps behind Him. He goeth not one way so often as to make a path of it, that men may see the plain tendency thereof. The uses follow. It teaches us—I. The nothingness of the creature, and the all-sufficiency of God. II. To teach us in this lottery of human affairs to look after surer comforts. This is the whole drift of this book; for Solomon, in his critical search and observation of all things done under the sun, aimeth at this, to direct our hearts to blessings which are more stable and sure. God would leave these things at uncertainty, that our hearts might not too much be set upon them, that we might not pursue after favour, riches, and credit as the best things. III. What need there is God should be seen and sought unto in all our designs and resolutions about the disposal of ourselves and ours. 1. What will the use of means and second causes do without God? 2. When we have done our duty, and used such good means as God affordeth, then we may quietly refer the success to God, in whose hands are all the ways of the children of men, and upon whose good pleasure the issues of all things depend (*Prov. xvi. 13*). IV. The wisest and best of men must not expect always to be happy, but must prepare themselves for sinister chances; for the words are brought in upon this occasion of rejoicing in our comforts. V. Take heed of carnal confidence, or depending upon the sufficiency of any means, though never so likely to produce their effect. VI. To keep humble men of the best abilities and sufficiencies for any work. 1. Before the event; for many times they meet with more disappointments than those that want them, and their best designs miscarry when meaner persons are carried through their difficulties with less ado. 2. After the event we must look above second causes, not attribute

anything to our own strength or gifts, but to God's assistance and blessing on our labours. VII. To prevent the discouragement of those that want gifts, or parts, or means. God many times passeth over the strong, wise, and understanding, and gets Himself most glory in protecting the weak, and providing for them. The issue of all is this: Let us bear all things befalling us from the wise hand and providence of the Lord, and encourage ourselves in His all-sufficiency in all straits and difficulties. (*T. Manton, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. **Man also knoweth not his time.**—*Blessed ignorance*:—"If ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." This applies to our ignorance in relation to the future. It is mercy that has woven the veil. I. If we knew our future, ENJOYMENT would be IMPOSSIBLE. Suppose we knew all the bereavements, sufferings, adversities that are before us, and the time, circumstances, and place of our death, would there be any pleasure for us on this earth? II. If we knew our future, DUTY would be IMPRACTICABLE. With all the dark events of our future clearly marked out before us, we should stand aghast, and be utterly unfit for the ordinary duties of life. III. If we knew our future, LIFE would be INTOLERABLE. It would be utterly impossible for our fragile natures to bear such a vision. (*Homilist.*) *Man's ignorance of the time of his death*:—These words suggest a few thoughts concerning death. I. It is INEVITABLE. "His time": that is, his time to die; fixed by an irrevocable decree (Heb. ix. 27). Science, art, wealth, all have been tried, to avoid death; but all have failed. II. It is INSIDIOUS. "The fish is pursuing its own course through the waters, in search of its prey, and unconscious of danger, when, all at once, it finds itself hopelessly entangled in the folds, or caught in the meshes of the fisher's net, and there is no escape. The bird is following its instinct, in quest of food, when the limed twig or the baited trap, on which it alights, robs it of its freedom, and consigns it into the hands of the fowler. As blind, oftentimes, is man himself to the coming stroke which is to smite him to the dust." III. It is UNEXPECTED. "Boast not thyself of to-morrow," etc. "Take heed, for in such an hour as ye think not," etc. (*Ibid.*) *Man knoweth not his time*:—I. CONSIDER THE EVIDENCES OF THE FACT—that "man knoweth not his time." 1. With respect to men in general, they do not know the time of their visitation. This is evidently the case with the impatient and unbelieving, who disregard the tokens both of the favour and displeasure of God. The founder melteth in vain, and the wicked are not plucked away. The day of opportunity is lost, perhaps never to be regained. Nor can Christians themselves be wholly acquitted of the charge of inattention. Too apt are we to deprive ourselves of the gracious presence of the Saviour for the want of a little more humility and self-denial. 2. Man knoweth not his time as to the seasonable performance of various duties. Sometimes we have had loud calls to humiliation and prayer, when, like Israel of old, we have given ourselves up to joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine (Isa. xxii. 13). Sometimes we have had a favourable opportunity of bearing our testimony to the important doctrines of the Gospel, or the equally important duties of practical religion: yet we have neither had a heart nor a tongue to speak, when a few words might have had a very happy effect. 3. We do not know the time when afflictions will come, or when we shall be delivered out of them. God has an appointed time for both. All events are safe in His hands, but they are at the same time concealed. His counsel shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure. We can no more advance or retard God's work than we can hasten the rising sun, or hinder its going down (Isa. lx. 22). 4. We know not the time of our continuance in life or departure out of it. 5. We know not the day of judgment, or the final period of all things. Our ignorance in this respect is best suited to that state of subjection to the wisdom and sovereignty of God in which we are placed, and to the nature of that economy which He has established, as well as to the limited extent of our frailties. II. INQUIRE THE REASON WHY MAN IS LEFT IN IGNORANCE OF PARTICULAR TIMES AND SEASONS. 1. It tends to do honour to the Divine government (Prov. xxv. 2). 2. The knowledge of times and seasons would be injurious to us rather than advantageous. Hereby faith, hope, and patience, so much adapted to a probationary state, are kept in continual exercise; and by being exercised are strengthened and increased. IMPROVEMENT: 1. This subject teaches us to repress a prying and inquisitive temper, and the wish of being wise above what is written (Deut. xxix. 20; John xxi. 21, 22). 2. Learn to be thankful for that degree of information which God has been pleased to impart. All that is

necessary to be known, both as to faith and practice, is sufficiently revealed; and the more necessary the knowledge, the clearer is the revelation. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *Expectation of long life unwise*:—I. WHY MEN ARE SO APT TO EXPECT TO LIVE LONG IN THIS WORLD. It needs no proof that they are apt to expect that their lives will be prolonged even to old age. It is the inward thought, hope and expectation of those in the morning, in the meridian, and even in the decline of life, that they shall live many days, if not many years. The health they have enjoyed, the dangers they have escaped, the preservation they have experienced, the means they have used and intend to use to lengthen out their days, all serve to corroborate and confirm their pleasing expectation that their lives shall be long continued. But their dread of death is another strong and powerful reason why they cherish the expectation of living to the latest period of human life. II. WHY IT IS UNWISE IN PERSONS OF ALL AGES, CHARACTERS, AND CONDITIONS TO HARBOUR AND CHERISH THE EXPECTATION OF LIVING LONG IN THIS WORLD. 1. Because God has designedly concealed the length of their days. 2. Because they are continually liable to innumerable unknown and unavoidable causes of death. 3. Because God, in His providence, is continually and solemnly warning them against such vain expectations. He is continually taking away the child before the youth, the youth before the man, the man of twenty before the man of forty, the man of forty before the man of fifty, or sixty, or seventy, or eighty, or any of a greater age. He promiscuously takes away the useless and the useful, the learned and unlearned, the rich and the poor, the religious and irreligious. 4. It will appear still more unwise and absurd for men to form and cherish high hopes and expectations of living long in this world, if we consider how expressly and repeatedly God, in His Word, has warned and admonished them against it. IMPROVEMENT: 1. Since mankind are so extremely apt to harbour and cherish expectation of the long continuance of life, there is reason to think that they generally die unexpectedly to themselves. 2. It appears from what has been said that death commonly comes to men in an evil time. To die is the great and last act to be done on the stage of life, and extremely solemn and interesting to the dying and to the living; and a sudden and unexpected time is certainly a very evil time to make the solemn and important transition out of this into the invisible and eternal world. 3. It appears from men's undue expectation of living why bereavements are often so heavy and grievous to be borne. Those who habitually expect to live long in the world themselves are almost equally prone to expect that their relatives and friends will be long-lived; and therefore their sudden and unexpected death brings with it a sudden and unexpected bereavement, which often gives a treble and sometimes a tenfold weight to it. 4. Since death so generally comes suddenly and unexpectedly to the living, we learn the wisdom and importance of early piety. 5. We learn from what has been said why God does cause so many sudden and unexpected deaths to take place in the world. It is undoubtedly designed more for the benefit of the living than for the dying. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The uncertainty of human life*:—It is an ancient aphorism that every man thinks all men mortal but himself. Rather than encounter a realizing view of death, and engage in a serious preparation to meet it, men will hazard all consequences. They are like soldiers marching up to the battery of an enemy with their eyes and ears closed, and dreaming of safety because they neither see nor hear the motions of the foe. Death will come, however much a stranger it may be to our thoughts; and it will come with double ruin for having been kept out of view so long. It may come suddenly, like the convulsions of an earthquake which at dead of night buries whole cities in ruins. "Man also knoweth not his time;" that is, he is ignorant of the time of his death and the time when overwhelming calamities may come upon him. He may be stripped naked in one day like Job; or in the midst of his dreams of earthly happiness he may open his astonished eyes in the world of spirits. "As the fishes that are taken in an evil net"—while they are wandering securely, or sporting among pearls, or rushing together for food, little thinking of being suddenly drawn up in the concealed net. "And as the birds that are caught in the snare," while they are skipping sportively without apprehension, or are eager to pick up the grain which is spread to decoy them to death. "So are the sons of men snared in an evil time"—while they are sporting and feeding themselves, secure in conscious health, ignorant of the shaft that is festering in their breast. "When it falleth suddenly upon them." While they are most secure the arrow of the Almighty reaches their heart. While they are saying, "Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," the word comes,

"Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Where are now the ancient empires of Assyria, and Babylon, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome? Where are the emperors, statesmen, philosophers, and bards of antiquity? Where is now the immense army of Xerxes, which seemed to darken Asia, and to sink with its weight the land of Greece? Where are now the many millions who have filled the world with noise and contention, with fame and folly for a hundred generations? Kingdom has trodden on the heel of kingdom, and nation has followed nation down to the land of forgetfulness. You hang over the grave by a thread on which the flame has seized, and you may look every moment to fall to rise not again "till the heavens be no more." Could the veil be drawn from eternity and discover to your astonished eyes the infinitely glorious or dreadful consequences depending on the present life; could then the veil be drawn from the many agents which are constantly striving within you to keep in order your complicated machine, and discover to you the many critical junctures which are daily occurring, which, without making you sensible of it, bring you within a hair's breadth of death; could the veil be also drawn from the course of nature around you, and disclose the dangers among which you walk by day and sleep by night; could you thus have a view of your hourly exposures and of the eternal interests at stake, you would start from your dream like a man awoke in a burning house, and flee for your life—ah, whither? whither but to the arms of Christ? (*E. D. Griffin, D.D.*) **So are the sons of men ensnared.**—*Snares in the path of the young*:—The sad truth here declared has been experienced thousands of times, not only by those who are now alive, but by others who have passed away to their great account. No one likes to be deceived in any matter; and yet how sin is constantly deceiving us! No man is willing to be ensnared by an enemy; and yet how Satan leads us captive at his will and what a disclosure will the judgment-day present, of fraud and subtlety on the side of sin and Satan—of weakness and compliance on the part of sinners! From among the many sources of danger now presenting themselves to my mind I must select several of the most prominent and powerful. 1. There is the danger of speculativeness in matters of religion. Remember, speculativeness proves nothing—faith "proves all things"; speculativeness deceives—faith cannot; speculativeness enfeebls the mind—faith strengthens it; speculativeness receives nothing truly—faith grasps and retains that which is revealed to faith; speculativeness is the false light of a carnal state—faith is the beacon-blaze of God set up in the soul; and this the apostle knew full well, when he said—"We walk by faith, not by sight." 2. Another source of danger is indecision with regard to personal religion. Multitudes of young men, we believe, who neither speculate upon the Bible, nor deny or even question its authority, but yield a full respect to religion itself and to the religion of religious friends, are in this sad state of personal indecision. No step of a positive kind has been taken. They wish to be religious—we give them credit for that; but then they are not. They hope to be so by and by—we believe they do; but where is the sustained effort that evidences the reality both of wishes and of hope? Indecisive, long persevered in, may at length—and it is a solemn thought—acquire the force of decision, but acting in a wrong direction. It may be decision on the side of ruin, simply because the young man, knowing in a truth, may not have firmness to act on what he knows, nor grace enough, sought in persevering prayer, to decide at once for life, salvation and a glorious immortality, accessible to him at any moment, through faith in Christ Jesus by the Spirit. 3. I have next to set before you the danger of worldly conformity, even when you have been enabled to overcome your natural indecision, and have cast in your lot with the true people of God. Before this occurs, you are of necessity conformed to the world; it cannot be otherwise; you have no motive for separation from the world till then. In whatever degree a Christian conforms to the habits and principles which govern the world around him, in the same degree is his spirituality in danger of deterioration. And yet how many Christian professors live as like the rest of the world, as if they had never professed to come to a decision on the side of Christ! The truth is, that the world makes concessions to religion; and the religion of these modern days is too liberal to withhold compliance to the demands which the world makes in return for its concession. Contact with the world is unavoidable; it is one thing, however, for us to submit to that which must be, but quite another to conform to that which should not be, just because it invites and pleases, or because it threatens. I know it is difficult to maintain your ground when the intercourse between Christians and the world is so familiar; but are you to give

way when a difficulty crosses you in the path, and looks you in the face? Are you accustomed to do so in the ordinary pursuits of life? Is there not difficulty in the way of everything that is worth doing? Does not difficulty generally stimulate perseverance? To be aware of difficulty arising from the character of worldly society, with which you cannot perhaps at all times avoid mingling, is, if you will have it so, to be partly armed against it. If you fail in this, the worldly spirit around you will soon cast a successful snare; and you may find by bitter and humbling experience that, "as the fishes are taken in an evil net, and as the birds are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." (*G. Fisk, LL.B.*)

Vers. 14-18. *There was a little city, and few men within it.*—*The little city and the poor wise man.*—The little city, as first introduced to our notice, is in sore straits. The legion of the foe seem innumerable, while the garrison is reduced to a mere handful. They are fast being brought to extremities, and in a few short hours the unfortunate little city will be, in all human probability, subjected to all the horrors of capture by storm, and will be ultimately razed to the ground. At first sight it may seem rather paradoxical to compare this great world of ours, with its almost innumerable inhabitants, its vast area, its enormous resources, to the little city with few men within it. But do we not, comparatively speaking, take too exalted a view of this little world? For relatively little it is, after all—but an insignificant fraction of God's great universe. But further, inasmuch as the city spoken of here is represented as being ultimately delivered from its peril, we are hardly justified in applying the figure to humanity at large, for whom indeed deliverance has been provided, but has not by it been accepted. The little city joyfully accepting the benefit of deliverance is a much fitter type of the spiritual Church of Christ, viewed in the foreknowledge of God as a complete whole, redeemed and delivered by the wisdom and love of the poor wise man who has cast in his lot with her: and this is indeed "a little city, and few men within her." So that the parallelism thus limited is by no means strained or unintelligible. Now, we know nothing of the circumstances to which the little city owed its danger—it may or may not have been its own fault; but we do know the cause of the peril in which the human family has been involved, and that the blame rests entirely with ourselves. Man has rebelled against the sovereign will of God; the defiant cry of humanity through the long dark ages has still been, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." The result of all has been that we have forced God into the position of a foe, although He is in His heart our best and truest friend. God would be false to His own position in the universe were He to permit rebellion against His authority: He would be practically abdicating His throne, and this He will never do. Do you know what it is to have reached the point of self-despair? have you found yourself surrounded by the mighty bulwarks? have you felt what it is to have no escape? Not until then, believe me, will you be disposed to value the deliverance procured by "the poor wise man." To him we will now turn our attention. He was but a poor man; but he had a patriot's heart and a wise man's head; and, moved doubtless by love for his compatriots, by some extraordinary and unlooked-for effort of wisdom, he delivered the city. How did he do it? Here again we have no information, but it is suggestive to notice that an incident very similar to the one described here actually took place in the time of Solomon's father, and must in all probability have made so deep an impression on his own mind that it is scarcely possible that his mind did not recur to it as he wrote these words, though in this case the humble deliverer was a woman, not a man (2 Samuel xx. 15). The guilt of one man here had involved the whole town in peril, because his guilt was imputed to them; but at the suggestion of the wise woman, the guilt was laid on the head of one, himself the guilty party, and one man died for the people, and the whole city perished not. But our Wise Man, Himself the Innocent, offered Himself, with a wisdom which was the child of love, that the guilt of our city might first be imputed to Him the Innocent, and that further His innocence might be imputed to our city, so that by His own voluntary self-sacrifice one man might die for the city, and the city itself might be safe. The wise woman saved the city at the cost of another's life; but our poor Wise Man has saved His Church at the cost of His own; and in the moment of our despair we see the hostile bulwark withdrawn, the engines of war removed. We too are saved by the interposition of One who, "though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His

poverty might be made rich." He too was found in the city with no outward distinction of rank or title. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." Born in a remote province, in an obscure town, brought up in retirement as a peasant's son, what was He to the Cæsars and Herods of His day? But now I hasten on to the sequel, for I am speaking to the delivered ones to-day. What became of the poor wise man? Did they make him king or governor? Did he continue to be the most prominent figure in the little commonwealth which he had saved? Nay, but he disappears again into his old obscurity, he retires to the back street—to his cellar or his garret. "No man remembered that same poor man." Ah, blood-bought souls, ye ransomed from ruin by the death of the Deliverer, is this true of any of us? Having been delivered from impending ruin by the Christ, have we learned to forget the Deliverer, and to live very much as if we had delivered ourselves? (*W. H. M. H. Aitken, M.A.*) *The poor wise man*:—A very remarkable case this is indeed. Here is a little city, with few inhabitants, in a weak defenceless condition, and a powerful army at the gates; which is rescued out of the hands of its enemies, and snatched from the jaws of destruction just opened to devour it: war and slavery are driven far away, and peace and liberty at once restored. And all this is effected by one "poor wise man." What would the behaviour of the people be in such a case? Would not their hearts overflow with gratitude toward their deliverer? Would they not render to him all their service who had rendered to them all his; and vie with each other who should do him most honour? Nothing less! they did not so much as thank him. Nay, after the thing was over, he did not even enter into their thoughts—"No man remembered that same poor man." This is a very affecting story, considered only in itself: but if we can find an interest in it, and make the case our own, it will be much more so. Let us ask, then, what is to be understood by the city, the great king that besieged it, and the poor wise man that delivered it? The first thing we meet with is "a little city with few men in it." Is not this a description which suits well with the Church, or society of believers? (Matt. v. 14; Heb. xi. 10; Ps. lxxxvii. 3). And few and weak indeed we are, in comparison of those that besiege and encompass us round about to destroy us. Who these are, we are next to consider. "There came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it." That the Christian state, of which this besieged city is a picture, is a state of warfare is known and acknowledged, when it is called the Church militant; and who it is that attacks it we all declare at our baptism, when we promise to fight manfully against "sin, the world, and the devil." Sin and the world are but two instruments in this war: it is the devil who uses them; and, therefore, he is the great king that besieges this city and builds bulwarks against it. The bulwarks are raised; the city is ready to fall; and the enemy is about to enter: when lo, there is found in the city a poor wise man; and who is he? If we are the city, he that saves the city must be he that saves us; even our Lord Jesus Christ; than whom none ever was poorer or wiser: He was made poor for our sakes; and in Him were all the treasures of wisdom. This is He who by His wisdom delivers the city; who places Himself in the breach, as Moses did. At the sight of Him the infernal host was in an uproar; and for a time they seemed to overwhelm Him; they shouted for victory, and were hasting forward to the prey: the enemy of Israel, the spiritual Pharaoh, said, "I will pursue, I will overtake," etc. And here, "except the Lord had kept the city, the watchman had waked but in vain." Had he been an earthly conqueror, the day had been lost. For, to the everlasting confusion of His enemies, He who lay down in his grave the poor wise man, the despised and afflicted Galilean, arose from the dead "the Lord mighty in battle; and of the subject of death became the King of Glory." And now, would you think it possible that after all this no man should remember that same poor man? that they should entirely forget him? that they should all forget him? Who at the hearing of this monstrous act of ingratitude is not filled with indignation? Yet we have done all this: we have had this mighty deliverance vouchsafed to us—and we have forgotten it! We have forgotten Him, who so remembered us that He forgot Himself, and made no account of all those sorrows and sufferings, from His birth in the manger to His death upon the cross, which He underwent for us men and our salvation. The first thing we ought to remember and confess is this, "That we got not the land in possession by our own sword," etc. You have now seen how well this parable of Solomon bears an application to the salvation of us citizens of the Church by Jesus Christ; and how it agrees with the same in every

particular. There is another case of the kind, in which the event was quite contrary; and the case of the one city should never be thought of without the other. You have seen the example of a city saved by a poor wise man. I can tell you of another city lost for want of him. The city of Jerusalem fell into the condition of our city in the parable. A great king came against it and encompassed it with armies, and built great bulwarks against it, and prevailed so as to overthrow it to its very foundations, and scatter all its inhabitants. There was found in it none to save; no poor wise man to prevent its destruction. There had been one; but they had cast him out, and refused to be saved by him: for the sake of his poverty they had despised his wisdom; so their destruction was inevitable. And so will it be of all those who cast out their Saviour: yea, the time will come when the whole world shall perish for want of Him. (*W. Jones, M.A.*)

Vers. 17, 18. The words of wise men are heard in quiet.—*The superiority of moral to military force*.—"The words of wise men are heard in quiet": words of thoughtfulness and conviction, silently dropping from the lips or the pen, are more mighty than the boisterous bombastic utterances of those who rule by force. I. The one **DEVELOPS THE HIGHEST ELEMENTS OF MIND AND CHARACTER**, the other does not. In what does moral power consist? 1. In a correct apprehension of moral truth. 2. An indomitable sympathy with moral truth; such a sympathy as Job had when he said, "Though He slay me," etc. And as Paul, "I count not my life," etc. 3. A practical embodiment of moral truth. But what have you in military power? No deep moral conviction, no high sympathies; nothing but tact, cunning, brute courage. II. The one **AFFORDS FULL SCOPE FOR ALL THE DELICATE INSTINCTS IN MAN**, the other does not. 1. Military force can only bring man into contact with the mere forms of his enemies. It does not touch the spirit of enmity; moral force does. The words of true moral power, heard in "quiet," smite dishonesties, enmities, falsehoods. 2. There are hosts of enemies that military force cannot meet at all. What can military force do with ignorance, poverty, carnality, selfishness, diseases of all kinds? Nothing. III. The one **OVERCOMES ITS ENEMIES EFFECTIVELY**, the other does not. Man is made to be subdued and swayed by the appeals of truth, justice, and kindness. We are told that in the East there are people who, by music, can so influence some species of serpent that, while under its spell, the deadly cobra may be handled as if it were utterly harmless. But if the charmer tread on the snake unawares, he is poisoned like any other man. This is something like the influence of moral force, of moral truth and love; it can subdue malignant minds. But military power cannot do this, it cannot touch the soul: no shot nor steel can reach the arena of soul. IV. The one **ACHIEVES ITS CONQUESTS WITHOUT INJURY TO SELF OR OBJECT**, the other does not. The moral force employed in moral campaigns, either in self-defence or in conquest, does not injure, but blesses the fighter. By it he gets good, his energy is renewed by exercise. Nor are others injured; no wealth is sacrificed, no sufferings are produced. But in military force all is ruined: commerce, governments, wealth, towns, cities, as well as millions upon millions of human life. V. The one is **SANCTIONED BY THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST**, the other is not. When "He was reviled, He reviled not again." From the subject learn: 1. The fearful moral ignorance of the world. Kings, statesmen, all have more faith in swords and bayonets than in moral truth. 2. The encouragement to use moral force in the correction of wrong. 3. The men who are destined to become the heroes of the future. (*Homilist.*) **One sinner destroyeth much good.**—*The destructiveness of sin*.—1. Sin, in itself, is a moral force of tremendous potency. Nothing finite or human can resist it, or counteract its malign influence. Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Ah! that is the terrible law of sin. 2. As a social moral force sin works on a broader field, and with the sweep and destructiveness of a cyclone, uprooting and destroying everything in its path. One cholera or fever-stricken man may infect a whole city: so one moral leper may impart the plague to all within the circle of his influence while living, and send the death-current down through many generations. One scoffer or infidel may blast the faith of a thousand souls. One bad book, the progeny of a single brain, may taint the morals of a nation, and, like Paine's "Age of Reason," sweep down through the centuries with the destructiveness of a moral sirocco. 3. Confine the view to a narrower social field—say the family, or the little neighbourhood, or the single church—and the same alarming fact is brought to light. The narrower the sphere the more intimate and constant the contact, as a rule the

stronger the influence exerted. One evil child often leads astray a whole family group; one evil companion corrupts a whole circle; one bad example suffices to destroy the integrity of the whole body. Lessons: 1. Be watchful and vigilant in regard to the first appearance of evil—(1) in the individual himself. Timely rebuke, faithful admonition, earnest prayer and effort may arrest the tide of evil and save a sinner from the doom which he courts, and save society from the dreadful effects of an abandoned career. (2) In the community in which he moves, in the way of warning, and in the way of hedging in and counteracting his destructive influence. 2. Remember, and act on the fact, that while "one sinner destroyeth much good," one devout, earnest praying Christian may set in motion moral influences and forces that shall "turn many to righteousness." (*Homiletic Review*.)

CHAPTER X.

VER. 1. **Dead flies cause the ointment . . . to send forth a stinking savour.**—*Dead flies*:—Among the Jews, oil rendered fragrant by being mixed with precious drugs was used for many different purposes. With it priests and kings were anointed when they entered upon their offices, guests at the tables of the rich were treated to it as a luxury. It was used medicinally for outward application to the bodies of the sick; and with it corpses, and the clothes in which they were wrapped, were besprinkled before burial. Very great care was needed in the preparation of the material used for such special purposes. Elaborately confectioned as the ointment was, it was easily spoiled and rendered worthless. It was accordingly necessary not only to take great pains in making it, but also in preserving it from contamination when made. A dead fly would soon corrupt the ointment, and turn it into a pestilent odour. So, says the Preacher, a noble and attractive character may be corrupted and destroyed by a little folly; an insignificant-looking fault or weakness may outweigh great gifts and attainments. The fault which shows itself in a character is not like a stain or flaw in a marble statue, which is confined to one spot, and is no worse after the lapse of years, but like a sore in a living body, which weakens and may destroy the whole organism. One cause why the evil influence spreads is that we are not on our guard against it, and it may grow to almost ungovernable strength before we are really convinced that there is any danger. We can recognize at once great errors and heinous vices, and the alarm and disgust they excite prepare us to resist them; but little follies and weaknesses often fill us with an amused contempt for them, which blinds us to their great power for evil. So numerous are the sources from which danger arises, that a long list might be made of the little sins by which the characters of many good men and women are often marred: indolence, selfishness, love of ease, procrastination, indecision, rudeness, irritability, over-sensitiveness to praise or blame, vanity, boastfulness, talkativeness, love of gossip, undue laxity, undue severity, want of self-control over appetites and passions, obstinacy, parsimony. Numerous though these follies are, they may be reduced into two great classes—faults of weakness and faults of strength. I. **FAULTS OF WEAKNESS.** This class is that of those which are largely negative, and consist principally in omission to give a definite and worthy direction to the nature; want of self-control, love of ease, indolence, procrastination, indecision, selfishness, unfeelingness. Want of self-control over appetites and passions led David into the foulest crimes, which, though sincerely repented of, were most terribly avenged, and have for ever left a stain upon his name. Love of ease is the only fault which is implied in the description of the rich man in the parable (Luke xvi. 19), a desire to be comfortable and avoid all that was disagreeable, but it led him to such callous indifference to the miseries of his fellows, as disqualified him for happiness in the world to come. A very striking illustration of the deterioration of a character through the sin of weakness and indecision is to be found in the life of Eli. His good qualities have not preserved his memory from contempt. This is the sting of the rebuke addressed to the Church of Laodicea (Rev. iii. 15, 16). In Dante's description of the lower world special infamy is attached to this class of offenders, that of those who have never really lived, who have never awakened to take any part either in good or evil, to care for

anything but themselves. They are unfit for heaven, and hell scorns to receive them. "This miserable mode the dreary souls of those sustain who lived without blame and without praise." II. **FAULTS OF STRENGTH.** This class includes those faults which are of a positive character, and consist largely in an abuse of qualities which might have been virtues. The very strength of character by which men and women are distinguished may lead by over-emphasis into very offensive deterioration. Thus firmness may degenerate into obstinacy, frugality into parsimony, liberality into extravagance, light-heartedness into frivolity, candour into rudeness, and so on. And these are faults which disgust and repel, and cause us to overlook even very great merits in a character; and not only so, but, if unchecked, gradually nullify those merits. We may find in the character of Christ all the virtues which go to make up holiness so admirably balanced that no one is over-prominent, and therefore no one pushed to that excess which so often mars human excellence. "His tender tone was the keen edge of His reproofs, and His unquestionable love infused solemnity into every warning." (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *Dead flies*.—Our instances must be taken almost at random; for, like their Egyptian prototypes, these flies are too many to be counted. I. **RUDENESS.** Some good men are blunt in their feelings, and rough in their manners; and they apologize for their coarseness by calling it honesty, downrightness, plainness of speech. They quote in self-defence the sharp words and shaggy mien of Elijah and John the Baptist, and, as affectation, they sneer at the soft address and mild manners of gentler men. The question, however, is not between two rival graces—between integrity on the one side, and affability on the other; but the question is, Are these two graces compatible? Is it possible for a man to be explicit, and open, and honest, and, withal, courteous and considerate of the feelings of others? Is it possible to add to fervour and fidelity, suavity, and urbanity, and brotherly kindness? There never was one more faithful than the Son of God, but there never was one more considerate. And just as rudeness is not essential to honesty, so neither is roughness essential to strength of character. The Christian should have a strong character; he should be a man of remarkable decision. And he should be a man of inflexible purpose. When once he knows his Lord's will, he should go through with it, aye, through fire and water. But this he may do without renouncing the meekness and gentleness which were in Christ. He may have zeal without pugnacity, determination without obstinacy. II. **IRRITABILITY.** One of the most obvious and impressive features in the Saviour's character was His meekness. In a patience which ingenious or sudden provocation could not upset; in a magnanimity which insult could not ruffle; in a gentleness from which no folly could extract an unadvised word, men saw what they could scarcely understand, but that which made them marvel. But many Christians lack this beauty of their Master's holiness; they are afflicted with evil tempers, they cannot rule their spirits, or rather they do not try. Some indulge occasional fits of anger; and others are haunted by habitual, daily, life-long fretfulness. The one sort is generally calm and pellucid as an Alpine lake, but on some special provocation is tossed up into a magnificent tempest; the other is like the Bosphorus, in a continual stir, and even when not a breath is moving, by the contrariety of its internal currents vexing itself into a ceaseless whirl and eddy. But either form, the paroxysmal fury, and the perennial fretfulness, is inconsistent with the wisdom from above, which is peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated. III. **SELFBENESS.** The world expects self-denial in the Christian; and with reason, for of all men he can best afford it, and by his profession he is committed to it. Attention to the wants of others, care for their welfare, and consideration for their feelings are Scriptural graces for which all Christians ought to be conspicuous. Christianity allows us to forget our own wants, but it does not permit us to forget the necessities of our brethren. It requires us to be careless of our own ease, but it forbids us to overlook the comfort and convenience of other people. (*J. Hamilton, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left.—Heart and hand:—I. The wise man's heart at his right hand means that HIS AFFECTIONS ARE AT THEIR PROPER OBJECTS. The heart is the moral power or seat of principle. "With the heart man believeth." "A new heart also will I give unto you." Then the hand is the active power, the faculty by which principles are carried into action. "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners." "I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands to God." The right hand, again, is the

ideal hand. "The Lord hath sworn by His right hand." Thus whatever a hand is or does, the right hand is and does pre-eminently. It is the perfection of all that is characteristic in a hand. When therefore, a wise man's heart is said to be at his right hand, it is said by way of commendation. It means that his moral nature is as it ought to be. It occupies its right place. It sustains its right relations. It discharges its proper functions. It is altogether a heart right in God's sight. Now, the heart is a most important portion of the body. It is the very seat and citadel of its life. Derangement in it means instantaneous derangement in every vital process. And in the spiritual life the thing we call the heart is no less essential. Out of it are the issues of life. It is the seat of principle. It is the home of the affections. It is the source of all the moral actions. The other powers are the heart's executive to obey its rule and carry out its high behests. II. The wise man's heart at his right hand means that HIS PRINCIPLES ARE AT THE BACK OF PRACTICAL POWER. All through Scripture the right hand is the emblem of power. Our Lord styles the Father's right hand "the right hand of power." God is declared to have led Israel "by the right hand of Moses," and Israel to have obtained the Land of Promise by "God's right hand, and His arm, and the light of His countenance." So men are spiritually saved by God's "right hand," and Christ in His resurrection was "by the right hand of God exalted." The right hand of God, the right hand of man, is the organ of power in each. In the body the heart is in closest connection with the strongest hand. And in the spiritual department the same law holds. The godly man in whom exists the most perfect connection between heart and life, has for this reason a power all his own. That power is spiritual power, the mightiest power there is. It is an aspect of the force that regenerates hearts, that illuminates minds, that changes characters, that adorns lives with the transcendent beauties of holiness. Not more surely does a right hand of power connect itself with a healthy nourishing heart, than a forceful Christian life attends on and expresses the energies of a heart renewed by grace. III. The wise man's heart at his right hand means that HIS PURPOSES ARE AT THE FITTEST AGENCY FOR CARRYING THEM OUT. When the heart chooses God's will, the hand chooses His way. It perceives the fitness of it. It believes in the policy of it. It would argue the suitableness of it in any case from the fact that it is His way. This is true wisdom. No stronger reason for adopting a way than that it is God's way. IV. HIS RESOLUTIONS ARE AT A DEGREE OF STRENGTH IN WHICH THEY PROMPTLY TAKE THE FORM OF ACTION. There is a constitutional unreadiness in some people. They cannot be prompt. This unreadiness which distinguishes the dull from the smart, distinguishes also the left hand from the right. It responds more slowly to the will. It acts less readily in almost every work. The right hand is the hand of promptitude as well as the hand of skill. Now, in life, as every young man should consider, the element of promptitude has an important place. The few who succeed are the wise men who have their boat of action ready to launch on the advancing wave of opportunity. The many who fail are the foolish who are indolently unobservant, and therefore always off their guard. There is a perfectly identical treatment of the question of personal godliness. Religion has its times of opportunity which are its decisive hours. Some saving truth comes home. There are stings of conviction. There are half-formed resolves that choice shall be made of eternal things. But here the curse of spiritual unreadiness comes in. The man is not prepared for immediate action. He is a spiritual "Athelstone the Unready." To God's "now" he answers "soon." To God's "begin" he answers "wait." The man whose heart is where and how it ought to be is a man who takes God directly at His word. The Divine "come" he takes to be the essence of duty, and the Divine "now" to be never untimely. And so, like doves to their windows, he flies for refuge to Christ. Then darting forth an eager hand, he lays hold on the hope set before him. (J. E. Henry, M.A.) *Influence of a good heart*:—I. A GOOD HEART is something which comprises all moral goodness, or everything truly virtuous and excellent. "God is love." His love comprises holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. So a good heart in man consists in true benevolence, and comprises every holy and virtuous affection. And for this reason the Scripture calls a good heart a perfect heart, a pure heart, an honest heart, an upright heart, a wise and understanding heart. II. A GOOD HEART FITS MEN FOR EVERY KIND OF DUTY. 1. A good heart fits men for all religious duties. (1) A good heart evidently fits men to read the Scriptures. These were indited by the spirit of holiness, and ought to be read with the same spirit with which they

were written. (2) Devout meditation is a religious duty; and a good heart fits men to meditate upon God and Divine things with peculiar pleasure and satisfaction. (3) Prayer is another religious duty of the first importance, and a good heart is the very spirit of grace and supplication. (4) God looks at the heart in all religious services; and it is only a pure and upright heart that can prepare men to worship Him in spirit and in truth. 2. A good heart fits men for all secular as well as religious duties. It disposes them to propose a right end in all their secular concerns, which is the glory of God and the good of their fellow-creatures. So far as men are guided by a good heart, they act from noble and benevolent motives in all their pursuits. Whatever they do, they do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men. 3. A good heart fits men for all social duties. It naturally prompts those who possess it to speak and act with propriety in all companies, in all places, in all stations, and in all relations of life. It makes men quick to discover and practise the duties which they owe to each other. 4. A good heart fits men for doubtful duties, or duties in doubtful cases. If any are at a loss whether to embrace or reject any religious sentiment proposed, they have a standard in their own breasts by which to try it. It is only to appeal to their own conscience, and ask, What says benevolence in this case? Is this doctrine agreeable to disinterested benevolence, or is it an expression of selfishness? And therefore the good man's heart is always at his right hand, and ready to decide what is true and what is false. 5. A good heart fits men for difficult duties. There is a great variety of difficult duties, but I shall mention only two sorts; dangerous duties and self-denying duties. These have always been difficult to perform. But a good heart will make them easy and pleasant, and dispose men to perform them with a degree of alacrity and delight. IMPROVEMENT: 1. If a good heart fits men for every kind of duty, then they can never find a solid and satisfactory excuse for their ignorance or neglect of duty. 2. If a good heart fits men for all kinds of duty, then those who have a good heart will be very apt to make it appear that their heart is good. 3. If a good heart fits men for every kind of duty, then those who have a bad heart will be very apt to show it. Men are as apt to discover their left hand as their right hand. They discover it both by not using it and by attempting to use it without ease and dexterity. As a good heart fits men for duty, so a bad heart unfits them for duty. It sometimes prevents their understanding their duty, but more frequently prevents their doing what they know to be their duty. Both their ignorance and neglect discover an evil heart at their left hand. 4. If a good heart fits men for all kinds of duty, then those who are destitute of it do no duty at all in the sight of God. 5. If a good heart fits men for all kinds of duty, then good men find a pleasure in performing every kind of duty. 6. If a good heart fits men for every duty, then all good men desire to grow in grace. They desire grace, not merely on account of the spiritual enjoyment that grace affords them, but principally because it fits them for every duty towards God and man. 7. If a good heart fits men for every duty, then those who are destitute of it continually live in darkness. This is certainly a very deplorable situation. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Heart and hand*.—In the physical system the heart and the head are alike related to the hand. We associate the heart with feeling, the head with thought, and the hand with movement or action. Life is made up of feeling, thought and action. The motive power may be said to lie in the heart; the guiding principle in the head; and the efficient working element in the hand. But in the Scriptures the heart is almost always used to denote the whole inner being, as including the mental and moral nature, the intellect and the affections. Wisdom is the right direction of all our faculties and powers towards a given end, and it demands their harmonious co-operation. We want first of all to have concentration of power, and after that the direction of it along the right lines. In the harmony of head and heart we have wisdom in thought and action. In their contrariety we have folly. The heart or soul ought to control the hand. It is the business of a wise man to know what he can do and what he cannot do. A man need be in no doubt as to the end of his existence. If it is one's deepest desire really to serve the Lord, He will lead one in the right way, and show one in specific form what he ought at all times to do. A wise man's heart is at his right hand in this sense, that he always acts from within himself, or from the ground of his own personal feeling. This sentence of Solomon means that the wise man is a practical man—a man of action as well as of thought. The foolish man whose heart is at his left hand has separated thought from action. If he has

a theory of life at all, his actual life is out of harmony with it. It is so with the religion of many: they have separated between their theory of the life to come and their practice in the present life. The man whose heart is at his right hand is always ready for action, and specially prepared to seize the opportunity when it comes. There is a general preparedness for action which always characterizes him, and makes him equal to the occasion, his mind being constantly made up to a very large extent. The true soldier is always ready for action. One's facts and principles must always be at hand, ready for the occasion. To have one's heart at his right hand is to do one's work with his whole heart. He puts his mind and conscience into it, and really enjoys it. His motto is that what is worth doing at all ought to be done well. There is nothing so miserable as to have a work to do for which one has no heart. But to have as one's daily work that in which he finds his highest happiness and culture is surely a most enviable condition. In opposition to all this, the man whose heart is at his left hand is living an essentially idle life. There is no unity of purpose in his existence. The deep spiritual forces of his being, separated from all that is practical and profitable, are wasted. Let us seek by all means the concentration of our powers, and the direction of them to the one true end of life. Our heart is in the right place when our supreme affection is that love to God in Christ which goes continually forth in earnest and prayerful endeavour for the good of others. When Sir Walter Raleigh had laid his head upon the block, he was asked by the executioner whether it lay aright; whereupon, with the marvellous calmness of a man whose heart was fixed, he replied, "It matters little, my friend, how the head lies, provided the heart be right." (*Fergus Fergusson, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth.—*A social scene in human life.*—I. THIS SOCIAL SCENE IS COMMON. 1. In the political realm. We see small-minded men occupying influential offices in the State. 2. In the ecclesiastical department. 3. In the commercial department. How often do we see little men by trickery, fraud and lucky hits become the great men of the market. 4. In the literary department. II. THIS SOCIAL SCENE IS INCONGRUOUS. 1. It does not agree with what we might have expected under the government of a righteous God. That the race is not always to the morally swift and the battle to the morally strong is an undoubted anomaly in the government of God. 2. It does not agree with the moral feelings of humanity. Whilst there is a perversity in man which leads him to hurrah the successful and the prosperous, there is, nevertheless, down deep in the heart of all men a feeling that such a scene as that indicated in the text is something terribly incongruous, a great moral enormity. III. THIS SOCIAL SCENE IS TEMPORARY. 1. Such a social scene does not exist in the other world. Death destroys all these adventitious distinctions and moral incongruities. 2. Such a social scene will not always exist here. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.—*Respect the hedge.*—We covet the apple on the tree and forget the snake in the grass; the consequence being, that when we essay to bite the apple, the snake bites us. Now, there are many protective hedges about us; and the trouble is, that we are variously tempted to play tricks with these, and upon occasion to set them at naught. Therein we usually discover how great is the mistake we have made. I. **GUARD THE SENSE OF SHAME.** Whatever tends to lessen the acuteness of the soul to things false, ugly, or foul is sharply to be shunned. Beware of the literature that tends to reconcile to odious things! If the soul is to keep its virgin purity, it must turn away even from the reflection of foulness in a mirror. Beware of the company whose conversation and fellowship in some way, not perhaps very apparent, blights the bloom and dims the lustre of pure feeling! Beware of the amusements that flech away the quick delicacy which has been evolved in our nature at an infinite expense! Beware of the fashion that sets lighter store by old-fashioned modesty! Better pluck out as useless appendages the tender eyelashes which guarantee the sight than consent to destroy the instincts of purity which preserve the spirit. The sense of shame is a sacred thing; it is the saintliness of nature, and we ought sedulously to guard and heighten it in the fear of God. The man or woman who heedlessly violates this ethereal hedge puts himself or herself outside what is elsewhere called a wall of fire. II. **RESPECT THE CODE OF COURTESY.** Even in domestic life and between

chief friends are interposed hedges, if they be not rather flower borders, which must be respected, if mutual regard and veneration are to continue. United most closely as we are, certain delicate observances and deferences fix the isolation of our personality, and imply the attention that must be paid to our rights and feelings. The grievous misunderstandings and animosities which wreck the peace and prosperity of households not uncommonly originate in excessive familiarities between brothers and sisters; these fail to see that refined proprieties guard the several members of a family as a scarlet cord reserves special places in great assemblies, and that "good form" must be observed in private as well as in public. Some one has wisely said, "It is no worse to stand on ceremony than to trample on it." No, indeed, it is often a great deal better; for social ceremonial is the fence that protects the delicate forms and flowers which are so difficult to rear. Let young people revere the pale of ceremony, for when it is broken down beauty, purity and peace are at the mercy of a ruthless world. III. OBEY THE RULES OF BUSINESS. Regulations touching hours of going out and coming in, minute directions for household conduct, rules about the handling of cash, usages in keeping accounts, and petty laws directing twenty other details of duty, are based in an expediency which really and simultaneously conserves the rights and safety of masters and servants alike. The beginner may not see the reasonableness of a system of delicate network which comprehends eating, drinking and sleeping, and the almost infinite ramifications of daily duty; but there is more reasonableness in all these worrying precepts than he sees. The laws of business are the outcome of the experience of generations, and are not lightly to be set aside. A young man can hardly pay too much deference to the customs and traditions of the establishment in which his lot is cast; he cannot be too exactly conscientious about the prescribed obligations of time, usage, method, goods and cash: to tamper here is to be lost. Beware of the slightest infraction of your official duty, of all informality and unauthorized action, of all illicit and contraband ways and things, deadly serpents without rattles wait behind the violated precepts! Whilst, on the other hand, if you keep the least of these commandments, it shall keep you, and the discipline of obedience on a lower level will strengthen you to comply with the sublimest laws of all on the highest levels of thought and conduct. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Fences and serpents*:—What is meant here is, probably, not such a hedge as we are accustomed to see, but a dry stone wall, or, perhaps, an earthen embankment, in the crevices of which might lurk a snake to sting the careless hand. The "wall" may stand for the limitations and boundary lines of our lives, and the inference that wisdom suggests in that application of the saying it, "Do not pull down judiciously but keep the fence up, and be sure you keep on the right side of it." For any attempt to pull it down—which, being interpreted, is to transgress the laws of life which God has enjoined—is sure to bring out the hissing snake with its poison. I. ALL LIFE IS GIVEN US RIGIDLY WALLED UP. The first thing that the child learns is that it must not do what it likes. The last lesson that the old man has to learn is, you must do what you ought. And between these two extremities of life we are always making attempts to treat the world as an open common, on which we may wander at our will. And before we have gone many steps some sort of keeper or other meets us and says to us, "Trespassers! back again to the road!" Life is rigidly hedged in and limited. There are the obligations which we owe, and the relations in which we stand, to the outer world, the laws of physical life, and all that touches the external and the material. There are the relations in which we stand, and the obligations which we owe to ourselves. And God has so made us as that obviously large tracts of every man's nature are given to him on purpose to be restrained, curbed, coerced, and sometimes utterly crushed and extirpated. God gives us our impulses under lock and key. All our animal desires, all our natural tendencies, are held on condition that we exercise control over them, and keep them well within the rigidly marked limits which He has laid down, and which we can easily find out. We sometimes foolishly feel that a life thus hedged up, limited by these high boundaries on either side, must be uninteresting, monotonous, or unfree. It is not so. The walls are blessings, like the parapet on a mountain road that keeps the traveller from toppling over the face of the cliff. They are training-walls, as our hydrographical engineers talk about, which, built in the bed of a river, wholesomely confine its waters and make a good scour which gives life, instead of letting them vaguely wander and stagnate across great fields of mud. Freedom consists in keeping willingly within the limits which God has

traced, and anything except that is not freedom, but is licence and rebellion, and at bottom servitude of the most abject type. II. EVERY ATTEMPT TO BREAK DOWN THE LIMITATIONS BRINGS POISON INTO THE LIFE. We live in a great automatic system which, by its own operation, largely avenges every breach of law. I need not remind you, except in a word, of the way in which the transgression of the plain physical laws stamped upon our constitutions avenges itself; but the certainty with which disease dogs all breaches of the laws of health is but a type in the lower and material universe of the far higher and more solemn certainty with which "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." The grosser form of transgression of the plain laws of temperance, abstinence, purity, brings with itself, in like manner, a visible and palpable punishment in the majority of cases. Some serpents' bites inflame, some paralyze; and one or other of these two things—either an inflamed conscience or a palsied conscience—is the result of all wrongdoing. I do not know which is the worst. III. ALL THE POISON MAY BE GOT OUT OF YOUR VEINS IF YOU LIKE. Christ has received into His own inmost life and self the whole gathered consequences of a world's sin; and by the mystery of His sympathy, and the reality of His mysterious union with us men, He, the sinless Son of God, has been made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. For sin and death launched their last dart at Him, and, like some venomous insect that can sting once and then must die, they left their sting in His wounded heart, and have none for them that put their trust in Him. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The hedges of life*:—I look around upon the universe. It is a place of hedges. It is not barren moorland about which we are doubtful if it has an owner, for He has everywhere defined His rights and established His bounds. I. READ IT IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY, and take it as a piece of experience. It is given us by a man who brings it out of his own heart, for he had felt the bite of the serpent himself. There was scarcely a hedge upon which he did not set his foot, and there were few penalties of sin which he did not feel. Although every means was at his command for avoiding sin's consequences, he felt the serpent's sting; and if you will take his experience of sin, and rest satisfied in his verdict on it, it will save you from untold sorrow and infinite regrets. But this is not the experience of one man. Look around society and question men for yourselves. Hear the intemperate man express the shame and contempt which follow his intemperance; hear the worldly man as the day of life draws to its close bemoan the hollow cheat the world has played upon him; listen to the experience of those who have climbed out of the mire and have now their feet set upon the rock; and the unqualified answer you will get will be that this language is true. Or open the volume of history, and mark the solemn retributions of God upon every page. Read the history of Jacob, of Haman, of Ahab and Jezebel. Or open the book of secular history. Glance at the history of Greece and Rome, or any nation under heaven. Thrones gained by the sword have been lost by it. Fortunes won by fraud have cursed in turn every one that has held them; and tear at random any page from the archives of the world, and it will comment to you on these words, for the experience of men through 6,000 years has confirmed these truths, and they express the settled experiences of mankind. II. READ THIS NOT ONLY IN THE LIGHT OF HISTORY, BUT IN THE LIGHT OF REVELATION, and take it not only as a piece of experience, but as the revelation of a Divine law. God's government has another world as its theatre as well as this. Men may sin here and in some cases be comparatively free from any terrible outward consequences; in that other domain of God's the effects of their sin will reveal themselves in all their fearfulness and terror. Poison does not always work immediately, but sometimes after days of health and happiness the serpent's bite begins to show itself. And so although violation of moral order may bring with it no instantaneous punishment, punishment for all that will follow. It is a law of the eternal universe. Now, these hedges are both physical, social and moral. Break one of the laws of health, and you will induce disease; and that disease is the bite of the serpent. Or break one of the laws of society, and society will distrust you, and that distrust, that loss of respect and position, is the bite of the serpent. But break one of the higher laws—the laws of morality—and what, probably, will follow? Why, penalties severe and terrible. Even in this world the resources of God to punish are infinite. He may punish you in yourself, in your circumstances, by means of your children. He can punish you through prosperity as well as through adversity. III. TAKE THESE WORDS AND READ THEM IN THE LIGHT OF THE CROSS. God, in His infinite love, has provided

salvation in Christ. The temporal effects of sin He does not remove—Divine forgiveness will not repair the shattered constitution, or mend the broken fortune. The bite of the serpent works death; but God suffers it not to work the second death. Yet do not misunderstand this, as though it were a light thing to see now that salvation through Christ is offered to all. You can never be what you might have been but for its committal. The damage you do to the sapling appears in the massive trunk of the oak, and all your machinery cannot straighten it. And though sin may be forgiven, the very omnipotence of God cannot undo that which has been done; and though in future ages you ultimately burn as a seraph or worship as an archangel, you can never be what you might have been. (*H. Wonnacott.*) *Sin; and the serpent's bite*:—We are supplied with motives to help the right-doing. But that is not all! Our humanity is surrounded, as it were, with a wall of fire. Of God's great mercy we do not suffer for wrong-doing merely, but in wrong-doing also. Neither heavenly bliss on the one hand, nor the punishment of evil on the other, are exclusively matters of faith, for God has written the truth of his Divine utterances on the page of our daily history and experience. I. *GOD'S LAWS*. 1. If we go for a moment into the natural world, we find there are certain principles, or laws, received and acted upon. The law of the centre of gravity; even the clown knows that if he guides his vehicle to the edge of the precipice, so that the centre of gravity falls beyond the bounds of safety, his conveyance will fall over and be destroyed! In relation to our physical being, there are laws which we must keep, or the grave will receive us before due time. A Hercules must take nourishment; every man must inhale air, and that air must be composed of certain ingredients. 2. Consider man morally, and the same principles apply. II. *MAN'S LAWLESSNESS*. 1. Suppose a man were to reach a dangerous spot, and were to see a warning to that effect, but yet persisted in going right into destruction, he would be regarded as not competent to take care of himself; still in such a man we have an illustration of the folly of the lawless conduct of the unbeliever. God, by His providence, in His Word, and by His Spirit's teaching, has set up a warning, in every by-path; plain enough to be read. "Trespassers shall be punished," meets us everywhere. Would that men read, understood and obeyed! 2. We see in human nature the mischievous tendency developed in daily acts of folly. If we were compelled to do what we often choose to do, heaven would be besieged by lamentations, and the multitude would mourn over the hardness of their lot. III. *THE RETRIBUTION*. 1. Present retribution. Look at the debauched; his face is a sign-board of hell, his heart a seat of woe. 2. Future retribution. (*H. Parrish, B.A.*) *The serpent behind the hedge*:—I. *THE HEDGES WHICH GOD HAS PLACED AROUND US*. 1. God's commandments. 2. Parental restraints. Hedges with respect to associates, books, habits, and places of amusements. 3. Imparted principles. Teachers are anxious to fix truths, sentences from Scripture, holy maxims, in the minds of the young, that they may be in them as moral hedges in the time of temptation. II. *THE YOUNG WILL BE TEMPTED TO BREAK THESE HEDGES*. 1. By their own evil hearts. 2. By evil companions. 3. By the evil one. III. *THERE IS A SERPENT BEHIND THE HEDGE*. If we do wrong we shall certainly suffer. The path of sin is full of serpents. The way of transgressors is hard. Punishment not always visible, but surely follows the deed. In the sense of shame, in the stings of conscience, in the displeasure of God, the serpent's bite is felt. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Ver. 9. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby.—*Raising stones and cleaving wood*:—The precise meaning of the maxim is not quite clear. Some think the stone is part of a cairn that marks a neighbour's property, which a man tries to move. The tree, likewise, belongs to a neighbour; and the teaching is, that one who commits acts of aggression upon the property of others will receive his punishment out of the acts themselves. Others find a political reference. The reformer tries to move stones, to remove ancient grievances, or to cut down trees, the upas-trees of hoary abuses, and finds that ancient and deep-seated evils have a deadly power of striking at those who dare to meddle with them. Or, again—and this, the simplest explanation, is to me at least as likely as any other—the cynical author in these homely words that ordinary honest labour must pay its due of misfortune in this sad world: a man cannot quarry stones to build his house, or cut logs to make up his fire, without risking the misfortune which a cruel fate seems to bring

alike on the evil and the good. This interpretation fits in well with the Preacher's view of life. Christ came to teach that in His right hand were pleasures for evermore. He came to join in every kind of innocent enjoyment, to teach men that the Father in heaven rejoiced in His children's joy. He lifted stones and cleft wood in the builder's workshop at Nazareth for more than twenty years out of His short life, to show that honest toil brought something else besides danger—that the stone could become a Bethel, and the wood an altar which raiseth the consecrated soul. (*J. H. Moulton, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. **If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength.**—*The iron blunt, and the iron whetted*:—I. THE LESS FACILITIES IN WORK, THE GREATER IS THE STRENGTH REQUIRED. The woodman who has to hew the old oak with a blunt axe must throw more muscular energy into the stroke than if his instrument were keen. 1. This principle applies to secular work. The men who are placed in such temporal circumstances as seem to doom them to destitution, must, if they would overcome difficulties and rise, be strenuous in effort. 2. This principle applies to educational work. Thousands have so employed the bluntest iron, that they have become the greatest apostles in science, and the most distinguished masters in art. Do not find fault with thy mental tools. Use the bluntest iron with all thy might, and thou shalt rise. 3. This principle applies to religious work. Most unfavourable are the circumstances in which the millions are placed for the cultivation of a truly godly life. Albeit, though the "iron" of such a man be blunt, let him use it, and he will succeed. 4. This principle applies to evangelizing work. II. PRACTICAL SAGACITY IN WORK SERVES TO ECONOMIZE STRENGTH. "Wisdom is profitable to direct." 1. Strength may be saved in commercial pursuits by a wise system of management. It is not the sweating hustler who does the most work in the world's trade; it is the man of forecast and philosophical measures. 2. Strength may be saved in governmental action by a wise policy. 3. Strength may be saved in self-improvement by a philosophic method. 4. Strength may be saved in the work of diffusing the Gospel by an enlightened policy. (*Homilist.*) *God's provision concerning labour*:—1. It may have often struck you, as a very surprising feature in God's dealings with this earth, that though He has abundantly stored it with all the necessaries and comforts of civilized life, He has left both the discovery and employment of such materials dependent upon human industry and human ingenuity. The very metal mentioned in the text, to deprive the world of which would be to produce starvation, and which with mighty toil is wrung from the bowels of the earth, underwent many curious and necessary processes ere it came to the husbandman in the form of a plough. God no more directed men where to find, than how to prepare the iron. He only furnished them with faculties to discover the substance, and placed them in circumstances favourable to their development. Each man was left to his own ingenuity and industry; and after having experienced the benefit of these discoveries themselves, they naturally communicated them to others. And how marvellously has discovery gone on from age to age! how have new properties been discovered, new errors been exploded, new theories established! But with all our admiration, which the boundless stores thus laid open to us are calculated to exercise, there does seem room for something of surprise that God should have allowed a vast amount of the most beneficial productions to be brought to light, not merely by patient investigation but entirely by accident, so that the world has long been actually ignorant of many blessings which lay within its reach. This has been singularly the case with medicines. You might have expected that, having made so merciful provision for the alleviation of human pain, God would not have left the world so long ignorant of the existence of such antidotes and remedies. Yet it is very observable how close an analogy there is between God's dealings in this respect, and those which relate to the scheme of salvation; for many ages God did not guide men, at least only a few, to the fountain open for sin and for uncleanness, and even now how many of the great mass of our race are kept in ignorance of the balm that is in Gilead. We may be sure there are some very wise ends, though not discoverable by us, subserved by this protracted concealment. And we cannot but observe a display of wisdom and benevolence in the arrangement by which our world has been peopled, by no means inferior to that which furnished us with the treasures of the earth. If thousands of our race had been called into existence before science had been discovered, and the arts been invented,

what could have resulted but universal wretchedness, inasmuch as every individual must have struggled with the ground for a disastrous subsistence, and have perpetually devoted himself to the warding off starvation! A beautiful thing in the present economy is that the labour of one man raises a sufficiency for numbers, and thus others devote themselves to various pursuits, and bring about the spectacle of a stirring and well-ordered community. But this is owing to the fact that the husbandman had the implements with which to work, whose manufacture is not to be procured and effected without much toil and thought and time. Man has not been left merely to his animal strength, but having been taught, as it were, not only to use the iron, but also to "whet its edge," he is enabled to accomplish single-handed what, on any other supposition, must have required the joint energies of a multitude of his kind. And as it was God's beneficent purpose to throw man, as it were, on his own industry and ingenuity, must we not always admit the goodness as well as the mercy of the appointment, through which it was ordered that there should be no excessive pressure on our race, but that we have been afforded time to advance in knowledge, equivalent to the increase and necessities of population? We have now taken a general view of the text, and one, we think, which has enabled us to survey Divine providence under a very interesting aspect. We will now bring before you more precise illustration of the passage, but still under such views as may best excite you to the observing the benevolence of God. It is a property, or we might rather say an infirmity of man, that he cannot give himself to incessant labour, whether it be bodily or mental, but what it soon causes him to seek relaxation and repose. The iron will grow blunt, if used a certain time; and if a man will then go on persevering in the using it, he must be prepared to the putting to more strength, which will certainly ere long bring about a total prostration. But if wisdom directeth him, so that he daily whet the edge by some lawful recreation, he may by God's help be enabled for a long time to retain both his strength and his usefulness. And however it may be in general, there is far more cause for fear that men will be too inert rather than too active, though cases of a contrary nature frequently occur, in which the caution most needed is, that they always "whet the edge." The proverbial saying which one so commonly hears, and which involves a great fallacy, "Better wear than rust," would almost seem to contradict the great principle of our text; just as though it were necessary that iron should rust out, if it is not rapidly worn out, whereas the truth is, that though by putting to more strength, the iron will be worn out, it will not be rusted out through whetting the edge, seeing that the whetting of the edge brightens what it sharpens. And it is melancholy to think of what frequently happens in our seminaries of learning; where youths of high promise, of fine powers of imagination, and large capacities for science, sink beneath the pressure of an overtaken mind, working out for themselves an early grave, and depriving the world of the benefit which they might have conferred on it by their literature or their piety, through that constant and incessant use of the iron, and continued neglect of whetting the edge. And it is yet more melancholy to think how many of the ministers of Christ have destroyed themselves by devoting themselves to work with an uncalculating ardour. We have, therefore, to derive an important lesson from the text; a lesson, that it is as much our duty to relax when we feel our strength overtaken, as it is to persevere when we feel that strength sufficient. 2. The man who spends his Sabbath religiously, remembering that it is God's day, and therefore to be devoted to God's service, necessarily abstracts his mind from secular cares, and thus allows it to recover that tone and elasticity which must have been greatly injured under one continued uniform pressure. And far more than this; in studying the Scriptures and meditating on heaven, in attending the ministrations of the sanctuary, praying with all fervency of purpose, the man is securing to himself fresh supplies of grace, which may strengthen him for the trials and duties of the week. The iron was blunt, and had he attempted to proceed without interruption in his labour, he must then have put to more strength, and thus have disabled himself for the fulfilment of his duties; but he possesses wisdom, that wisdom which cometh from above, and this taught him to withdraw himself to God, and bidding farewell to earthly concerns, forget time in his anxiety for eternity. He has been brought into contact with heavenly things, and the attrition has sharpened him again for his earthly occupations, so that when "the iron" is brought into use, "its edge" is so powerfully sharp, that what seemed adamant was divisible, and what seemed inseparable might be cleft. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Blunt tools:*

a counsel and consolation:—The writer of this book had gone where the Blessed Master went, into the carpenter's shop. And there as he looked about him he saw this—that it is not always the man who works hardest who does most: that the workman who had a blunt tool must sharpen it, or he must work harder if he would keep pace with the others. I. HERE IS A LESSON ON SERVICE. Iron is the very emblem of service. The stone age is prehistoric, uncivilized and savage; the golden age is but a dream; the iron age is the true age. Think of the plough, the sword, the thousand uses of iron; the huge machinery with which men master the earth and lighten labour, the modern shipping, and above all, in these later times, the pen. These things build up our civilization and our strength. Iron may stand as the fittest emblem of service. Shall the dead stones be capable of such high uses and such gracious ends, and are we alone to be of no account? Is there no power that can uplift us and enrich us for worth and blessedness? For us there must be possibilities of good and blessing. For us somewhere, somehow, there must be high ends and glorious purposes—the dullest, darkest, dearest of us. The iron is enough to proclaim it. II. HERE IS A LESSON ON FITNESS FOR SERVICE. The iron gets blunt—that you cannot help. What you can help and must help is this—that it do not remain blunt. Let it be a matter of conscience with us that we be ever at our best for our Lord. Do you ask how shall the iron be sharpened? The wise man gives us the method. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." In this lonely London the sight of a friendly face, the touch of a kindly hand, the sound of a cheery voice is a very whetstone of the spirit. Yet better than the man's prescription for dullness is contact and communion with the Friend of Friends, the Lord Himself. Nothing else will keep us fit for service. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Contact and communion with Jesus Christ alone can keep us fit for service. Then, again, let there be a daily surrender of ourselves to Him for service. III. SOME CONSOLATION FOR BLUNT FOLKS. If the iron be blunt, what then? Well, you must use more strength. Alas, some of us sigh within ourselves, "I am not made of fine material: I cannot take a keen edge: I am not one of your very clever people. No genius am I at anything, but only a plain blunt tool. I see the steel polished and graven; the flashing sword: and I know I shall never be like that." Well, make up for your dullness by your energy; and say, "If I have not so many gifts, I must get more grace. If I am lacking in skill and learning, I will be richer in love." Some tools are the better for not being oversharpened. He who was the carpenter still needs hammers as well as chisels and planes. Only give thyself to Him. (M. G. Peares.) *Blunt axes*:—Solomon desires to impress upon us the truth of what a load of trouble a man may save himself by a little forethought. A little preparation, a little contrivance, will prevent in the end an enormous amount of work, whereas the neglect of common foresight must entail the waste of strength and time and toil. I. TAKE EDUCATION. An uneducated child growing up into man's estate is a dull, stupid individual. He may get through a certain amount of labour, but it is only at the cost of a great expenditure of bodily strength. There are about him all the rules of science and mechanical laws, but not knowing them they cannot be used. A man who knows general principles can with a very little contriving apply those principles to almost everything he comes across. It is the man who knows the most who will make the best workman when he has learnt the trade. There is not a calling in life, from the ploughboy to the statesman, that may not be made more effective by the worker being educated in the general details of learning and science. The great error of the day is to suppose that general education may supersede particular training, and that if a child has been to school that therefore that child can turn his hand to anything. II. TAKE MECHANICAL APPLIANCES. There is just as much work done in England in one day by the help of machinery as it would take five hundred millions of men to perform without. The reason is that as a nation we sharpen our axes before we begin to work. The perfection of mechanical appliances, the power of steam, impresses into man's service the forethought and preparation. III. TAKE THE PRINCIPLES OF RELIGION. Some may say, What has all this subject to do with religion? Much every way. Religion teaches us how to live here as well as to be saved hereafter. There is one notable thing which we should do well to lay to heart, and that is that it is in Christian nations, and in Christian nations only, that true progress in arts and science and knowledge has its being. Heathen nations, such as China and India, are the same as they were 3,000 years ago.

Semi-heathen nations, such as Italy, Spain, and Turkey, are careless, dissolute, and remain as they were. But, more than this, the subject applies to the welfare and salvation of our souls to a larger extent than we should at first suppose. If men go about the world—as, alas! too many do—like a lot of blunt axes, annoying their fellow-creatures with the unnecessary toil they take to accomplish the most simple acts, they do not exalt the religion they profess. Learning and wisdom are useful to the Christian, and they are necessary to the Christian. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 16. **Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!**—*Wickedness in high places* (with Ps. xxvi. 10):—Those two passages are descriptive of wickedness in high places. The morals of a nation hardly ever rise higher than the virtue of the rulers. Henry VIII. makes impurity national and popular. A William Wilberforce in the Parliament ennobles an empire. Sin, epauletted and bestarred, comes to respect and canonization; vice, elevated, is recommended. Malarias rise from the marsh, float upward and away; but moral distempers descend from the mountain to the plain. 1. In unrolling, then, this scroll of wickedness in high places, the first thing that I mark especially is incompetency for office. If a man seeks for a place and wins it when he is incompetent, he is committing a crime against God and a crime against man. It is not a sin for me to be ignorant of medical science; but if, without medical attainment, I set myself up among professional men, and trifle, in my ignorance, with the lives of those whose confidence I have won, then my charlatanism becomes high-handed knavery. The ignorance that in the one case was innocence, in the other case becomes a crime. It is not a sin for me to be ignorant of machinery; but if I attempt to engineer a steamer across the Atlantic, amid darkness and hurricane, holding the lives of hundreds of people in my grasp, then the blood of all the shipwrecked is on my garment. But what shall we say of men who attempt to engineer our State and national affairs over the rough waters without the first element of qualification?—men not knowing enough to vote “aye” or “no” until they have looked for the wink of others of their party? 2. I unroll the scroll a little further and find intemperance and the co-ordinate crimes. Oh! it is a sad thing to have a hand tremulous with intoxication holding the scales of justice, when the lives of men and the destinies of a nation are in the balance; to have a charioteer with unskilful hands on the reins while the swift destinies of governments are harnessed on a road where governments have been dashed to pieces, and empires have gone down in darkness and woe! 3. I unroll the scroll of wickedness in high places still further, and I see the crime of bribery. It was that which corrupted Lord Bacon in his magnificent position—it was that which led Chief Justice Thorpe to the gallows. There are four things for you to do:—1. First, stand off from all political office unless your own principles are thoroughly settled. Do not go into the blaze of temptation unless you are fire-proof. 2. The second thing to do is to take the counsel of Paul, and pray for your rulers; pray for all in authority. Do you know that Shadrach and Abednego did not need the Son of God beside them in the fire so much as your rulers do? 3. In the next place, be faithful at the ballot-box. Make up your mind in a Christian way as to who are the best men for office; then vote for the man who loves God and hates rum, and believes in having the Bible read every day, as long as the world stands, in all our common schools. But I have a better prescription than all. 4. It is the fourth thing that I have to say in the way of counsel, and that is, evangelize the people. Gospelize this country, and you will have pure representatives and pure men everywhere. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

CHAPTER XI.

VER. 1. **Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days.**—*Cast thy bread upon the waters*:—This saying takes us to the banks of the Nile, where, every year, as the flood subsided, while the level lands were still all ooze and mud, the farmer went forth, and, without any ploughing, just cast the grain over the mud, and, simply trampling it in with his flocks of goats, knew that he should “find it after many days” in those fruitful harvests which made

Egypt the granary of the ancient world. Only, mark what it means. It is not a mere lesson of sowing. It is not cast thy "seed" upon the waters. It is cast thy "bread"—cast of thy bread-corn, that which you might use for bread—cast that on the waters, spare even of that to sow for the days to come. You see, it is a lesson not merely of sowing, but of self-denial and self-restraint in order to sow. There is a lesson here which is always needed, but which was never, perhaps, more needed than to-day. For, if I mistake not, the marvellous advances of our age, the quickening of the whole speed of life, have had this effect—to produce a sort of eager impatience and eagerness for the utmost immediate results, a remorseless sort of draining of the present of everything that can be got out of it. People want to make all their harvest into bread—yes, or into cake, if it can be—are not willing to forego any of it for seed, or to be put into the sinking fund of the future. Why, look at this even in what one may call the using up of life itself. All this marvellous advancement of our age should have given people—even the hardest-worked and busiest—a little more leisure for simple, happy living—living for its own sake. I asked a dressmaker once if the invention of the sewing-machine had not lightened her labour. "Not in the least," she replied. "Ladies only want so much the more work putting on to their dresses; and so they take just as long making as ever." Is not that a good deal true, all through life? Every gain of time has been used up right away in new wants—none of it saved for those quieter uses and higher uses which would be the seed of a nobler, fuller future. You see illustrations of this in every direction. You see it in trade and the various material arts of life. In the older times it was the ambition of a business man to establish a business,—a concern that might stand, a business that his sons might be proud to take up and maintain the prestige of it. But such an ambition involves some foregoing of present advantage; and that is where modern life is so weak. Besides, men do not look to their sons to take up their business as they used to do. If they are successful their sons will hardly need any business! So what able men try to do is to make the utmost possible for a few years; and, to do this, there cannot be much sparing of bread-corn to cast on the waters, not much restraint in the use of opportunity. They must just drive the keenest trade they can, wring the last cent out of all dealings. It is all this excessive living for to-day: men haven't patience, they haven't faith, for the steadier, slower business which would build up character and reputation and last into long years to come. Or take another illustration, in the houses which are everywhere being built about our cities, for the housing of this hand-to-mouth generation. The building of a house was a serious business in our grandfathers' time. What strong foundations they laid! What massive timbers you find in those old houses! Something to last, there! But now—well, to begin with, there is not the same desire to have a house; there is not the same idea of living steadily on in one place. So houses are built less solidly, but more showily. It seems to me that it is not houses only, but the whole fabric of society which is being built up thus flimsily and temporarily. Look at literature. There is such a demand as never in the world before for light sketches, superficial reading. It is not any lasting good that men want from books, but an hour's excitement or relaxation. These are some of the conspicuous ways in which the hand-to-mouth spirit of the time is shown. But the thing to take to heart is this: that it appears in these greater ways, because it is in common life in all sorts of lesser things. You see it in home life, in society, in the education of children. The greatest lack of modern society, I do believe—all through, from children up to grown men and women—is thoughtful self-restraint, the willingness to forego the gratification of to-day for the sake of the days to come. People will go to the opera, even if they don't know how they will pay next week's board-bill—yes, often enough, even if they can't pay last week's! Now, if there is one thing which our religion ought to teach us, it is this spirit I have been trying to show the need of—of living not just for to-day, but for days to come, of casting one's bread upon the waters—the spirit of patient, thoughtful permanence in life and doings. Why does "the law" stand in that noble emphasis at the beginning of the Hebrew religion? Simply, that is the first thing—thoughtful obedience and self-restraint. So spare even of thy bread-corn to cast upon the waters; "for thou shalt find it after many days." Yes! we shall find it. I do not believe we ever sow for future life; I do not believe men ever exercise a noble reserve in the use of comfort or luxury, or put their manhood into thoughtful efforts for mankind, without finding the harvest of it after many days, perhaps—yet still they find it, and, after the

law of God's true harvest, "thirty" or "sixty" or "a hundred-fold." So with all pleasures, all indulgences—use them not to the uttermost, not as many as ever you can get hold of: let your principle in such things be a noble reserve. And, in all work, faith and patience! (*Brooke Herford.*) *Uninviting work*:—This passage may be regarded as an invitation to work of a special kind—work not likely to be popular, but, nevertheless, essential. I. It is a call to **UNAPPRECIATED WORK**. Our bread is to be cast upon the waters. We are to render service—service that often costs much—to thankless people. We must be content to work when our work is unacknowledged, unrequited—nay, when it is despised. Much of the highest, painfulest service wrought for the good of men—work of brain and heart—is least appreciated. Let us work in the spirit of a noble faith and consecration, knowing that what we give and suffer will be lightly esteemed among men, and knowing also that it will be accepted before God and become immortal in the life of the world. II. It is a call to **UNOBTRUSIVE WORK**. Seed sown on the waters suggest silent forms of service. Mark the way of the Master. In all His work there was an utter absence of theatricality and advertisement. Said His brethren: "If Thou do these things, show Thyself to the world." How truly human such a request, as if all was lost that was not shown! But Christ declined the tempting publicity. He sowed the bread of heaven on dark waters so softly that history hardly noticed Him or His sowing. Did not our Lord, in following this course, intend to teach His people that the establishment of His kingdom would depend most of all upon modest evangelism? And, indeed, ever since Christ's day His cause has chiefly grown out of noiseless, unobtrusive work. The history of the Christian Church wonderfully corresponds with geological history; it is the history of the snowflake, the demonstration of the prevailing efficacy of modest personal sacrifice and influence. All tourists love to tell of the cataract of Niagara, of its thunder, foam and rainbows; but, after all, cataracts like Niagara do little for the fertility of the world. The thousand little streams that go softly in the grass fill the earth with fruit and beauty. III. It is a call to **UNPROMISING WORK**. To sow the seed upon the waters looks hopeless; little good seems likely to come of such toil and sacrifice. So work for the world's good sometimes seems sadly unpromising; the giving of money, time, influence, feeling, seem only like ploughing the sands, throwing treasure into the sea. But we must hope in hopeless work, or what to the carnal eye looks like hopeless work. The most unpromising ground sometimes yields the richest results. The finest grapes in the world are not grown on fat soil, but on sand deserts and barren shingle that would not afford nourishment to a patch of oats; and the lover of man not rarely gets his richest clusters on the most unpromising ground. It has often been so with the missionary. Who, looking at ancient Britain, would have thought that it would become the vineyard of the Lord? It is often thus in families—the careless, undutiful children turning out the parents' strength and joy. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Faith and duty*:—There are in this book aspects of truth that we are very apt to forget, an emphasis put upon certain out-of-the-way duties that are as essential to a proper, natural, and religious life as those doctrines and principles that we bring to the forefront of our evangelical preaching. Prudence is a virtue, but a man may be too prudent. Economy is an excellent habit, but a man may by penuriousness spoil his fortunes as much as if he were a spendthrift. There is a certain audacity in business, in love, and in religion that is essential to success. There is a certain scattering that brings increase, and there is a withholding more than is meet that tends to poverty. It is true of the world, it is true of the Church; true of your body, true of your fortune, true of your soul. Cast thy bread upon the water. Put your money into a number of ventures; do not be too timid, do not be too cautious; use a large-hearted, statesman-like breadth and liberality in your enterprise and in your activity, and in the end your bread will come back to you—it will come back in large and wide profit. Again, in your benevolence, in your readiness to help a partner or a client, or even to do a good turn to a poor neighbour, do not be calculating just whether you must do it or whether you must not. Ecclesiastes says, "Give to the seventh, do a good turn to the eighth." And it appeals to common sense. Do not call it unevangelical, do not call it selfish. There is a reasonable recognition of the law that connects causes and effects, results and those forces and actions that lead to them, that is of the very essence of nature, and it is perfectly justifiable that a man should look to it. Says Ecclesiastes: If you go always looking at the clouds, if you are always peering out to see where the cat's-paw wind is

coming, you will never sow your field, and you will never reap. You had better sow every year. Sow when the spring looks black; sow when the early summer seems to forecast a stormy autumn; sow year by year—that is the right thing to do. Some years you will lose, but at the end, when your life is done, you will have made a large gain, a great profit. Yes; there is a looking at that part and side of the world that is out of our control, that God holds in His own hands, that paralyzes human endeavour; and the Book of Ecclesiastes warns us, as men of the world, as men of religion, against concerning ourselves with God's share in the transaction. Send your ships there and there, send them far and wide over the world, and in the end—that is your wisdom—leave the results to God. Do your duty at God's bidding. Strike out into the world; sow on all waters, cast your bread far and wide; do good deeds here, do them there, and in the end you will reap a rich harvest. It is not difficult to get people to make up their minds to be good; the real difficulty is to get them to carry it out. Nothing more easy than to stir men and women to start well in life; the job is to keep them going on. It is not just the first volley of cannon-balls against the fortification that will break the wall down; it is keeping at it day after day till the breach is made and the stronghold can be taken. You know what momentum is. Aye, a man has got to be good; he has to speak the truth to-day, to-morrow, the day after, the week after that, and on and on, if he is going to form within himself such a mass of light and honourableness that men may speak as if some great and noble monument had fallen: "That man's word was better than his bond; that man never spoke a dishonest, untruthful word." Oh, the power of momentum! the thinness, the weakness, and the poverty-stricken character of that goodness that comes in gushes, and then stops in fragments, in shreds and patches! What is it that makes our goodness so broken, so interrupted, so parenthetical? I think the commonest and chief cause is that we do good upon impulse, not upon principle. We set out to do right, riding upon a great wave of ardent emotion, not upon a serious, calm, earnest determination of will. A great many of us make another mistake. We misunderstand a wise principle; we say to ourselves that we ought to calculate profit, that we ought to look out for results; and so, mistaking this fact that we ought to choose to do our goodness in the wisest and likeliest way, we mistake that wise habit of prudence, judgment, and we turn it into a petty trafficking attempt to secure certainty that every little thing we niggardly do is going to bring us a definite and special return. Now, you cannot do that in business. Fancy a farmer as he goes across the field sowing corn, taking it out grain by grain, and saying, "I wonder whether this grain will be eaten up by a bird, whether this will rot in the ground; I do not know, and therefore I will not sow it." That would be about as silly as to be always calculating whether the penny you put into the plate is going to convert a heathen, or whether that Bible is going to convert a sinner, or whether going to that meeting will do any definite good. My friend, you have got to sow in faith, with a great prodigal generosity. Blessed those busy lives that are always at it, always working—working when it promises well, working when it promises ill, standing in the pathway of duty, of Divine service, in the pathway of blessing to others, in the pathway of certain blessing to themselves! It is not easy to be good; it is terribly hard to keep on doing right; you get awfully tired of it, and then you wonder and think that you cannot be really good when you are so sick of being so self-sacrificing, so sick of forgiving that brother or sister that always irritates you, and you feel that you really ought to get a little rest from it, to take an interval of not being good; and then you turn upon yourself and upbraid yourself. Not a bit of it, my friend. There is nothing more fatiguing and wearisome than being good. It is a crucifying of oneself to be good. How could it be but that you should be weary many a day? St. Paul says, "Be not weary," because he knows you will feel it—"Be not weary in well doing; if you are weary keep on doing right; if you faint not, in the end you shall reap." Lift up thy heart and do not faint. In the morning sow thy seed and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou canst not tell whether shall prosper, this or that, or whether, since all rests at last with the great, big-hearted, loving God, both alike, beyond your very utmost dreams and hopes, shall be prosperous. (*Prof. Elmslie*.) *Excitements to missionary effort*:—The text applies to all attempts which are made to benefit the immortal part of man. In our charities towards the soul, we have need of patience; and it is evident that spiritual benefit is chiefly here intended. I wish to direct your attention to some of the important objects which

the text places before us. I. A LARGE AND LIBERAL BENEVOLENCE IS ENJOINED UPON US. Selfishness is at once the degradation, and part of the misery, of our nature. It shuts up some of the finest feelings of which we are capable. That which has separated man from God has also separated man from man. The doctrine of stewardship is peculiar to our religion. This is a fine principle which the Gospel has brought to light: it teaches us that, though God is the fountain of all good, He has made creatures the instruments of good to man. II. SOME MOTIVES TO THE EXERCISE OF BENEVOLENCE. 1. Here is a motive addressed to our hope. What appalling spectacles presented themselves to the view of the missionary who first trod our shores! He listened to the din of noisy festivals; he beheld obscene and lascivious rites; he saw the effect of the whole system of worship on the wretched people by whom he was surrounded; but he cast in the seed; and has it not been found "after many days"? You, with your religious assemblies, your faith in God, your love to our Lord Jesus Christ, your hope in heaven—you are proofs that seed cast upon the waters may be found "after many days." Oh, then, go on: future ages shall call you blessed; and the glorious results of your labour shall be found in that day, when "they shall come from the east, and the west," etc. 2. A motive addressed to our prudence and foresight: "Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." This may apply, first, to ourselves. Who can tell how near evil may be to us, how near may be sickness, how near the final call of death? Well, then, "cast your bread upon the waters." If your tongues must be so soon employed in groaning and in complaints, let them now, at least, be employed for God. But let us view the subject on a larger scale. The prospect of evil has always been a motive for exertion to good men. They have endeavoured to meet the coming evil by laying up a store. The apostles, in the midst of their great and successful exertions, prophesied a fatal apostasy. It might be supposed that this would have operated to check their exertions. But they acted on the principle of the text; they "cast their bread upon the waters"; they "gave a portion to seven, and also to eight"; they spread the seed freely and largely; and, amidst a great apostasy, seed sprang up, of which we are now some of the pleasing fruit. 3. A motive drawn from the fitness of the thing. "If the clouds be full of rain," etc. Like the clouds in the spring of the year, which require no great effort to make them pour forth their waters, but tremble at the lightest breeze, and impart their living springs to the earth; so let Christian men be to the thirsty soils of this parched world. 4. A motive drawn from the consideration of human mortality. "If the tree fall toward the south," etc. If those who are now within our reach, if those who are now in darkness, be not benefited by an application of the means God has given us in His providence, "a great gulf" will soon be fixed, over which no pity, no exertion, can step. How important it is to do the work of the day in the day! to "cast our bread upon the waters"! to "give a portion to seven, and also to eight"! to sow our seed "in the morning and in the evening"! We are dying, and the world is dying around us! III. SEVERAL OBJECTIONS ARE IMPLIED IN THE TEXT. 1. The first seems to be, that the opportunity is not favourable to such exertions (ver. 4). What then? Are we to withhold the seed, or to sow it? We are to sow it—to sow it in faith—faith in the commission of Christ, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature"; faith in the promise of the Saviour, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world"; faith in the irreversible covenant, "Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance," and all these dark, ferocious savages, all these unwholesome, inhospitable climes, yea, "and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." 2. A second objection seems to be that, even if we apply ourselves to works of this kind, very frequently the manner in which God carries on His work is very different from the conceptions which we had formed (ver. 5). God acts not by any man's plans, but leaves it to us to say, "Thou knowest not the works of God." 3. A third objection is, that there will be a partial failure. "Thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that." Part of the seed will perish. We admit this; it is a fact that part of the seed will perish, and that the condemnation of men is increased by the hearing of the Gospel. But what is your duty? Why, as to yourselves, it is to "give the more earnest heed to the things that you have heard, lest at any time you should let them slip"; and, as to others, to do all you can to give effect to the administration of the Gospel, by renewed exertions, and by more fervent prayers. IV. SOME REASONS FOR DILIGENCE AND CONSTANCY. 1. The first reason is taken from the quality of the seed (ver. 6). The seed you sow is good. The

seed here referred to is that of bread, in which man's vitality, nourishment and strength all seem to be bound up. So in the Word of God there is all that can bless and dignify man here, and prepare him for everlasting glory. 2. Consider the small portion of the world which, after all, has been sown with this blessed seed. 3. Remember that you all, without exception, have it in your power still more largely to promote this good work. (*R. Watson, M.A.*) *The poor man's portion*.—I. THE DUTY RECOMMENDED. In general it is, to do good with our property. It is the glory of true religion that it inspires and inculcates a spirit of benevolence. Christ went about doing good. 1. That with which we do good must be our own. "Cast thy bread." As there are some who withhold more than is meet, so there are others who, from ostentation, give what is not their own. 2. We are to do good liberally. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight." It is a great obstacle to many, and a common objection, that cases are so numerous. 3. For the sake of doing good we should deny ourselves. "Thy bread." It is a notion of many that they are required to give only superfluities; but this is treating God and the poor with only a dog's portion—the crumbs, as it were, which fall from their table. Emulate the Churches of Macedonia (2 Cor. viii.), whose deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality. 4. We are to do good, notwithstanding discouraging appearances in Providence. Give as the Lord hath prospered you, and leave another day or another year to take care for itself. II. THE MOTIVES BY WHICH THIS DUTY IS ENFORCED. 1. The reward which awaits you. "Thou shalt find it again." What we do for the poor is not thrown away, though it may seem to be so. It is sowing the seeds of immortality, and, if done right, we shall find it, though it may be "many days" first. God so orders it, that merciful men meet with mercy in this life, and their children after them (Ps. cxii. 20); and who knows what ours may need? Or, if we never find it here, we shall find it in a dying hour, and still more at the judgment (Matt. xxv. 31-46). Yea, it will add to our joy hereafter, else it could not be called "laying up treasure in heaven." 2. The impending ills that threaten us. "Thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." Covetousness would turn this to another use: "We know not what we shall want; we must every one look to himself." Not that which you now possess may be taken from you: foes may consume it, floods may sweep it away, enemies may invade it, or internal changes may strip you of your all. Do good while you have it in your power—by and by you may be unable. 3. The design of God in affording us what we have—not that it may be hoarded, but communicated. "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth." Inanimate nature is brought in to provoke us. We are but stewards after all, and must give account of our stewardship. 4. The near approach of death, when all our opportunities will be for ever at an end. (*A. Fuller.*) *Sowing on the waters*.—This line contains a noble principle, which admits of many applications; we shall select one, and apply it to the Christian instruction of the young. I. THE CHARGE IS, "Cast thy bread upon the waters!" 1. Its first reference is to seed, for this is what is meant by "bread." Seed supplies poetry with a fit figure to illustrate anything mean which gives existence to anything magnificent. A seed is but a solitary grain, or a soft and trembling flake of vegetation; yet from the seed gushes the bright flower—from the seed starts the towering tree—from the seed springs the bread of life. "Now, the seed is the Word of God." Christ supplies it. "Christ," writes John Milton, "gives no full comments, or continued discourses, but speaks oft in monosyllables, as a Master scattering the heavenly grain of His doctrine, like pearls, here and there, requiring a skilful and laborious gatherer." 2. A second reference in the charge is to the sowing: "cast" the seed. Weeds are self-dispersive, and have a fruitful facility of growth; but fruits are God's blessing on labour. A distinction has been made between a radical reformer and a seminal reformer. The one strikes the axe at the roots of evil; the other sows the seeds of good. The first mode of action, though often a necessity, is frequently connected with disadvantage; for, in tearing up the ravelled roots of an ancient grievance, growing in a tangled place, we may rend and wither delicate interlacings that we wish to live; but sowing seed disturbs nothing—injures nothing; frets no weakling—startles no alarmist; and works a change the most complete, by a process soft as the flush of spring, and noiseless as the laws of nature. "Work while it is called to-day;" sow ideas, sow truths, sow thoughts suggested by God's own Spirit, whose blossoms will soon "make the wilderness rejoice, and solitary places glad." 3. The third reference in the charge is to the place where the seed is to be cast: "Cast it upon the waters."

As the seed fell on the soft and porous soil beneath the water, your hints may drop into yielding and receptive natures. Part with your most precious knowledge, then; venture to sow it in faith on the waters of thought; it may find a lodgment, dart the fibres of life in secrecy, and in due time reappear in those practicalities which most beautify and bless the world. II. **THE PROMISE**, "Thou shalt find it after many days." "Thou shalt find it;" therefore you may be at first inclined to think it lost;—after many days; therefore you need not be strengthless with the chill of discouragement if it should not be found at once. Here and there the spiritual life may spring and mellow early, but in most instances its appearance will be "after many days." While you speak in agony to save, you may seem speaking to vacancy—the young spirit is not listening—it is far away in chase of a merry fancy. Yet when, "after many days," that boy reaches some crisis of being, the sudden remembrance of this very word may startle him as if a sweeping spectre spoke, and save him from a crime. III. **WHAT EFFECTS** should this charge and this promise have on our faith and practice? 1. We must aim to sow the right seed. We should make unceasing search for this till we find it, and be anxious not to fall into a mistake with reference to such a primary condition of success. What, then, is the right seed? It appears to be this alone—teaching in its history and its connections the fact that "Jesus Christ is the Saviour of sinners." 2. We should aim at the best way of teaching. The main and master principle is love. The secret of Dr. Arnold's ascendancy as a teacher was the love that charmed his pupils into friends. Shining through many natural disqualifications for teaching, love will enlighten and enchant. Love will also, more than anything else, tend to overpower what disqualifies, and create efficiency. It will set mind in motion. It will "endow the plain-tongued man with heavenly eloquence." 3. We should aim to look to the right quarter for success. We are not to forget that "God gives the increase," and that man alone, like the cypher alone, is nothing. He is not able to manufacture a single seed, nor to give it a particle of vitality, but only to sow it. 4. We should aim to use the right rule for estimating success. It is true that "Bread cast upon the waters will be found after many days"; but these words contain no assurance that it will be found on earth. It may not reappear in the earthly lifetime of the sower, but, as an unseen spirit, he may watch it spring from age to age. (C. Stanford, D.D.) **CERTAINITIES AND UNCERTAINTIES**:—I. **THERE ARE CERTAINITIES AND UNCERTAINTIES IN REFERENCE TO GOD**. 1. God worketh all. His wisdom plans, His power executes, and His love reigns over all. 2. The method is unknown. II. **THERE ARE CERTAINITIES AND UNCERTAINTIES IN REFERENCE TO PROVIDENCE**. 1. Man's agency is subordinate. There are things certain belonging to man as the subject, minister, interpreter, symbol of God and of Providence. (1) Activity is the distinction of man. (2) The world must go back unless man will work. 2. Man must work according to certain laws. "Cast thy bread upon the waters," etc. It is not certain you shall reap all you sow, but it is absolutely certain you cannot reap unless you sow. III. **THERE ARE CERTAINITIES IN REFERENCE TO SOCIETY**. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight," etc. 1. That men have certain moral and spiritual duties to discharge. 2. That the latent evil of the human heart is liable to explosion. Conclusion:—1. Cultivate as much as possible your thinking powers. 2. Let not the uncertainties connected with Providence tempt you either to indolence or to despondency. 3. Work in faith through the power of God. (Caleb Morris.) **The social agency of good men**:—All men, whatever their creed, character, or conduct, have a social agency. "No man liveth unto himself." The text indicates the kind of agency that a thoroughly good man exerts upon his race. I. **DIVINELY TRUSTFUL**. Faith in God and His eternal laws is the mainspring in all the efforts of a good man's life. He is ruled by principles, not by results. He looks, "not at the things that are temporal, but at those things that are eternal"; he "walks, not by sight, but by faith." II. **EMINENTLY BENEFICENT**. What he gives out is not stones or chaff, but bread, corn, the life of the world. Like a seed—1. His every act has life in it. His every effort is an embodiment of a living conviction. The efforts of others are mere chaff. 2. His every act has propagating power in it. It is a seed that will germinate, multiply. One really good act has proved the seed of millions of noble efforts. 3. His every act has a helpful power in it. It supplies moral bread for the world. III. **INEVITABLY REMUNERATIVE**. "Thou shalt find it after many days." The reward will not come at once. You cannot force moral vegetation. But, though slow, it will come. "Thou shalt find it." "A good man," says

Carlyle, "is ever a creative mystic centre of goodness. A good thing done 3,000 years ago works now, and will work through all endless times and years." No good effort has ever been lost, or ever can be. It is a Divine incarnation, and more imperishable than the stars. (*Homilist.*) *Sowing on the waters; or, the reward of unselfish beneficence*.—I. A PRECIOUS DEPOSIT. That which is to be parted with is not "seed" merely, but "bread," i. e. in an anticipative and inclusive sense. If the husbandman would have increase he must sow again in faith, and commit himself to a watchful Providence. In commerce, too, it is exemplified: a man invests in land or in bonds which have no present market value; but his business sagacity tells him they will have in the course of years, and if he himself may not benefit by the venture, his son will. The capital the manufacturer sinks in plant, etc., has the same significance. It is in the realm of ideas, in fact, that the saying is most manifestly verified. The thinker stakes his reputation, comfort, life even, upon the realization of his doctrines, which are the most cherished embodiment of his spirit. II. AN UNCERTAIN RECEPTACLE. "Upon the waters." The text seems to encourage an almost wanton open-handedness in beneficence. Is it so? If there is one phase of traditional almsgiving which the modern spirit deprecates more than another, it is its indiscriminateness. We not only desire to certify to ourselves the fitting objects of our compassion, but to follow them into the actual surroundings of their daily life, that the ultimate aim of our assistance may be secured. "When the starving man has been relieved, modern charity inquires whether any fault in the social system deprived him of his share of nature's bounty, any unjust advantage taken by the strong over the weak, any rudeness or want of culture in himself wrecking his virtue and his habits of thrift." To this we have to reply that—1. Neither this nor any other Scripture forbids inquiry. It would, on the contrary, be true to the genius of Christianity to satisfy ourselves as far as possible that our alms is well bestowed, and that it is given in such a way as to secure the utmost advantage to the recipient. 2. When every practicable security has been taken charitable help and spiritual service will still be attended with much uncertainty. The methods of the mathematician are not applicable to Christian enterprise to any appreciable extent. No one can pretend to be an infallible reader of character. 3. It is often the duty of the Christian to work and to give even when he cannot be certain as to results. III. A CERTAIN RETURN. 1. "After many days"—a sober promise, but true to the law of Moses. Even in this life, according to the Decalogue, the reward was at least to begin. Late or soon it is sure to come to all who are earnest and unselfish. God never loses sight of our "work of faith." 2. "Shall find"—therein consists the romantic interest of the spiritual venture. What will it be for some who have laboured in the Church on earth with scarce any visible result, but whose welcome to heaven will be from the lips of one born here and another born there through services that seemed without fruit! (*A. P. Muir, M.A.*) *Spiritual efforts not lost*.—There can be nothing clearer from the Bible than that, though man can deserve nothing from the Creator, so that his best actions, if tried by their own worth, would procure him only wrath, nevertheless he will be tried by his works, and receive a recompense of which those works shall determine the extent. God, in His infinite condescension and love, has resolved to deal with us as though we had been able to deserve at His hands; proportioning what He bestows to what we have done in His cause, though all the while it is only as a free gift that we receive the least of those elements which constitute future happiness. And when this principle has been settled—the principle that, though we cannot merit from God, our actions are to decide our condition—we may speak of good works as hereafter to be rewarded, because they are as inevitably to regulate our portion as though that portion were a recompense in the strictest sense of the term. And if, then, it be lawful to speak of reward, we may certainly speak of the bread "cast upon the waters" as "found after many days." It will very frequently happen that we have no means whatever of ascertaining that any beneficial results have been produced by our most earnest and disinterested labours; and it is quite possible, moreover, that no such results have yet followed, and that none will follow. The utmost which many of the most devoted servants of God can affirm when they come to die is, that they have been diligently casting bread upon the waters. They have received no testimony of the usefulness of the bread which they have thus cast—no testimony that the examples they have set, the exhortations they have uttered, the Bibles they have distributed, have been instrumental to the adding a single

member to the visible Church. And are they on this account to conclude that they have made a wholly fruitless outlay of zeal and exertion? It were indeed a most erroneous impression. The attempt to benefit others, even if it spring from a pure love to God, may utterly fail, as far as its professed objects are concerned; but it cannot fail to be beneficial to ourselves. And when at the last those who have gladly spent and been spent in the service of God, and whose toils and sacrifices have never been sweetened by the knowledge that they were effectual in accomplishing the ends for which they were endured—when these men shall receive their portion from their Judge, there will be given the most effectual demonstration that "God is not unrighteous to forget their work of labour and love." To every man will be allotted a recompense, to every sacrifice a compensation. But we have thus only vindicated the statement of our text on the extreme supposition, namely, that our labours to do good are so wholly ineffectual, that they produce no advantageous results to those whose benefit was their object. And we call this the extreme supposition, because we believe that ordinarily where God has prompted to exertion and to sacrifice He crowns them with some measure of success, though He may not always allow that success to be known. The quantity of good wrought by this or that agency is commonly amongst those secrets which only the future can unfold. And we can believe that this unfolding will be one of the most surprising and animating transactions of the last judgment. The minister who has been oppressed up to his dying hour by the melancholy conviction that his warnings, his entreaties, his expostulations, have been lost on his congregation, may be hailed by many, as the instrument of their conversion. And parents who have had to struggle with that heaviest of trials, the ungodliness of children, and who have not had the least ground to hope that their remonstrances and tears and prayers have wrought any effect upon their reprobate offspring, they may be met hereafter by the sons or the daughters whose contempt of religion entered as iron into their souls, but into whose hearts their admonition had sunk notwithstanding the apparent insensibility. Now, this naturally leads to our taking that view of the text which is practically of the greatest importance. We wish you to regard the text as a promise—a promise which is admirably fitted to guard you against becoming "weary in well-doing." When considered under this point of view, the words are of extraordinary value, for they just meet that feeling of despondency which those who labour for God are often tempted to entertain. It is evident that we might apply the words to every endeavour to benefit our fellow-men by imparting to them that bread which came down from heaven. The text contains a decisive assertion that such endeavours shall not be unavailing. But, at the same time, by speaking of "many days," it warns us alike against impatience and despondency. And it should lead us, in every case in which there seems to be no result from our labours, to examine whether we have faithfully complied with its precept; whether there have been diligence in casting the bread; and whether it has really been bread that we have cast. Of course if there have been a defect in either of these particulars, it is no marvel that the promise has not been made good, and we cannot but think it in a high degree probable that much of the apparent failure in the fulfilment of this promise must be traced to non-compliance with its conditions. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

After many days:—It does not seem to be a very lofty precept in the Preacher's sense of it. He does not intend by it what we might mean by Christian charity, but rather a doing what you can with your own interests in view. Make your kindness a sort of investment. Be kind in every way you can, even in most unlikely ways, because they may turn out unexpectedly to be profitable to yourself. But we shall take the precept in a higher light, in the light of our Lord's teaching, as when He said, for example, "He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." 1. No work done in Christ's name is ever in vain. The tenor of all Scripture is in harmony with that. God's word shall not return unto Him void. And Jesus said that the giver even of a cup of cold water in His name should not be without his reward. The great waste of loving labour in human history, labour spent on unworthy causes, has often been remarked upon. Mark Rutherford gives as an instance the love and sacrifice that were lavished on the Jacobite cause. The devotion to that cause on the part of many was wonderful. The Jacobite songs still live because they breathe a fervour of loyalty and a strength of attachment which were vividly real in their day. But the cause is a lost one. It is all love's labour lost, and it is pathetic to think of the waste of love connected with it. Not so is it with the cause of Christ. What an amount

has been spent on that cause in the course of the ages! What an amount of sacrifice made and suffering borne and loving labour endured! Useless, fruitless, we might have said many a time and oft. But not one of Christ's countless followers would have recalled one jot or tittle of it all—not in the midst of their toil and travail, not in their final hour, and not assuredly now when they stand around the throne. From the very first it brought to them an immediate return in soul-satisfaction. It brought what the world could neither give nor take away. It was a saying of Cromwell's that "he goes furthest who knows not where he is going." It is not business-like to know not whither you are going, and he is not likely to go far who should enter upon business in that fashion. But in the spiritual realm it is different. The great thing there is to follow the Divine leading, and to sow even though it be in tears, trusting Him, who gives the command, that all will be well, and that in His own good time there shall come a reaping time of joy. 2. The text suggests to us also the blessing that may be hid in delay. It is not best for our spiritual life that we should always get immediate returns for our labours. The transaction which is done to-day, and whose results can be pocketed to-morrow, is not usually of the kind that gives strength and beauty to the character. Macaulay objected to school-prizes because the reward was too immediate. The true reward of hearty study comes to be realized only after many days. Is it not so also in business? The man who prospers too easily is not likely thereby to develop the finest type of character. In spiritual work immediate and abundant reaping tends sometimes to be productive of spiritual pride, to a man's own undoing and to the undoing, probably, of the work itself. The noblest Christians are those who most markedly have in their patience won their souls. (*J. S. Mavor, M.A.*) *Cast thy bread upon the waters*:—Some think that this image is borrowed from sea-trading. The merchant sent his ship over the waters, he lost sight of it altogether, and in those days the quickest passage on record was unknown. Solomon had a navy, and once in three years it returned, bringing gold and silver, apes and peacocks. The merchant of that period had to wait long, to scan the horizon oft, before he was greeted with the sight of his returning barque. So if we do good to men, it is like launching some precious craft on the deep, which at best must be long before its return gladdens the eye. And some of the work we do seems specially doubtful, and calls for exceptional patience; it is not so much as if we sent a ship to India or China, but rather as if we put our heart and treasure into a fleet which must dare the dark and icy seas of the North Pole. But even then it shall return. "Thou shalt find it after many days." Your work shall not be unavailing, your barque shall not be shipwrecked. To do any work with ardour and thoroughness and perseverance we must have a strong assurance that it will succeed, and in the noblest work we have that assurance. The seed that was sown generations ago is bearing fruit to-day, and it shall be so once more with the seed we sow. The ship we send forth with trembling, that is never reported from any foreign port, that is never spoken with by a passing sail, that sends no message in sealed bottle on the waves, that is frozen fast in abysses of frost and darkness, shall nevertheless return, bringing treasure beyond all ivory, pearls, or gold. On celestial cliffs we shall hail argosies that we fitted out and sent over stormy seas. Every kind word, every unselfish act, every true prayer, tells, and tells deeply, abidingly. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Ver. 3. *If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth.*—*Black clouds and bright blessings*:—It was raining very heavily when I was thinking over this text. When I came here I found that you had not had a drop of rain. This seemed to me like an example and an illustration of the sovereignty of God's dispensations. In one part of the Church God's grace descends in a flood, while another part remains as dry and arid as the wilderness itself. He hath the key of the rain, and it is for us to ask Him to give us of the dew and the rain of His Holy Spirit. I. COMFORT FOR THE TIMID. The clouds are black, they lower; they shut out the sunlight; they obscure the landscape. The timid one looks up and says, "Alas! how black they are, and how they gather, fold on fold!" What makes them black? It is because they are full, and hence light cannot pierce them. And if they be full, what then? Why, then it will rain, and then the hot earth will be refreshed, and every little plant, and every tiny leaf and rootlet of that plant will suck up moisture, and begin to laugh for joy. If the clouds were not black, you might not expect rain. If your afflictions were

not grievous, they would not be profitable. If your adversities did not pain and trouble you, they would not be blessed to you. We have heard some people say, "If this trouble had come in such and such a shape, I would not have minded it." But God meant you to mind it, for it was in your minding it that it was blessed to you. I do not know—how can I tell—what is your particular trouble; but you may well believe that He who appointed it, He who measured it, He who has set its bounds, will bring you to the end of it, and prove His gracious design in it all. Do not think that God deals roughly with His children, and gives them needless pain. It grieves Him to grieve you. It is easy to have a faith that acts backwards, but faith that will act forwards from the point of your present emergency is the true faith that you want now. Hath God helped you out of one trouble after another, and is it to be supposed that He will leave you in this? Do ask, then, for grace that you may believe while you are still under the cloud, black as it looks, that it will empty itself in blessed rain upon you. So will it be on the largest possible scale in the whole Church of Christ. There are many clouds surrounding the Church of God just now, and I must confess that, with all the religious activity there is abroad, there is very much to cause us great sorrow. But we must not yield to fear. The Master knows.

II. AN ARGUMENT WITH THE DOUBTING AND THE DESPONDING. It is a law of nature that a full thing begins to empty itself. When the cloud gets full, it no longer has the power of retaining its fluid contents, but it pours them down upon the earth. Well now, I want you to draw an argument from this. Our gracious God never makes a store of any good thing, but He intends to give it to us. Just think for a moment of God, our gracious Father. He is love. He is all goodness. He is a bottomless, shoreless sea, brimful of goodness. He is full of pardoning goodness to forgive sin. He is full of faithful goodness to watch over His children; full of bounteous goodness to bestow upon them all that they want. Now, if there be such a plenitude of goodness in the Father, it must be for some object—not for Himself. Why should it be given to Himself? It must be there for His creatures. Is it not written that He delighteth in mercy? We know that He maketh the sun to shine upon the evil as well as upon the just. Then I, even though I be evil, will hope that this store of goodness in the heart of the everlasting Father is intended—some of it, at any rate—to be poured out upon me, poor unworthy me. Ah, troubled, doubting soul! think again; let me ask you this time to muse a little upon Jesus Christ the Son of the Father. Now, if thou believest Christ to be a cloud that is full of rain, for what reason is He full? Why, that He may empty Himself upon the earth. To proceed yet further, I would ask the doubter to look at the infinite fulness of power which is treasured up in the Holy Spirit. Is thy heart hard? He will empty His softening influence upon it. Is it dead? His quickening power shall there find a congenial sphere. Art thou dark? Then there is room for His light. Art thou sick? Then is there a province for His healing energy.

III. THE TEXT FURNISHES A LESSON TO CHRISTIANS. The drift of the passage is, of course, to be gathered from the connection, and it was intended by Solomon to teach us liberality. "If your pocket is full, empty it out upon the poor and needy; and if God has endowed you with much of this world's substance, look out for cases of necessity, and consider it as much the object of your existence to bestow help upon the needy, as it is the design in the creation of a cloud that it should empty itself upon the earth." When a man once gets into the habit of giving to the cause of God, it becomes as much a delight to contribute of his substance as to pray for God's bounty, or to drink in the promise. Let the wealthy empty themselves upon the earth, and this shall be the way to fill themselves. But, though not many of us are entrusted with much wealth, we have other aptitudes to be useful. Some Christians have a considerable amount of ability to serve the Lord. They are, perhaps, able to speak for the Master. Now, I think that wherever there is some knowledge of God's Word, a personal acquaintance with its power, and a facility to speak, we should exercise our talent, if it be but one; and if we have ten, we should not keep one of the ten to ourselves. Some Christians have a large amount of experimental knowledge. They are not eloquent, they are not educated, but they are wise. If you have any experience, let me say to you—do, as you have opportunity, tell it out; empty it upon the earth. If you have gained some knowledge of God, communicate it. If you have proved Him, confess to a generation about you that He is a faithful God. Observe, lastly, when it is that the clouds do empty themselves. The text says, when they are full. This is a broad hint, I think, to the Christian;

it tells him when to work. David was to attack the Philistines at a certain signal. "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry-trees, then thou shalt bestir thyself." Take this as a Divine signal; when you are full, it is time for you to set about doing good, emptying yourselves upon the earth. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 4. **He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.**—*Difficulties vanquished.*—The principle of the text is, that we ought not to be deterred from discharging our duties by trivial difficulties. I. **THE NATURE OF THE DUTIES TO BE DISCHARGED—SOWING AND REAPING.** 1. They must be attended to in their own proper season. It would be useless for the husbandman to scatter the seed upon the ground in midsummer, or to go to reap at Christmas. It must be attended to in season or never. Now is the time. 2. They have but a short time allotted for their discharge. What is our life? A vapour, etc. Do not sell certainty for a perhaps. 3. They are works done with a view to futurity. No man scattereth the seed to the ground for the sake of scattering it—no man reaps for the sake of reaping; but the man sows for the sake of harvest, and reaps for his support during the year. The whole of life has a regard to futurity. II. **THE DIFFICULTIES IN OUR WAY WHILST DISCHARGING THESE DUTIES.** Winds, clouds, difficulties within, without, from the world, from the devil. Doubts, fears, weakness. 1. They are the common lot of humanity. 2. They are powerful in their resistance against us. 3. They are changeable in the nature of their resistance. The wind blew to-day from the south, it may be to-morrow from the north; to-day from the east, to-morrow from the west. To-day it may be a tempestuous wind, to-morrow a salubrious breeze. So with the Christian; the tempest does not always blow in the same direction, nor with the same force. 4. They are all under the control of our Heavenly Father. III. **THE RESOLUTE MIND WITH WHICH THESE DIFFICULTIES MUST BE OVERCOME, AND THE DUTIES DISCHARGED.** 1. We must not look upon the difficulties as things insurmountable. The wind, though it troubles the sower, does not actually prevent him from sowing, and the cloud, though it threatens to pour its contents upon the reaper, does not stop him. Our difficulties are not such as cannot be overcome. 2. We ought to add fresh vigour because of the difficulty. 3. In all our exertions we ought to depend upon God for strength and prosperity. Let us act and pray. (*David Hughes, B.A.*) *Optimism and pessimism versus Christianity.*—Here we have a rule, or principle of life and conduct, which corresponds with, but which is more important than, the rules of good farming. We are not to spend the brief day of life in wistfully surveying those evil conditions or those calamities which surround our existence. We are to go forward; we are to do the utmost in, and to make the best of, that certain duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call us. If we suppose a man placed in this world without the light of revelation, how is he likely to look upon his existence—as an existence of happiness or misery, a blessing or a curse? This question will probably be answered in accordance with the deep-seated tendencies of individual temperament, but these tendencies when prolonged become a system of doctrines, and so it is there are two main ways of looking at human life and its surrounding liabilities. First of all, there is what is called Optimism—a production of the temperament which refuses to see in earthly human existence anything but sunshine. This kind of optimism lives at the West End of London, and forgets that the East End exists at all. It draws a veil over the miseries, the poverty and pain; it draws its curtains and pokes up its fire; it has no patience with people who have human sorrows, and when they are forced on their attention, it protests with a good-natured smile that things do not look so gloomy as some people think, and it whispers to itself the familiar words, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," and perhaps it fancies that it has got hold of the true meaning of Solomon and it is obeying him in not regarding the clouds. The objection to this optimistic theory is, that it is inconsistent with hard facts; it only belongs to the man who has good health, fair abilities, and sufficient income. Such a man may, for a certain time, keep the sterner realities of existence at bay, may dream that this is the best of possible worlds in which to live. But for the immense majority of human beings the language of optimism can never sound other than heart-deceiving. It has no will to play the fiddle like the Emperor of Rome, while Rome is burning, or to dance upon the deck of a sinking ship; even the buoyant spirits of the Greeks

gave way before great calamities. In the solemn event of death there is needed some theory apart from this temper of refined and cultivated selfishness. In view of sights to be seen in this great city, with its vast accumulated misery, poverty and pain, the optimist well knows that there are things on earth, if not in heaven, which have not been duly allowed for by his smiling philosophy. And here the opposite estimate of human existence claims a hearing. We have, all of us, met with people who make a point of looking at everything on the darkest side, who fondle jealousy, and prize their groanings; who, as if under some strange pressure of conscience, do not allow themselves to recognize the happier features of their life or of the circumstances in which God has placed them. For them the sun never shines, the flowers never open, the face of man never smiles; they see everything through a thick atmosphere of depression and gloom. The pessimist has no eye for the creative and recuperative powers of nature. He lingers over its tendency to corruption and decay. He sees before him only death in life—never life in death; for him man's history is made up of unprofitable emerging from and sinking back into barbarism without any lasting gains for human progress and improvement. One of the incidental proofs of the Divine greatness of Christianity is to be found in its attitude towards these opposing estimates of human life. For the religion of Christ is by turns pessimist and optimist. Christianity quarrels not with the principles of these two ways of looking at life, but with their misapplication. Christ could not allow that human nature weakened and degraded by the Fall, exposed to the inroads of temptation and sin, subject to invasion by sickness and by death, is a fitting subject for light-hearted self-congratulation. Nor, on the other hand, is it consistent with faith in and respect for His finished work, to despair of souls or to despair of societies which He has redeemed, in forgetfulness of the new force with which He has endowed them. St. Paul is pessimist in his description of the state and prospects of the heathen world at the beginning of his Epistle to the Romans; but who more optimist than he—who more buoyantly confident of the splendid destinies reserved for the servants of Christ than this same apostle when he describes the effects working in the soul, and the working of the Spirit of Life, in his Epistle to the Romans; or of our incorporation with the Redeemer, in the Epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians? With human nature left to itself he could hope for nothing; with human nature redeemed and invigorated by Jesus Christ our Lord, he could despair of nothing. Of the one he says, "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Of the other he cries, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." And then we see how the birth of our Divine Lord into this human world was the consummation of optimism and the condemnation of pessimism. Pessimism, which is common sense in the heathen, is, in the Christian, disloyalty to Christ. Optimism, unlike that in the heathen, is in the Christian, who knows what Christ has done for him, mere common sense. The reason is because he knows that the Divine power has, at the birth of Christ, entered into human nature, has reversed his own downward inclination in his character, the warp towards evil, and that faith has endowed it with a vigour which comes from heaven. The Christian who regardeth the clouds, who looks long and wistfully at evils, or at threatenings of evil, which are beyond his power to remove or to correct, shall not reap the harvest of joy or work which lies already to his hand. For so regarding the clouds takes time and thought and effort, and our stock of these things is too small to admit of any wasteful expenditure. So to regard the clouds depresses the spirit, enfeebles the heart, and takes away the strength of purpose and resolute exertion which are wanted for the work of God. There are evils enough nearer the earth than the clouds, evils of our own causing, and evils springing from our own heart, evils lying right across our path, or by the side of it, and on these we cannot bestow too much attention. But the clouds, however much we may gaze at them, and wish they were really rain, or the reverse, the clouds are after all out of our reach. Let us not regard them; let us leave them to God. (*Canon Liddon.*) *Too late:*—The writer of this book is unquestionably tempted to a sceptical and despondent spirit. But there is something within him besides which saves him from hopelessness. And in the words before us he warns his hearers against that very habit of mind to which we might have supposed he was himself peculiarly inclined; the habit of observing the wind when it was time to sow, and of looking at the clouds when it was time to reap—i. e. in words divested of the figurative, to falter in the presence of duty from an exaggerated sense of the difficulties which beset it, to pause and speculate when the time

has arrived to obey and to act. Now, this evil tendency takes one of two forms. First, it has a grosser and a commoner form, viz. when men falter and spend their time weighing and measuring difficulties, merely from the power of an indolent and self-indulgent nature. To them religion and duty seem chilling and gloomy, and they put off the decisive effort to the last possible instant, often, alas, so long that they hear the words "too late," at the journey's end. Of one thing I am quite sure, that amidst the blessings, so many and so undeserved, which God bounteously reserves for the sons of men, there are absolutely none for the indolent. I cannot conceive any fault of character so essentially fatal as indolence. But this tendency, condemned in my text, frequently takes a less contemptible, but not less injurious, form. Persons by no means addicted to self-indulgence waver in the presence of duty, and when there is a call to action, from a timid anticipation of difficulty. After all, it is very few of us who keep up the due balance between thought and action. It has sometimes occurred to me that thought and action, speculation and practice, are related to each other as melody and time in music. Beautiful sounds may by accident fall into beautiful combinations, and the breathings of an *Æolian* harp have a charm of their own; but until the element of time be added it is not music. Even so the unpractical speculator may have fine thoughts and fascinating experiences; his mental exercises may be as sweet as the notes of an *Æolian* harp; but they are as wild and meaningless. Time it is that makes music, and even so the music of life is beaten out by action as well as thought. Speculation and inquiry are safe and healthy, as far, and only as far, as they are conducted in connection with action. There need be no fear of courageous and unflinching investigation, if it go hand in hand with devotion to duty, and obedience to the light within, and work for others. We must, to use a forcible Scripture phrase, "do the truth," as well as think the truth, if we are to be true. Dreaming is a dangerous thing in this working and struggling world under any circumstances, most dangerous of all when it is indulged in to the neglect of duty, and when it is but a form of criminal idleness. But I must try to bring these thoughts to a point, and so I shall warn you against this purposeless disposition—1. In the greatest matter of all, our closing with the offers of God's love, and the surrender of ourselves to His service. The gloriousness of the prize will make the toil of winning it seem light. An enthusiasm, wrought by the Spirit of God, will bear us along; we shall count the hindrances along the road but trifling, because heaven and victory and Christ are at the end. Believe it. Accept God's salvation, and leave the future to Him. Start upon the way that leadeth to life, and trust Him that "as your day so will your strength be." But guard against this wavering and procrastinating temper—2. In fulfilling the details of duty, and in the conduct of life. After all, life should be an economy; an economy of strength, of time, of opportunity. But we must watch against this wavering and procrastinating temper—3. In our work for others. I do from my heart wish that in our efforts for the souls and bodies of men we would bear in mind two very elementary considerations. First that it is better to work with the tools we have than to spend our time in lamenting that they are not better; and next, that it is not permitted to us to dictate to God what amount of success shall follow our efforts, that our right state of mind is rather to be thankful that we have any success whatever. (*J. A. Jacob, M.A.*)

Sowing in the wind; reaping under clouds.—I. NATURAL DIFFICULTIES MAY BE UNDULY CONSIDERED. A man may observe the wind, and regard the clouds a great deal too much, and so neither sow nor reap. 1. Note here, first, that in any work this would hinder a man. It is very wise to know the difficulty of your calling, the trial which arises out of it, the temptation connected therewith; but if you think too much of these things, there is no calling that will be carried on with any success. Well now, if there be these difficulties in connection with earthly trades, do you expect there will be nothing of the kind with regard to heavenly things? Do you imagine that, in sowing the good seed of the kingdom, and gathering the sheaves into the garner, you will have no difficulties and disappointments? 2. But, next, in the work of liberality this would stay us. This is Solomon's theme here. "Cast thy bread upon the waters;" "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight;" and so on. He means, by my text, that if anybody occupies his mind unduly with the difficulties connected with liberality, he will do nothing in that line. 3. Going a little further, as this is true of common occupations and of liberality, so is it especially true in the work of serving God. Now, if I were to consider in my mind nothing but the natural depravity of man,

I should never preach again. 4. You may unduly consider circumstances in reference to the business of your own eternal life. You may, in that matter, observe the winds, and never sow; you may regard the clouds, and never reap. "I feel," says one, "as if I never can be saved. There never was such a sinner as I am. My sins are so peculiarly black." Yes, and if you keep on regarding them, and do not remember the Saviour, and His infinite power to save, you will not sow in prayer and faith. "I do not feel like praying," says one. Then is the time when you ought to pray most, for you are evidently most in need; but if you keep observing whether or not you are in a proper frame of mind for prayer, you will not pray. "I cannot grasp the promises," says another; "I should like to joy in God, and firmly believe in His Word; but I do not see anything in myself that can minister to my comfort." Suppose you do not. Are you, after all, going to build upon yourself? Are you trying to find your ground of consolation in your own heart? If so, you are on the wrong tack. Our hope is not in self, but in Christ; let us go and sow it. Our hope is in the finished work of Christ; let us go and reap it; for, if we keep on regarding the winds and the clouds, we shall neither sow nor reap. II. SUCH UNWISE CONSIDERATION INVOLVES US IN SEVERAL SINS. 1. If we keep on observing circumstances, instead of trusting God, we shall be guilty of disobedience. God bids me sow: I do not sow, because the wind would blow some of my seed away. God bids me reap: I do not reap, because there is a black cloud there, and before I can house the harvest, some of it may be spoiled. I may say what I like; but I am guilty of disobedience. I have not done what I was bidden to do. 2. Next, we are guilty also of unbelief, if we cannot sow because of the wind. Who manages the wind? You distrust Him who is Lord of north, and south, and east, and west. If you cannot reap because of a cloud, you doubt Him who makes the clouds, to whom the clouds are the dust of His feet. Where is your faith? 3. The next sin is really rebellion. So you will not sow unless God chooses to make the wind blow your way; and you will not reap unless God pleases to drive the clouds away? I call that revolt, rebellion. An honest subject loves his king in all weathers. The true servant serves his master, let his master do what he wills. 4. Another sin of which we are guilty, when we are always looking at our circumstances, is this, foolish fear. God has commanded His people not to fear; then we should obey Him. There is a cloud; why do you fear it? It will be gone directly; not a drop of rain may fall out of it. You are afraid of the wind; why fear it? It may never come. Even if it were some deadly wind that was approaching, it might shift about, and not come near you. If you get fearing about nothing, the probability is that you will get something really to fear, for God does not love His people to be fools. 5. There are some who fall into the sin of penuriousness. Observe, that Solomon was here speaking of liberality. He that observeth the clouds and the winds thinks "That is not a good object to help," and that he will do harm if he gives here, or if he gives there. It amounts to this, poor miser, you want to save your money! 6. Another sin is often that of idleness. The man who does not sow because of the wind is usually too lazy to sow; and the man who does not reap because of the clouds is the man who wants a little more sleep, and a little more slumber, and a little more folding of the hands to sleep. If we do not want to serve God, it is wonderful how many reasons we can find. Oh, yes, yes, yes, we are always making these excuses about winds and clouds, and there is nothing in either of them. It is all meant to save our corn-sood, and to save us the trouble of sowing it. Do you not see, I have made out a long list of sins wrapped up in this observing of winds and clouds? If you have been guilty of any of them, repent of your wrong-doing, and do not repeat it. III. LET US PROVE THAT WE HAVE NOT FALLEN INTO THIS EVIL. How can we prove it? 1. Let us prove it, first, by sowing in the most unlikely places. Cast your bread upon the waters; then it will be seen that you are trusting God, not trusting the soil, nor trusting the seed. 2. Next, prove it by doing good to a great many. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight." Talk of Christ to everybody you meet with. If God has not blessed you to one, try another; and if He has blessed you to one, try two others; and if He has blessed you to two others, try four others; and always keep on enlarging your seed-plot as your harvest comes in. 3. Further, prove that you are not regarding winds and clouds by wisely learning from the clouds another lesson than the one they seem made to teach. Learn this lesson: "If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth"; and say to yourself, "If God has made me full of His grace, I will go

and pour it out to others. I will empty myself for the good of others, even as the clouds pour down the rain upon the earth." 4. Then prove it still by not wanting to know how God will work. Go out and work; go out and preach; go out and instruct others. Go out and seek to win souls. Thus shalt thou prove, in very truth, that thou art not dependent upon surroundings and circumstances. 5. Again, prove this by constant diligence. "Be instant in season, out of season." Sow in the morning, sow in the evening, sow at night, sow all day long, for you can never tell what God will bless; but by this constant sowing, you will prove to demonstration that you are not observing the winds, nor regarding the clouds. IV. LET US KEEP THIS EVIL OUT OF OUR HEARTS AS WELL AS OUT OF OUR WORK. 1. And, first, let us give no heed to the winds and clouds of doctrine that are everywhere about us now. Blow, blow, ye stormy winds; but you shall not move me. Clouds of hypotheses and inventions, come up with you, as many as you please, till you darken all the sky; but I will not fear you. Such clouds have come before, and have disappeared, and these will disappear, too. Give yourself to your holy service as if there were no winds and no clouds; and God will give you such comfort in your soul that you will rejoice before Him, and be confident in His truth. 2. And then, next, let us not lose hope because of doubts and temptations. When the clouds and the winds get into your heart, when you do not feel as you used to feel, when you have not that joy and elasticity of spirit you once had, when your ardour seems a little damped, and even your faith begins to hesitate a little, go you to God all the same. Trust Him still. 3. Lastly, let us follow the Lord's mind, come what will. In a word, set your face, like a flint, to serve God, by the maintenance of His truth, by your holy life, by the savour of your Christian character; and, that being done, defy earth and hell. Only be strong, and of good courage, and do not regard even the clouds from hell, or blasts from the infernal pit; but go straight on in the path of right, and, God being with you, you shall sow and you shall reap, unto His eternal glory. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 5. **Thou knowest not the work of God, who doeth all.**—*Christian agnosticism* (with James i. 5, 6):—The favourite intellectual mood of unbelief in recent times has been agnosticism. It declares that the greatest things we do not know, shall never know. Ecclesiastes is a very modern book in respect of this recognition of human ignorance. And it is more than modern in that while it fully states the puzzle, it gives the key. I. **WE KNOW NOTHING.** There is a farmer observing the wind now, saying, "It is in the right quarter; I will put in my seed." He shall not. The seed is six miles away, and a cart-wheel is broken. To-morrow the land will be flooded. The next day his child will be dying, and he will postpone everything. Another was very anxious about the rainy harvest; he "regarded the clouds," he chose a good week and set the men on; but he fell from his horse and died; some one else saw the harvest home. "Thou knowest not what is the way of the wind." That is the kind of experience that makes Tennyson say, "Behold, we know not anything." Of course there is very much in the regularity of things to make us think we know. A shrewd and careful farmer usually gets on well. The wind is a sign, and the clouds are a sign, that any man of common sense must pay attention to. Say we do not know what God doeth, if you like. But lay upon Him all that is done. If a man sows wild oats it is God who makes them come up. Do not say it is nature; it is God. And then if they seem not to come up—one man does wrong and is punished, another does wrong and is not punished—you are not embarrassed with any irregularity hard to account for. God has them both in hand. And with Him is no variability or shadow that is cast by turning. II. **WE KNOW GOD.** The unbelieving agnostic says we can know everything earthly, but nothing heavenly; we cannot know God. The Christian agnostic says, "We are not certain of anything earthly; but we are certain of God. We know whom we have believed." God shines into all the world with the pure light of goodness; and all iniquity, greed, violence, and so on, of which we say the earth is so full, is really a vision, too, of God by contrast. The earth is full of the glory of God, and that is why the bad things about us show up so. Christ has come—a human character up against which every one begins to feel ashamed by sheer contrast. He dares to say, "I am the light of the world," and men have to recognize it, because they all show up dark against it. The character of God is there, plain enough, in touch with us. III. **IF WE KNOW GOD WE ARE IN THE WAY TO KNOW EVERYTHING—AND THE ONLY**

WAY. Do not imagine there is some long, toilsome path, as the Deists used to say, "through nature up to nature's God." It is not far to get through nature. It is as thin as paper. Put the two texts together—"Thou knowest not the work of God, who doeth all." "If any lack, let him ask of God, in faith, nothing doubting." By faith all things are yours, ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's. (J. H. Stowell, M.A.)

Ver. 6. In the morning sow thy seed.—*The seed-time of life:*—The morning, as we apply it to Christian youth, stands for brightness, freshness, promise, for "regenerate hope, the salt of life," for opportunity, activity, and corresponding responsibility. The morning is pre-eminently the sowing time. Noon and evening will take their complexion from the morning, and morning, whether we improve or waste it, never returns. How important, then, that we should sow well, that our aims should be right, that we should lay up the opportunity and live crowded hours. First, as a matter of fact, we are all sowing. God has so constituted our nature that we must sow. Every thought, emotion, motive, is a seed; all our words and deeds are seeds which must generate, spring up, and bear fruit in our hearts and lives, in the hearts and lives of others, in time and in eternity. Our present characters are the harvests of seeds sown in the past of our lives. The seed we are sowing is imperishable. Be the winds ever so high, be the frosts ever so severe, germinate and spring up the seed must. Outward circumstances may hasten or check the growth, but cannot kill the seed. Like the man who scatters it, it is immortal. I. Sow in the morning **FOR YOUR INTELLECTUAL ADVANTAGE.** "My mind to me a kingdom is," sang Edward Dyer, the friend of Sir Philip Sidney. But what if that kingdom is enveloped in darkness, or peopled with undisciplined, not to speak of evil, thoughts, the home of the crude, the distorted, the perverted and perverting in knowledge? The kingdom of the mind, to bring joy to its king, need be luminous with knowledge, peopled with wise and pure thoughts, the home of virtue, beauty, and order—a kingdom in which are reaped and sown harvest after harvest of sound attainment and discreet dissemination as life advances. I need hardly say that one of the best instruments of manly culture is reading. Young people should make companions of wise and good books. Read books that have in them, if I may so speak, mountains of strength, and gardens of beauty, and wide cornfields of knowledge, and fruits of ripe wisdom; books through which blow winds of purity, and whose pages are bright with sunshine of unstained joys. Thus will you be sowing in the morning the seed of a harvest of true satisfaction. Some young people begrudge the time and pains which the pursuit of knowledge demands. II. Sow in the morning **THE SEED OF NOBLE MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD.** It has been asserted that "the cardinal elements of national greatness are robust character, independent personality, and sincere religiousness." May not the same be said of individuals? Noble character is the supreme good. Without character even earthly knowledge is a vain possession in view of the highest ends of life, is only a phantasm of the brain, a fugitive mirage, whose illusive tropical gardens turn to dry sand. Without it, material prosperity is the soul's deadly snare. Let me say, in what may seem a commonplace remark, that you must begin to sow in repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which are the seeds of the new life in the soul. Prayer, humility, courage, self-control, and kindness are precious seeds. Scatter them with no miserly hand. Oh, sow for character. It is of all precious things the most precious—the diamond among jewels, the rose among flowers, the throne in the kingdom of man's possessions. For value, for beauty, for service, for command, it is the one thing needful. Keep the Lord Jesus Christ before you. He is your ideal as well as your Saviour. Self-surrender, faith, love, righteous living and good companionship will lead on to likeness to Him. III. Sow in the morning **THE SEED OF USEFULNESS.** The morning is your opportunity, a magnificent opportunity, while it lasts. Soon manhood and womanhood, with the cares of life, and the claims of lawful duties, will overtake you. Then there will be little time to give to the specific task of scattering the seed of saving truth. Fill the morning hours with labour. Let pleasure wait, or be you content with such joys as God gives the husbandman; not the artificial joys of the crowded resorts of the world's pleasures, but natural joys that are well symbolized by the babble of the brook and the skylark's song. You cannot fling abroad a handful of seed, you cannot speak a loving word for your Master, or do a serviceable deed without unsealing in your own heart a fountain of gladness. Oh, the world needs you.

Give yourselves to it. Bestow on it your hopefulness and brightness, your purity and tenderness, your best thought and effort. If any here are using the morning to sow evil seed, pause. Remember, if you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind. (*R. C. Cowell.*) **Thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that.**—*Magnificent failures*:—Every one must have been impressed with the curious fact that Columbus failed in most of the things that he tried for. He made a bad mistake at first in his reckonings. He never knew that he had not reached Asia. He looked for gold and wealth, but he died in poverty. Except that he proved that the earth was round, which had already been satisfactorily proved, everything turned out differently from what he thought. And yet we celebrate him as though he had completely succeeded. There is a certain kind of magnificent failure that takes hold of our imagination and sympathy even more effectively than unqualified success. The most thrilling episodes in history are stories like that of Columbus—of men who essayed vast endeavours, and, after all, proved to have done something vastly more important and other than they expected. The Protestant Reformation is such a story of magnificent failure. Nothing is more pathetic than the last weary year of Luther's life, or the brave Zwingli dying in battle. The reformers had set out only to go a little way, to reform certain abuses and to correct a few errors. But they stirred up faction and war, they divided Germany, they let loose all manner of free thought. A hundred years after Luther the Reformation in Germany still looked like a failure. Now at last we enjoy what they only began to set in movement. The incoming religion is nobler, sunnier, more philosophical, more comprehensive than the reformers would have dared to accept. The story of the famous Savonarola is equally instructive. He did not save Florence. He could not work miracles. His visions did not come true. They put him to death like his Master. But the great world took up the holy impulse of his life; and his name, his passion for justice, his instinct for purity, passed over out of flames—a vitalizing spirit—into the infinite stream of our human destiny. One leaps at once, without citing other examples, to the great primitive Christ story. The story of Jesus is that of the most magnificent failure. As far as the records go, it seems clear that Jesus and His followers alike looked for what did not come. The glorious new kingdom of the sons of God was not ushered in before that generation passed away. The Son of Man did not appear in the skies. The good still suffered, the wicked and oppressors were not cast out. Nevertheless, we see that no one in Jesus' place could have done more. No one ever had such magnificent success. We see the brotherly spirit which possessed Jesus going into all the world, even beyond where His name goes, slowly but surely banishing the ancient hate, banding men together, turning the evil into good. We believe that, if Jesus could see the travail of His soul, he would be satisfied. In the story of Columbus we distinguish two elements working out the events of his life. He was right, on the whole, in the great main issue; namely, that, the earth being round, one voyaging west would find land, and, going far enough, the continent of Asia. All his greatness and success came of his following a great truth. But Columbus was mistaken by thousands of miles in all the details of his geography. His maps were drawn by guess-work, not from facts. This is typical of what has happened in all the pathetic tragedies. Thus Luther, brave as he was, only partly succeeded. His maps and charts, like Columbus, were not correct. The facts about this world by which to draw the maps in religion were not yet in. And the early Church, too, was right in its main direction. It started out toward the goal of a world religion. It was right to proclaim a good God and a righteous world, a gospel of faith and hope. But the noblest soul that ever sailed the sea of life had to work from the old charts. The unknown spaces of this world were a chaos of strange demonology. This had not yet been discovered to be a universe. Hence disasters and shipwrecks even to those who rightly sailed west. Here we stand to-day confronting pressing questions of social and political administration. How can we most fairly organize society and humanize the relations of employers and the employed? Or take the gigantic question of the control of the drink traffic and the care of the intemperate. Good and earnest men are conscientiously divided over these questions. It is possible to-day that men are setting out from their Palos, and sailing west to find the distant lands of light. But others are also sailing, like Vasco da Gama, another and seemingly opposite course. It is possible that the men of neither expedition will find exactly what they look for. It is possible to-day that the bravest and noblest may be mistaken in their estimates of the

contents of the seas into which humanity sails. Ah, we should be glad to know that the course was so short and the route so simple and straight as some of our friends believe! It may prove again that the world is larger and more capes must be rounded than are down on the present maps. I find everywhere that progress is a resultant of many forces and the impulse of many men. I find that all misunderstanding, narrowness, prejudice, and bitterness, lack of faith in God or man, on the part of any of us, is always so far a waste. But I find more notably yet that, though particular methods fail, no earnest work goes quite to waste, that all is taken up in the final readjustment. Every movement that has the true sailing direction—nay, even the mishaps and wrecks, so be they lie toward the land whither we sail—at last serve the world's fleet of discovery. Vasco da Gama and Columbus each proved to help, and moved at last toward each other. It does not trouble me, therefore, that the good and wise differ, while yet we are only making maps. For this is to live in a world that moves and grows. It is to be learners and seekers of truth. It is to be children here that we may be sons of God by and by. (C. F. Dole.)

Ver. 7. **Truly the light is sweet.**—*The sweet light of life*:—The light of the sun is at all times sweet and pleasant. Glorious orb! His beams not only reveal, but create ten thousand forms of beauty, that lift the soul to its highest moods of thought and admiration. But there are other lights in life which are very "sweet." I. There is the "light" of an **AMIALE TEMPER**. A countenance beaming with good nature has often dispelled the gloom of a disheartened man and carried sunshine into his heart. Some are amiable by nature, all can be amiable by cultivation. II. There is the "light" of a **NOBLE CHARACTER**. Christ said of His disciples, "Ye are the lights of the world," and truly he whose motives are disinterested, whose honesty is incorruptible, whose spirit and aims are Christly, is "light" indeed, a "sweet light." A light that animates, cheers, and refreshes the observer. III. There is the "light" of **GOOD FELLOWSHIP**. As social beings we are wondrously influenced by the character of the circle in which we move. By good fellowship is not meant the fellowship of the wealthy, the fashionable, and the gay; but the society of men, the fountains of whose nature are pure, the thoughts of whose minds are fresh, true, and exhilarating, in whose conversation there flows ideas to enlighten, and humour to charm. IV. There is the "light" of **REDEMPITIVE TRUTH**. This is the best of all the lights. A light this that not only scatters moral darkness, and makes clear God and His universe, duty, and destiny, but quickens with the highest life all the faculties of the soul, and brings them out in harmony with the Divine will. It is what Paul calls a "marvellous light." (*Homilet.*) *The sweetness of light*:—Sweetness of almost every kind is an evidence of the Divine goodness. The fragrance of flowers, and of many plants and shrubs, is grateful to the smell; music is sweet to the ear; the whispering of the gentle breeze, and the murmuring of the purling stream, are soft and soothing to the soul; and specially sweet is the prattle of our children, the conversation of our friends, and the voice of the preacher in the house of God. And our sight, which Addison justly described as "the most perfect and delightful of all our senses," has a universe of enjoyment peculiar to itself; and as all the pleasures of vision are dependent on light, and to a great extent on solar light, it may be emphatically said, in the language of the text, "Truly the light is sweet," etc. I. **ARTIFICIAL LIGHT**. Were the world to be henceforth deprived of this, how large a curtailment of human comfort, industry, commerce, study, and even divine worship, would be thereby occasioned through the half of every year! The tiny taper in the widow's cottage is not only essential to her toil, but also the companion of her solitude. The floating light in the chamber of the invalid cheers his solitary midnight hours. The sight of the lighthouse is always grateful to the imperilled mariner. II. **NATURAL LIGHT**. 1. Light is sweet in itself. It is so admirably adapted, not only to our organs of vision, but also to the whole of our nervous system as to be the source of no small part of the pleasures we enjoy. 2. Light is sweet on account of the manifold and varied beauties, magnificence, and grandeur which it unveils to us. 3. Light is sweet on account of the cheerfulness and confidence which it inspires. Gloom and dread are usually spirits of darkness. Though we are sometimes afraid of things we see, we are far more frequently afraid of what we merely imagine. Hence fear often vanishes at the dawn of day. This is one reason why light is conducive to health and length of life. Inspired penmen frequently associate death with darkness (Job iii. 5; x. 21, 22; Ps. xxiii. 4;

xlix. 19; lxxxviii. 12; Jer. xiii. 16); light with life (Job xxxiii. 28, 30; Ps. lvi. 13; Eccles. vii. 11). III. INTELLECTUAL LIGHT. This light irradiates the chambers of the soul, and thus enables reason to perform her high and important functions. It shines upon the balance-beam of judgment, and thus enables us correctly to decide. By the aid of this light we hourly gather up ideas from without, and store, and arrange, and amplify, and compare, and compound, and contrast them in the laboratory of our souls. It is this light which illumines the closet of memory, and thus enables us to review the bygone, recall the past, and revivify the dead. This light enables us to anticipate the future, and thus originates and sustains hope within our bosoms. To this light, too, we are indebted for the power of being able rationally to love, and thus to partake the sweetness of social converse and domestic joy. In all these, and in numerous other ways, it is a source of blessedness to us. IV. SCRIPTURAL LIGHT. "The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light." "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." By this light we discern our characters and their shortcomings; our hearts and their desperate wickedness; our sad deserts and our terrific prospects. But it does not leave us thus. It shows us God, too; not merely as the God of holiness and justice, but also as the God of mercy, grace, and love, who is ready to pardon our transgressions, receive us graciously, and love us freely. Moreover, it shows us Christ as the brightness of His Father's glory, God over all, blessed for ever. It shows us the power and willingness of the Eternal Spirit to enlighten our minds, regenerate our hearts, and sanctify and save our souls. It also shows us the world in its vanity and vexatiousness, its sinfulness and its sorrows; and it shows us heaven in its holiness and love, its glory and its blessedness. Truly this light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is thus to behold the Lord God as our sun and shield. And there are times in the experience of every Christian when this light has special sweetness. 1. When we first derive therefrom a soul-gladdening hope of salvation. 2. When we find its directions specially suited to our circumstances. 3. When we find its promises specially suited to our wants. 4. When we are thereby enabled to obtain soul-reviving views of God, of Christ, of providence, of the future of the Church's history, and of heaven at last. V. SPIRITUAL LIGHT. The same Divine Spirit who enkindled the lamp of revelation for us by the agency of His inspired servants has imparted to us spiritual light by the operation of His grace. It is sweet—1. On account of the discoveries it makes to us. It shows us ourselves. It shows what monuments of Divine forbearance we have been. It shows us the way to the throne of grace. It reveals to us the way of acceptance with God. 2. On account of the transforming influence it exerts. By the light of heaven the sick are often restored to health, and the feeble frequently made strong. So by the light of grace the sinner's soul is renovated, strengthened, sanctified, and saved. VI. ETERNAL LIGHT. Heaven is emphatically termed, "The inheritance of the saints in light." "There shall be no night there." In closing we remark—1. How abundant, how varied, how precious, how suitable, and how gratuitous are God's bestowments. 2. We learn why it is that sinners hate Christ and His Gospel, the Bible and its teachings (John iii. 19, 20). But surely this must enhance their guilt, and will aggravate their doom. 3. This subject will enable us to account for much of the darkness and distress of soul in which even true believers are at times involved. We wander from the light, or are too distant from it to derive the full pleasure and advantage which it is designed and adapted to impart. 4. It assures us that personal religion is a truly blessed thing. Our sorrows and our gloom are to a great extent the result of our shortcomings; but the light of grace is "truly sweet." 5. It shows the necessity of faith. That which sight is to the body, faith is to the soul. Light may be around us in all its beauty and effulgence, but without the power of vision we can make no discoveries thereby. 6. Be thankful for the light. 7. Pity those who are in darkness. Many such are around you; millions are in other lands. Carry the light to all you can; send it to those to whom you cannot go. Above all, pray God to "send out His light and His truth," that the light of His revealed will may be universally diffused, the light of His grace universally enjoyed. (J. Jenkinson.)

Vers. 9, 10. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth.—Joy and judgment:*—Our translators have slipped in a "but" where there ought to be an "and," and have thus made the Preacher set the joy of youth and the judgment of God over against each other: whereas, in fact, the judgment is put as part of the rejoicing:

"Rejoice in thy youth; and know that, respecting all these, God will bring thee into judgment." Let us look at the two parts of the text separately—joy and judgment; and then we shall see how they fit into each other, and are parts of one great truth. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in thy youthful days, and pursue the ways of thine heart, and the things which are seen by the eyes." We are not listening to a Christian moralist: nevertheless, the sentiment is Christian. Childhood and youth, or youth and manhood, are fleeting; *therefore*, "Banish sorrow from thy mind, and put away sadness from thy body." He evidently does not think that the brevity and transitoriness of a thing is a reason for despising it. Neither do you and I, when we deal with ordinary matters. The rose which you pluck in the morning withers before the next morning, but you delight yourself with its colour and perfume none the less while it lasts. Youth and fresh manhood are things only of a few years; but their brevity is, to the Preacher, the reason why they should be enjoyed. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Youth is pointed back to his creation. What stamp did the Creator set upon it? What provision did He make for youth? What did He mean youth to be? Obedient, reverent, pure, diligent—all that certainly; yet as certainly fresh, joyous, vigorous. A joyless youth is as unnatural as ice in August: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth." It may be said, "At any rate, this aspect of the truth does not need pressing in our day, and it were better to warn youth against the coming judgment." And it seems to be assumed, moreover, that there is an antagonism between these two ideas of joy and judgment; that the thought of judgment is enough of itself to quench all rejoicing in youth. But the peculiarity of our text is, that it rejects this antagonism, and makes this coming judgment a cause of rejoicing—a stimulant of the joy of youth as well as a warning: "Rejoice, and know that God will bring thee into judgment. Banish, therefore, sorrow from thy mind, and put away sadness from thy body." Whenever this book may have been written, we find in it numerous allusions to a state of society which give these words about a future judgment a peculiar meaning and force; for the book depicts a society under a capricious despotism, with all its corruptions and miseries. And as the book reveals this fearful social condition, so, likewise, it gives expression to the temper which grows up in men's minds after a long course of such oppressions—a kind of fatalism and hopelessness which tempts one to yield passively to the current of affairs; to believe that God has ceased to rule, and that order and right have vanished from the world; to snatch at every pleasure; to drown care in sensuality rather than try to maintain an integrity which is sure to be rewarded with personal and social ruin. That kind of temper, if it once gained headway, would affect all classes and ages. In the nobler and better-seasoned characters it would become a proud despair; in vulgar minds a bestial greed, and an untrammelled selfishness; in youth a prompter to unbounded sensuality. You can see, therefore, what a powerful antidote to this temper would be furnished by the truth of a future judgment. One can afford to be cheerful, even amid oppressions and troubles like these, if the time is short, and a day coming in which wrong shall be righted, and worth acknowledged and fidelity rewarded. The judgment is a fact which confronts us as Christians—a fact emphasized by the words of Christ and of the apostles, and still further emphasized by the relation in which Christ puts Himself to it as the Judge of all men. And the attitude of even our Christian thought towards it is largely that of terror and apprehension. The element of solemnity must, in any case, dominate our thought of the last day. It cannot be other than a serious matter to appear before our Creator, and to give an account of the deeds done in the body. And assuredly it will be a day of wrath to rebels against God and to rejecters of Christ. But, withal, the truth has another side. It is not mere fancy which sees in the Judgment Day a day of consolation as well as of wrath. The Mediator is the Judge, and the blood of sprinkling has taken the terror out of judgment. Why, then, should a man, young or old, have the work or the pleasure peculiar to his age and circumstances clouded by the anticipation of judgment? Why may not the young man lawfully rejoice in his youth, provided he remembers his Creator? The mistake is in divorcing the Creator and Judge from the joy of life; whereas, God is the true joy of life. Whence come the pure pleasures of youth—its hopefulness, its energy, its mirth, its sense of beauty? Do they not come from God? Is He not the Creator of these as well as of bone and muscle? And if these gifts are recognized as God's, are they not at once sweetened, and guarded against abuse

by that very fact? Christ tells us that one office of the Holy Spirit is to "convince of judgment"; that is, to show men clearly that all sin deserves and will receive the judgment of God. Is it not, then, a cause of rejoicing that God guards our pleasures against abuse, that He teaches us what true pleasure is, that He sets up a sign marked "judgment" at the border-line of excess? Is it not a real cause of rejoicing that God restrains us from incurring the judgment of sin? Can that be real pleasure which ends in rebuke and punishment? And, therefore, when we recognize our legitimate pleasures as God's gift, our joy in them is heightened. We may enjoy without fear. God will not condemn what Himself has ordained and created; and when we look forward to the great judgment, the eternal life beyond, these very pleasures take on a prophetic character. They are foretastes, earnestings of something better beyond. The pleasure at His right hand here promises fulness of joy at His right hand for evermore. (*M. R. Vincent, D.D.*) *Advice to youth*:—It is in this healthy, bracing tone, it is in these words of manly wisdom, that the Preacher brings to a close the volume of his confessions. His tone has not always been thus bright and hopeful. It has sometimes been melancholy, cynical, sceptical, all but despairing. Bitterness, disappointment, vanity, these had been the burden of his book. But he has learnt by God's discipline the true wisdom, and he gives you the benefit of his experience. The book is that most touching of all autobiographies, the autobiography of a heart. The Preacher is a layman and an accomplished man of the world. This is no sour moralist of the schools, who condemns the vices to which he has felt no temptation, or who looks askance with an eye of something like half regret at the pleasures on which he frowns or the follies at which he sneers. Nor is he the stern ascetic who can make no allowance for human frailty and bids you crush with hand of iron the uprisings of human passion. Nor, again, is he, on the other hand, merely the sated voluptuary, who has drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs, and who, tired and disgusted with his own excesses, now with enfeebled frame and jaded appetite pronounces the mournful condemnation of his former self. He is the calm, prudent, philosophical man of the world. Such is the man. What is his teaching? What does this wise man, this man of knowledge and experience say, as, looking back at the end of the years, he sees others setting out on the voyage of life? How does he address the young? "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth." This is not, as some would persuade us, the language of cynical scorn. The Preacher does not hold up to you the empty shrivelled mask of the world that he may mock your joy. He does not take off the kingly crown and the robe of pride and show you the grinning death's head and the ghastly skeleton beneath, and bid you rejoice if you can. He means what He says. There is the full sympathy with youth. He would not teach you else. This is the secret of all true teaching. You can never win others if you are not in sympathy with them. Your words may be wise and weighty; but they will not influence men unless you can make them feel that you and they have something in common. And above all this is true with the young. How often the austere voice of age chills and repels the youthful heart. It has bright visions, golden dreams, a future which seems boundless. It has no patience with your stern maxims and your cold preaching about duty. But go to it as the Preacher goes in this book, go to it with the frank sympathy and the affectionate voice which says, Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth. Be happy in youth, for not to be happy now would be to despise one of God's best gifts of love. But will you go with him a step further? How would he ensure you this blessed gift of gladness and innocent mirth? How would he keep your heart fresh through all the coming years? By casting over it the shadow of judgment and the fear of God. "Walk in the way of thine heart and in the sight of thine eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh, for (without God) childhood and youth are vanity." "Know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." He wants to see you happy. He wants you to put away sorrow from your heart and evil from your flesh. He wants you to spare yourself the misery of a wasted life, of an accusing conscience, of bitter, abiding remorse. That is why he says to you, Know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. That is why he bids you remember your Creator. It is not to deny you one innocent pleasure, it is not to make you gloomy, misanthropic, unsocial. It is to lead you to carry everywhere with you the thought of a love which shall be as music in your hearts, whatever

labour may be given you and whatever sorrows may darken your path. This is a very simple elementary truth. But is it not a truth that is too much forgotten? Do we not need to make this the fundamental article of the religious teaching of the young? Ought we not to endeavour to stamp upon their hearts that old name of God, Thou God seest me? It is the appeal to the conscience before the conscience has been seared. Will you still say, I am young, let me enjoy myself, there is time enough to think about religion by and by? I know this is a common delusion. I know it is a delusion which is sometimes fostered by pernicious teaching. I do not limit the grace of God. He can change the heart of a sinner as He changed that of Saul of Tarsus, or of the robber on the cross. But such changes are the exception. And they at least had not known the truth and wilfully turned their backs upon the truth. And even if He should give you repentance, how bitter will it be. Think of the evil habits to be overcome. Think by how sharp and painful a process all those thick layers of evil which have gathered upon you must be cut away. How hard it is to begin late in life a habit of prayer, a habit of reading the Scriptures, a habit of self-examination, a habit of self-denial and self-sacrifice. If we would have a pure conscience and a strong faith and a clear hope, if we would save ourselves from bitter, bitter tears and a remorse which is agony, we must remember our Creator in the days of our youth. But once more the Preacher enforces his counsel, not only by the thought of judgment to come, but by the melancholy picture of an old age which can find no pleasure in earthly things and has no God to turn to. The Preacher does not threaten you with a short term of years, he does not dwell on the uncertainty of life. He knew well how easy it is to put away such a thought, how ready we all are to admit the possibility in every case but our own. He grants you the four-score years you expect to reach. And he puts before you the picture of your then self. With that palsied frame, with those decaying faculties, with that impaired vigour, will you serve God better? Or when your whole life has been one long forgetfulness of Him, will you find it pleasant to remember Him? can you change all at once the current of your thoughts and your affections? "Remember!" How that word checks the heedlessness and thoughtlessness of youth. "Remember!" And to you that word comes with a sweeter and more solemn sound. You are invited to remember not One only whose power fashioned you, but One whose love redeemed you. (*Bp. Perowne.*) *A warning to youth:*—Youths have often been compared to trees in their bloom; but, like beautiful and promising blossoms, they often disappoint the hopes they inspire. It depends upon the principles they imbibe, and the courses they pursue, whether they shall or shall not be blessings to their parents, to their friends, and to their fellow-creatures.

I. THE TRUE IMPORT OF THE ADDRESS TO YOUTH IN THE TEXT. 1. Some suppose that Solomon means to express his approbation of young people in pursuing the innocent recreations and amusements of life. They consider him as representing religion as not only free from austerity and gloominess, but as productive of the purest happiness in the present as well as in the future state. And he often does paint virtue and piety in this amiable and beautiful form (*Prov. iii. 17; Eccles. viii. 15; ix. 7*). 2. This does not appear to be Solomon's meaning in the text. He is speaking to a careless, secure, unsanctified youth, who has no fear of God before his eyes. It is therefore beyond a doubt that he means to speak ironically, and to convey an idea directly contrary to what his words literally express. But now those who are in the morning of life may be ready to ask, Why should the wise man give us, in particular, such a solemn warning to live and act under a realizing view of the great and last day? Did he not know that such a view of future and eternal realities would disturb our peace and destroy all our pleasing hopes and prospects? Why did he not make this address to the aged, who have gone through the busy scenes of life, and are just ready to appear before the supreme tribunal of their final Judge? **II. To convince you who are ready to think and speak in this manner, OF THE PROPRIETY OF THE WISE MAN'S ADDRESS,** and of the importance of your living in a constant preparation for your final account, I will suggest the following things to your most serious consideration. 1. Please to reflect upon your hearts, which you have carried about with you, and which you have found to be extremely corrupt and sinful. Can you conceive of any safety in trusting in such hearts, which you have found have so often betrayed, deceived, and well-nigh ruined you? Can you set any bounds to your progress in sinning? Is there any evil or danger to which you are not exposed? Is there not, then, a great propriety in the wise man's addressing you in particular;

and in warning you not to walk in the ways of your hearts, which are the ways to certain and endless ruin? 2. Consider that the world in which you live, and through which you have to pass to your long home, is every way calculated to corrupt and destroy you. (1) The things of the world are full of poison, and perfectly suited to increase and draw forth the native corruption of your hearts. (2) Worldly employments, as well as worldly objects, are of a dangerous and ensnaring nature to your hearts. (3) Besides, you are in no less danger from the men of the world than from its business and objects. (4) Furthermore, the god of the world unites with the men of the world, and all its scenes and objects, to lead you in the broad road to ruin. Do you not need the admonition in the text; and all other friendly admonitions of danger? Can any thought be more proper to lie continually on your minds than your constant exposedness to live and die impenitent? 3. Bear it in your minds that you are now in a state of trial, and forming your characters for eternity. 4. Remember that God not only may, but must, call you to an account for all your conduct in this state of trial. 5. Consider whether your hearts can endure, or your hands be strong, in the day that God shall deal with you. IMPROVEMENT: 1. If there be a propriety in the solemn address to youth in the text, then it is very absurd for any to think that young people in particular may be excused for neglecting preparation for their future and eternal state. 2. If there be a propriety in the solemn address to youth in the text, then there is something very beautiful and amiable in becoming religious early in life. Piety adorns all persons who possess it; but it shines with peculiar lustre in youth, because it more clearly appears to be the effect of a change of heart than of a change of circumstances. 3. If there be a propriety in the pathetic address to the youth in the text, then there is a peculiar propriety in young persons remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy. 4. If it be proper to give young people such solemn warnings and admonitions as Solomon does in the text, then it must be extremely improper to provide for them and allow them in vain and sinful amusements. If one of these things is right, then the other is wrong. 5. It appears in the view of this subject that the death of young people is a very solemn and interesting event to the living, whether they leave the world prepared or unprepared. (N. Emmons, D.D.) *Youthful pleasures*.—I. Their AUTHORIZATION. "Rejoice, O young man." God desires the happiness of youth, and has made abundant provision for it. Cheerful youthhood is the condition of a healthy and vigorous manhood. II. Their MODERATION. "Know thou." Adam in his innocence had a limiting law. God gives vast scope for human action and enjoyment; but not unbounded. 1. He will judge you at the bar of your own experience. The young man who gives full play to his passions, yields himself up to intemperance and self-indulgence, will, by an immutable law, be made to endure, as years roll on, the penalties of his immoderation. God has brought him to judgment. 2. He will judge you at the bar of your own conscience. (Homilist.) **Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.**—*Remembrance in youth of judgment to come*.—I. THE TRUE INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT. 1. It has been viewed by some as grave advice: as though its purport were: "youth is the time for gaiety within the bound of moderation; a certain decorum attends every age; there is a becoming grace and spirit in the gaiety of youth; let it be indulged only in consistency with the remembrance of God and judgment." 2. But to this interpretation it is objected by others that the terms used are too broad to allow of this passage being applied in such a serious meaning. The language in the former part of the sentence is merely ironical. II. ENFORCE AND ILLUSTRATE THIS SOLEMN WARNING. The heart of youth, if it goes in its own way, must go in a way full of moral disorder. Even if disgrace before men is escaped, there will be infinity of evil before God: neglect of God, of prayer, of self-examination, of Scripture. So much ingratitude and apostasy is there in neglect of God that a day of judgment is appointed for its punishment. With respect to this judgment, remember.—1. Its extent. "All these things" are involved in it. 2. The character of the Judge. 3. The severity of this judgment. 4. This judgment will be final and ultimate. 5. Its certainty. "God will bring thee into judgment." Heaven and earth may pass away, and shall; but not a word of God can fail. As sure as death is appointed unto all, is judgment also. (R. Hall, M.A.) *The judgment to come*.—I. THE JUDGMENT TO COME IS CERTAIN, AND CANNOT BE AVOIDED. The very heathens had some notices of it; and the consciences of mankind in general fore speak it (1's. lxxiii.). And the scriptures of truth clearly and fully confirm the certainty

of the future judgment. II. THE JUDGMENT TO COME IS A JUST, STRICT, AND IMPARTIAL JUDGMENT. III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THAT JUDGMENT ARE MOST IMPORTANT AND ETERNAL. They are either life, or death; unutterable joy and blessedness, and that not for a year, an age, or but a few ages, but for ever and ever. IV. THIS AWFUL JUDGMENT WILL QUICKLY COME. You may put the evil day far from your thoughts, or look upon it as at a vast distance; but it will quickly overtake you, and may come upon you before you are aware. There will then be an eternal entire end of all your sinful pleasing vanities; but not an end, happy would it be for you if there were, of your bitter remembrances of them; of your stinging reflections upon them, and of your overwhelming sufferings for them; these will stick close by you, and abide for ever with you. (*J. Guyse, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XII.

VERS. 1-7. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.—*The Creator remembered*:—How shall we understand this? Is it an allegory describing the weakening of the body? Is it a description of the Jews in captivity? Is it a dirge from some old book of hymns? The best explanation seems this: first, the Preacher describes old age as a stormy day; secondly, the figure changes to that of a palace going to ruin; then there is a reference to "the seven evil days" of spring in the Orient, which are thought particularly dangerous to the aged; and lastly the new figures of the lamp, the fountain, and the cistern come in. It is surely no strange thing to illustrate an idea with a variety of pictures. We may make a regular progression of the lessons taught in this passage. 1. There is a hereafter. Man is not made only for this life. What would we think of the pyramid builders if they scattered pyramids over a plain, but intentionally left every one of them unfinished, with the lines sloping together so as to prophesy of an apex which was never built? Such designed incompleteness is inconceivable, the human mind being what it is. No more can we conceive of God's having scattered over the world all the beautiful and noble lives in history, yet so that none of them should be complete. There must be a finishing some time. We are made so as to expect it. We have an organ whose function it is to anticipate it. And that organ of the heart would be as inexplicable without a hereafter as an eye without light. Where we find eyes we can presume the existence of light at some time. 2. Man is a responsible being. He can do pretty much as he pleases, but he cannot by any possibility exempt himself from the consequences of what he does. Sometime the score must be settled. 3. Death ends man's work on earth. It is interesting to note that the terrors of death are not dwelt upon in the passage. The sombreness, the pain of it, are passed by. Writers often gloat over death, they force the melancholy of it home upon our hearts, they seem to say (as Dickens is accused of saying in effect in describing the death of little Nell), "Now let us have a cry together." There is not the slightest touch of this in the ending of Ecclesiastes. If we have any plans for good, if we want to make this life a preparation for the glories of the future, how busy ought the thought and the sight of death to make us. 4. Reverent obedience to God is the only method of having a life that shall be worth living. God changes not, and we need not hope to change Him. He is a God of love always, but His love brings blessing only to those who seek to do His will. To those who disregard Him that same love becomes a condemnation. But how shall we keep God's laws? Above all commands, He has given to us our final command, by keeping which we are led to keep all the rest; "this is My beloved Son; hear ye Him." Therefore, trying to serve God while rejecting Christ must lead to failure in God's eyes. 5. Youth is the best time to begin serving God. (1) It is easier to begin then. Habits are unformed, and will as easily take one shape as another. Once they are made, rearrangement comes only, as it were, by fracture. (2) It is important to have the trend of life settled in favour of the good. You cannot do this except at the needless expence of great moral upheaval, at any time but in the early years. (3) The more years of life consecrated to Christ, the more the quantity of good which can be done for Him. Every year away from His service is an empty year from the point of view of eternity. (4) The

earlier one begins in the Christian life, the longer time he has for Christian growth. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The Creator remembered*:—I. AN EARLY RECOGNITION OF GOD WILL BECOME THE FORMATIVE PRINCIPLE OF CHARACTER. The formation of character is the true business of life. Character is the individual, the man himself. No one can be greater than his character, and no one can be less. At the centre of character there is always a governing principle. This may be one thing or another—may be a remembrance of God or a regard for the devil, may be a holy resolution or a weak sentiment. Still, it is there, and it is influential. It resembles the point of crystallization around which cluster the strange forms and colours of Nature's workmanship. Character will surely be determined by this central principle or supreme choice. Now, to "remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth" is to yield to God as He appears in Jesus Christ, or to become a Christian. This surrender enthrones God at the very centre of character. His word then becomes law. The holy life of His Son, our Redeemer, holds the attention. The formation of character proceeds as we "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." II. CHILDHOOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF GOD BECOMES THE PERPETUAL RECOMPENSE OF SERVICE. We must bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. He "went about doing good." He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Simple fidelities engaged Him. An hour of communion with His Father prepared Him for any conflict, and He often looked up into His Father's face to gain new inspiration when He was weary or troubled. The possibility of this consciousness is the promise of the Bible. Again and again we are assured that God is interested in us. He wants to help us. He offers the confidence which Jesus knew. Now, if we can secure this confidence early in life, we shall be stronger and braver than we could otherwise be, for in every honest service we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that God is pleased. We may train ourselves to "do all to the glory of God." If we undertake any service, we may perform it as unto Him, and not as unto our fellow-men; if we make a contribution of money, we may present it first of all to Him, and may then act as His stewards in its distribution; if we contemplate a new work, we may consult Him in prayer; if we are burdened with care, we may cast our care upon Him. At once there opens before us many rare privileges. Life with God in it moves safely. III. THE SECURE HOPE OF SORROW AND OF DEATH IS OBTAINED WHEN THE CREATOR IS REMEMBERED. "Hope thou in God" is the psalmist's exhortation. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost," is the benediction of Paul. God is the God of hope. What a blessed truth that is! He meets us with hope, and He continues to afford hope even to the end of life. When sorrows come we are not shut up to the conviction that we are the victims of fate. There is an "afterward" to every chastisement, with "peaceable fruit of righteousness." The end has not been reached. We are still at school. God is dealing with us as with sons. We shall bless Him by and by for life's discipline. Meanwhile, He sustains and comforts us to such a degree that a man has even been known to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." God is with us. We shall surely reach port. We hope in Him. And when we approach death, who but God can afford hope? (*H. M. Booth, D.D.*) *The Creator remembered*:—In any anthology upon old age this would easily rank first. Its cast is poetical, its substance the severest prose. In it the verdict of experience is given by one who has set himself "to know wisdom and to know madness and folly." The Preacher has simply spoken for the silent multitudes. Will the youth be sane and listen and heed, or giddy and unbelieving, till at the end he too will remorsefully cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity"? Certain truths and principles ought ever to be bound about his neck and written on the tables of his heart. I. THE YOUTH IS GOD'S CREATION. If he doubts or denies this he will live like the beasts that perish, and be ready after a while to say that he has not pre-eminence above them. The spirit of the age is hushing the demands of the Creator and magnifying those of the created. While it professes the deepest reverence for an insect form or faultless crystal or mote of star-dust, it shuts the senses to any call to penitence, or prayer, or trust, or sacrifice, since we cannot know if there be One supreme who has uttered it. The youth is in peril. God is—no question—no perhaps. He is thy Creator. Remember Him and that thou art His, not thine own. Thy intuitions are correct; they point thee to Him. II. IN THE NATURAL ORDER OF LIFE AGE MUST COME. The lambs that gambol over the fields, the birds that sing among the branches do not dream they will ever grow old. Not a hint

of future decay comes to any animal. Only the present has any fears for them. But man cannot hide from himself the fact of limitations. Even the child perceives that in the far distant time its steps will totter, its form be bowed, and its face wrinkled. The youth knows that enthusiasm will wane as the evening of life deepens. The strong man is aware that the days of decline are nearing. The house in its every part seems tumbling in pieces. The heart labours in beating, like a worn engine, with much noise and frequent calls for relief and repair. The thread of life, most delicate, is parting strand by strand, and the golden bowl which hung by it, in which the light has burned for fourscore years, is soon to be dashed in fragments. And so, whether it be the pitcher that no longer fetches the breath, or the wheel whose tiresome rounds of being are spent, and which has broken in upon itself, it is the end. Life has gone, as death has come, and each to its own. The dust claims its kindred; the Lord His. III. THE CURSE OF AGE IS WHAT THE YOUTH HAS INVITED. His own selfishness has robbed him of helpers. Indolence has clothed him with rags. Deceit has made all wary and suspicious of him. The cruel tongue has slain his defenders. Profligacy has consumed flesh and body, surviving a little to be tortured. Hawthorne said, "The infirmities that come with old age may be the interest on the debt of nature, which should have been more seasonably paid—often the interest will be a heavier payment than the principal." It will always be heavier for the bad. IV. THE RELIGIOUS LIFE IS THE TRUE LIFE. Man by birth and development is allied to God. He fills out the meaning of existence only by heeding the laws and impulses which the Lord gives. He shows his greatness above the creation simply by his regard for ideas and things which are not visibly one with it. Since it changes and perishes, he reaches up and grasps the unchangeable and eternal. "He would not be the most distinguished object in it if he were not too distinguished for it," said the illustrious German. Along his divinely marked way he finds joy springing out of duties performed. The zest of building for immortality makes his slightest deed sublime. V. THE RELIGIOUS LIFE PREPARES FOR THE JUDGMENT. Here it would seem is the key to this treatise. Revelation must adapt itself to the capacity of the receiver. A gross mind and heart is only gradually led to more perfect conceptions. Material things and events filled the vision of them to whom the message from heaven first came. Rewards and punishments were of a very practical nature. Food, offspring, and long life were offered to the dutiful and taken from the disobedient. It would pay to heed the commands of Jehovah. The Judge is the Lord, who has sustained and tested and known the doings of every one. The wicked must come with his daring crimes and his hidden deeds and answer therefor. That tribunal need have no terrors for the obedient. It is their vindication before any who questioned or exulted over them. And all shall see that the adjustments of another life will perfectly satisfy the inconsistencies of this. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) "*Remember thy Creator*":—I. REMEMBER—WHOM? "Thy Creator." As we are indebted to God for our life, and health, and for the powers of the mind, it is most proper that we should remember Him. Will you not—1. Remember Him and pray? 2. Remember Him and be thankful? 3. Remember Him and be obedient? 4. Remember Him and be watchful? II. REMEMBER—WHEN? 1. Youth is the time to store the memory. Life is now comparatively free, and all the powers of body and mind are capable of easy development. Now is the time when you may get into the habit of thinking about God, and into the habit of praying, and into the habit of acting from principle and for the glory of God. If you form the habit now it will ever after be easier to do right. 2. Youthful piety will save you from many sins and sorrows. 3. Youthful piety will ennoble and beautify your life. III. REMEMBER—WHY? Because evil days will come, and a time draw nigh when you will find no pleasure in good things. O how sad it will be if you let the days of youth pass by without giving your heart to Christ! (*W. Whale.*) *The remembrance of our Creator*:—I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE INJUNCTION TO REMEMBER GOD AS OUR CREATOR. 1. We are to remember that He has made us, and not we ourselves. 2. We are to bear in mind the superintending care of His providence and the riches of His grace. 3. We are to remember the authority with which, by the right of creation, God is invested; an authority to call us to account for the use we make of the privileges bestowed upon us. To Him we are responsible, and He will bring us into judgment. II. SOME REASONS WHY WE OUGHT TO REMEMBER OUR CREATOR IN THE DAYS OF OUR YOUTH. 1. And here it may fairly be demanded, Can we remember Him at too early a period? Reason as well as Revelation point out to us that the service

of God cannot begin too soon. 2. This duty is most practicable in youth. 3. A third reason for remembering our Creator in youth is the uncertainty of life. 4. The remembrance of our Creator in youth will provide a remedy for the evils of life. 5. The only remaining argument I shall mention for early piety is derived from the honour which will thus accrue to religion, and the effect it will have in promoting the glory of God. III. THE MEANS OF ATTAINING AND PRESERVING THE REMEMBRANCE OF OUR CREATOR. 1. Since we are by nature strangers to divine truth, let us be ready to receive instruction from those who are wiser and better than ourselves. 2. Let us search the Scriptures. They are the revelation of our Creator. They will not only remind us of Him, but they contain all the knowledge of Him which it is essential to acquire, and "are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." 3. Let it be a fixed principle to avail ourselves of all other means of grace, of the ministration of the Word of God, of public and domestic worship. 4. Let us endeavour to form a habit of seeing the Creator in all things; of recognizing the hand of God in the works of nature and the course of events. If we make a right use of these great volumes which are open before us, we shall everywhere behold the agency of the Almighty. 5. We must keep a strict watch over our hearts and our conduct. (*Christian Observer.*) *Remembering God*.—That word "remember," standing where it does, must mean a great deal. It must mean to keep in mind the thought of God as the shaping, constructive, sovereign influence in life. The idea of beauty the artist paints by; the idea of the special harvest the farmer tills the fields by; the chart the mariner sails by. So of the idea of God. We are to think by it; we are to feel in reference to it; we are to work under its inspiration; we are to live by the power of its life and incentive. The idea of God is illumination and power. It is interpretation, and it is the power of realization. Now for two or three thoughts urging us to this practice in youth. 1. First of all, youth is educable. If a man wants to be a mechanic, or a merchant, or a physician, he begins early. It is essential to the trade or the profession that it shall be so. If a man wants to Christianize his life, to make that life religious, ought he not to begin early, in analogy with other things which he does? Just as the hot wax receives the impression clearly and retains it lastingly, so the impressionable mind of youth receives the stamp of the character of God more clearly and retains it more lastingly than in the subsequent periods of life. 2. Then consider, too, how simple life is when we are young. Look at the business man of forty, and see how his life has left its original simplicity. He is no longer simply a son and a brother, a friend and a student; he is himself a husband and a father, and a business man with a hundred cares and responsibilities. His life has branched out into wonderful complexity. It is intricate, complicated, hard to manage. Now, suppose that the man of forty begins to be religious. How difficult is his problem—to take that single force of the grand idea of God and send it through all these relationships in which he stands! It is like an attempt to thread not one, or ten, or a score, but a hundred needles at once. But, if the man begins early, it is different. He is a son; and he lets the love of God bear upon that relation, and seeks for the power of God to realize the meaning of it. He is a brother, a friend, a student. These are the simple relations in which he stands. Let him bring these under the divine illumination, open his heart to the power that leads him to realize the divine meaning of existence. Then, when his life enlarges, it will be a process of assimilation. Life will be simply the growth of godliness. 3. Then, again, if a man wants to make any high attainment in religion, he must begin early. What is religion but the consecration and the perfection of human life? And, if it be the consecration and perfection of human life, ought not the passion of a man's heart to be for eminence in it? 4. If we begin early, we may expect finally the consummate blessing and power of the religious life—spontaneity in work, spontaneity in noble views of God, in noble views of men and of the future of the world, spontaneity in goodness. (*G. A. Gordon.*) *Human life*.—I. THE SUCCESSIVE STAGES OF HUMAN LIFE. 1. Here we have the growing stage. "The days of thy youth." Beautiful period this! It is the opening spring, full of germinating force and rich promise. 2. Here we have the declining stage. "While the evil days come," etc. The world, looked at through the eye of age, is a very different thing from what it is viewed through the eye of youth. There is no glow in the landscape, no streaks of splendour in the sky; there is a deep shadow resting over all. 3. Here we have the dissolving stage. "Man goeth to his long home." The grave is the long home of his body, eternity the long home of his soul. II. THE

SOVEREIGN OBLIGATION OF HUMAN LIFE. There is an obligation which runs through all these stages, meets man in every step he takes. What is it? "Remember now thy Creator." Two things are necessary to the discharge of this obligation. 1. An intellectual knowledge of the Creator. Three ideas are included in our conception of this transcendent character. (1) Absolute origination. We think of Him as one antecedent to all other existences, existing in the unbroken solitudes of immensity, having in Himself the archetypes of all that ever has been, of all that ever will be; and the power of giving them forms of existence distinct from Himself. (2) Absolute proprietorship. What He has created is His unconditionally, and for ever His. "All souls are mine," etc. There is yet another idea included in the conception of Creator. (3) Absolute obedience. If we all have and are His, ought we not in all things to be regulated by His will? Ought not His will to be our sovereign law in all things? 2. A heart sympathy with Him. What has God done for us, and what has He promised to do? Let the heart be duly impressed with gratitude for the past, and with hope for the future, and we shall assuredly remember Him. III. THE CHOICEST PERIOD OF HUMAN LIFE. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." 1. It is the best period for cultivating a godly life. Lusts lie comparatively dormant, habits are unformed, prejudices have attained no power; the conscience is susceptible, the heart is tender, the intellect is free, etc. 2. The cultivation of a godly life in youth will bless every subsequent period of being. Through manhood, through old age, through death, into eternity, and through all future times a godly life will ensure true blessedness of being. (*Homilist.*) *The irreligious youth:*—"Remember now thy Creator." I. BECAUSE THOSE POWERS OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT TO WHICH RELIGION APPEALS ARE EXERCISED AND DEVELOPED NOW. The youth cannot be in the same position as the infant of days, who cannot think, nor judge, nor will. The rational youth must stand on a footing different from the idiot youth. If God calls us to pursue a certain course, all who have faculties to pursue it are, by virtue of the possession of these powers, under obligation; the possession of the powers being alike the foundation and the evidence of the claim. II. BECAUSE GOD'S CLAIMS EXIST NOW. "Thy Creator." III. BECAUSE THE SEASON OF YOUTH IS FLEETING NOW. Infancy is gone; childhood is no more; but youth, even if but just come, is really going. Soon, therefore, it will be impossible to the irreligious youth to be a religious youth. He may become a godly man, but still he will have been an ungodly youth. IV. BECAUSE DAYS OF EVIL ARE COMING NOW. 1. The evil day of confirmed sinfulness is coming. Acts repeated, and states cherished, are habits. Oh, how mysterious and how mighty is the force of habit! It is a silken thread transformed by invisible processes into an iron chain. 2. The evil day of multiplied temptation is coming. The body daily grows, and with its growth may spring up some fleshly lust—it may be drunkenness, or grosser vice. The mind is gradually developed, and with its development may arise some spiritual temptation—it may be deceitfulness—scepticism—infidelity. Satan is concentrating force and power to stamp deep and clear this die—a sinful character. 3. The evil day of trouble is coming. V. DEATH MAY BE VERY NEAR, AND IS SURELY COMING NOW. VI. OLD AGE BRINGS CORRESPONDING INFIRMITIES; AND IF IT COME TO YOU, IT WILL SEEM TO HAVE COME BUT NOW. The "evening of life" is a common phrase for old age; let not this poetical phraseology mislead you. If old age be, in its calmness and stillness, like evening, remember that it has the duskiness and the chilliness of evening. Years blunt the bodily senses, and equally the susceptibilities of the soul. Who, therefore, in his right mind, will wait for old age, that in it he may "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling"? VII. THE GREATEST FACILITIES EXIST NOW. I speak now of external advantages, I refer to the state of the spirit, and I assert that more aid is furnished by the state of the soul in youth than by the state of the soul in any other period of life. Habits are not so confirmed in youth as in more advanced years, because the confirmation of habits requires time, and much time has not yet been given. VIII. RELIGION WILL GIVE MOST JOY, AND IT WILL SECURE MOST USEFULNESS IF COMMENCED NOW. 1. It will give most pleasure. There is not so much to unlearn as when persons become godly late in life; and unlearning is an irksome process. If there be any pleasure in religion, the amount taken is increased by being tasted early. 2. It will secure most usefulness. Youthful piety exerts an influence peculiar to itself, and God seems to choose for usefulness chiefly those who are godly while young. IX. RUIN MAY OVERTAKE A YOUTH NOW. If ruin overtake you, it were better for you to have died in infancy; nay, it were better never to have been born.

(*S. Martin.*) *Young persons exhorted to remember their Creator*.—I. THE DUTY HERE ENJOINED. 1. The object is our Creator. (1) There was a period when we had no being; had we always been in existence we could have had no Creator; but on the limited period of mortal life, both as it regards its commencement and close, the Scriptures are explicit (Job viii. 9; Ps. xxxix. 5; James iv. 14). (2) We have a Creator, and therefore did not make ourselves; could we have given ourselves existence, the duty enjoined in the text would have referred only to ourselves; but no being can make itself, as that would suppose it acted prior to its existence, which is a manifest contradiction. (3) Our Creator is God; this is one of the first truths of revealed religion (Gen. i. 27; vi. 7; Deut. iv. 32; Mal. ii. 10). 2. The act of remembrance. To "remember our Creator" implies—(1) A previous knowledge of Him. He has made Himself known unto us by the works of His hands (Ps. xix. 1; Rom. i. 20); by the acts of His providence (Ps. civ. 27, 28; Matt. x. 30; Acts xvii. 28). But more especially by the manifestations of His grace (Exod. xxxiv. 6). As a God of grace He pardons our sins, renews our hearts; and to know Him in this character is to have a consciousness that He has actually done this for us. This knowledge can be obtained only by a Divine influence (Matt. xi. 27; xvi. 17). (2) The frequent recollection and actual consciousness of His divine presence; to set the Lord always before us, and to consider Him as a Being essentially present in all places. This remembrance should be—(a) Reverential; His eternal Godhead, terrible justice, and wonderful acts should inspire us with the most profound sentiments of veneration. (b) Affectionate; His infinite love in the gift of His Son, and His amazing mercy in pardoning sin, should lead us to remember Him with feelings of the most ardent attachment. (c) Operative; we should evince that we do remember Him, by shunning all that He abhors, and following all that He enjoins. II. THE PECULIAR PERIOD WHEN THIS DUTY IS TO BE PRACTISED—"Now, in the days of thy youth." 1. Because He is the most worthy object for our remembrance; and that which is most worthy has the first and highest claims upon our attention. 2. Because such a remembrance, at this time, is peculiarly acceptable to God. O how lovely is youthful piety! Under the law, the first-fruits and the first-born were God's sole property; and the buds of being, and the earliest blossoms of youth, are the most acceptable sacrifice that we can offer to our Creator; and shall we neglect these offerings? 3. Because of the comparative ease with which it may be performed. 4. Because the present is the only certain time we can command for doing it; the past is gone, the future may never be ours. 5. From principles of justice: He is our Creator, and therefore justly claims the whole of our service. 6. From principles of gratitude; we owe our all to Him; He remembered us in our low estate; He still remembers us; on the wings of every hour we read His patience. O what a mighty debt of gratitude is due to Him! 7. From principles of self-interest; to remember our Creator is the way to true wisdom, substantial honour, and unfading happiness. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Days of youth*.—We have here—1. The successive stages of human life. 2. The primary obligation of human life. To "remember the Creator." This remembrance of the Creator should be intelligent, loving, practical, permanent. 3. The choicest period of human life. "The days of thy youth." I. The days of youth are days of peculiar ILLUSION. They live in romance. Their theory of life bears but little resemblance to stern reality. Their blooming landscape is but a mirage creation of their own fancy. Look at their views—1. As to life's happiness. In the home which they have painted for themselves there is no cloud, no storm, no blight. But how different they find the reality as they move on through the different stages to old age. 2. As to life's length. Most young people put their death a long way further off than it is. 3. As to life's improbability. Most youths feel that they ought to be religious, and they adjourn the work of spiritual culture till a time in the future, which they consider will be more convenient. But such a time never comes. II. The days of youth are days of peculiar TEMPTATION. 1. Credulity. They are unsuspicious and confiding, and with minds but partially informed with the facts of existence, and untrained to the weighing of evidence, they are ready to accept almost any plausible proposition, especially when it is agreeable to their desires. 2. Carnality. In the first stages of human life animalism is the regnant power. All the pleasures are the pleasures of the sense. 3. Vanity. The conceit of youth is proverbial. They are vain of their appearance, their talents, if they have no wealth or ancestry. 4. Gregariousness. Strong is the tendency in young natures to follow and to blend with others.

III. The days of youth are days of peculiar VALUE. Whilst all the years and hours of man's short life are of priceless value the time of youth is pre-eminently precious; its hours are golden. It is pre-eminently valuable—1. Because of its fleetness. "Youth," says John Foster, "is not like a new garment which we can keep fresh by wearing sparingly, we must wear it daily, and it wears fast away. It is a flower that soon withereth." 2. Because of its possibilities. The possibilities of flowers, fruit, affluent orchards, and waving fields of golden harvest are all shut up in the spring; so it is with youth, the greatness of manhood is in youth. He who wishes to be a great citizen, orator, saint, must begin in youth. (*Homilist.*) *Youthful piety: described and inculcated.*—I. TO SAY WHEREIN YOUTHFUL PIETY CONSISTS. It consists, you will find, in a ready, filial, and grateful remembrance of God—a remembrance which induces acquiescence in the Divine will and subjection to it. II. TO OBIVIATE SOME OBJECTIONS TO IT. 1. It is time enough yet, say some, for youth to think seriously and to be pious. This objection proceeds on the supposition that youth have yet many days and years to come; but how know we what a day or even an hour may bring forth? 2. Youth is the time of enjoyment, say others: young people should enjoy themselves. True; and is there nothing to enjoy in the favour and friendship of our Creator? Nothing to enjoy in freedom from the guilt and from the power of sin? Nothing to enjoy in being good and doing good? And is there any time comparable to youth for the enjoyment of these things? 3. Religion is very well and suitable for old age and infirmity is an objection to youthful piety nearly allied to the foregoing. So it is: but is it, therefore, unsuitable to health and youth? 4. We can repent and be religious some future time, will young people themselves sometimes say, when exhorted to remember now their Creator. But to repent when we will is not in our power. Repentance is the gift of Jesus Christ, and He may righteously withhold to-morrow what we ungratefully refuse to-day. 5. Piety induces gloom and melancholy, it is often further urged. Who are they that say piety induces depression and gloom of spirit? Not the pious, but such as never felt the power of godliness or experienced the joy of faith. Are they, then, to be believed who tell us of what they cannot possibly be judges? 6. Piety interferes with genteel and polite demeanour, it has, too, been said. This objection betrays in those who advance it great ignorance of Scripture and of scriptural character. No: the Gospel which we preach inculcates morals the most correct and chaste, tempers the most gracious, manner the most affable, behaviour the most courteous. 7. It will incur reproach, and possibly it may injure a young man's reputation; and consequently also may retard his advancement in life to be pious too soon, is the final objection to early piety we shall choose to notice. How sordid must be the views of a parent who seeks first for his children any object below "the kingdom of God and His righteousness"! And how must "the honour which cometh of man" be desired and valued above "the honour which cometh of God only" where there exists the fear of disrepute on account of religion! III. TO STATE SOME REASONS FOR IT. 1. It is reasonable in itself—that a creature should remember his Creator; a redeemed creature his Redeemer; and an immortal creature that immortality which awaits him. We execrate ingratitude one towards another: is there nothing offensive in an ungrateful forgetfulness of our Maker? 2. God requires it. Yet, "ye have robbed Me," may God justly say to those of our youth who forget Him and refuse to Him the homage of their hearts. 3. The mind is more susceptible of impression when young. 4. Piety in youth gives a proper bias to the affections. 5. The world will be viewed in a true light. 6. Piety in youth lays a foundation for placidity and calmness in age. 7. Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, will be more abundantly honoured by the devotion of our first years unto His service. IV. TO RECOMMEND IT EARNESTLY TO THE YOUNG AMONG YOU. (*W. Mudge, B.A.*) *The days of thy youth.*—I. WHAT THESE DAYS ARE IN THEMSELVES. 1. They are days most favourable for "remembering" the Lord. It was an appointment of the olden time that the manna was to be gathered in the morning, and for any that waited till late in the day there was none, embodying a lesson the young may well remember. The promise of the Lord is to them that seek Him "early" that they shall find Him. 2. They are the days of special privilege and promise. Think of some of the inspired biographies of some of the most eminent and what they show us of the days of their youth. Joseph, for instance, whose early days must have revealed the kindling purity and nobility that made his life such a power and his very bones an inspiration. Think of Samuel in the days of his youth, in which the mother's

training and the Lord's call show what shall be, as in after days his name stands upon the record of the worthies as "Samuel among them that call upon His name." Turn to the Hebrew youths in Babylon, and, captives as they were, you see the power that gathered around them as in their self-denial they put aside the delicacies of the king's table rather than incur the possibility of sin, and braved the terrors of the lions' den and the fiery furnace that they might be faithful to God. 3. The days of youth are days that are most receptive and most retentive of what may influence them. It follows from this that there should be all possible care that the good should be received and the evil excluded. It is what is first taken into the mind that sinks the deepest and lasts the longest. II. WHAT THEY SHALL BE IF RIGHTLY USED. 1. They shall be days of real and rich blessing. (1) In order to this, however, they must be days of response to the Divine call. (2) There must also be the full acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as your portion. It may involve self-denial, and it will; the Lord lays it down at the very beginning of His service; but that is a noble exercise for the young under any conditions, and in connection with the service of the Lord will bring a rich blessing. 2. Being this, the days of your youth will be days of gracious promise for all the days after. The inspired description of the course is as "the shining light," and not that only, but "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." III. THE RIGHT USE SHOULD BE MADE OF THESE DAYS AT ONCE. 1. It should, because of the proneness there is in youth to put off these things to the future, and how it will grow upon the man. 2. It should, too, because there are so many will seek to lead you into neglect and folly. 3. It should, too, because it will fill you with the divine portion from the beginning. 4. It should be, also, because it will not only give you a blessing for yourselves, but make you a blessing to others. (*J. P. Chown.*) *On the advantages of an early piety:*—I. THE NATURE OF THE ACT OR DUTY HERE ENJOINED; which is, to remember our Creator. To remember God is frequently, and in our most serious and retired thoughts, to consider that there is such a Being as God is; of all power and perfection, who made us and all other things, and hath given us laws to live by suitable to our natures; and will call us to a strict account for our observance or violation of them, and accordingly reward or punish us; very often in this world, and to be sure in the other. It is to revive often in our minds the thoughts of God and of His infinite perfections, and to live continually under the power and awe of these apprehensions. II. WHAT THERE IS IN THE NOTION OF GOD AS OUR CREATOR THAT IS MORE PARTICULARLY APT TO AWAKEN AND OBLIGE MEN TO THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD. 1. Creation is of all others the most sensible and obvious argument of a Deity. Other considerations may work upon our reason and understanding, but this doth, as it were, bring God down to our senses. 2. The creation is a demonstration of God's infinite power. And this consideration is apt to work upon our fear, the most wakeful passion of all others in the soul of man. 3. The creation is a demonstration of the goodness of God to His creatures. This consideration of God, as our Creator, doth naturally suggest to our minds that His goodness brought us into being; and that, if being a benefit, God is the Fountain and Author of it. III. THE REASON OF THE LIMITATION OF THIS DUTY MORE ESPECIALLY TO THIS PARTICULAR AGE OF OUR LIVES. "Now, in the days of thy youth." 1. To engage young persons to begin this great and necessary work of religion betimes, and as soon as ever they are capable of taking it into consideration. 2. To engage young persons to set about this work presently, and not to defer it and put it off to the future, as most are apt to do. 3. And how much reason there is to press both these considerations upon young persons I shall endeavour to show in the following particulars. (1) Because in this age of our lives we have the greatest and most sensible obligation to remember God our Creator: "in the days of our youth," when the blessing and benefit of life is now, and the memory of it fresh upon our minds. (2) The reason will be yet stronger to put us upon this, if we consider that, notwithstanding the great obligation which lies upon us to "remember our Creator in the days of our youth," we are most apt at that time of all others to forget Him. For that which is the great blessing of youth is also the great danger of it, I mean, the health and prosperity of it; and, though men have then least reason, yet they are most apt to forget God in the height of pleasure and in the abundance of all things. (3) Because this age is of all others the fittest and best to begin a religious course of life. And this does not contradict the former argument, though it seems to do so. For as it is true of children that they are most prone to be idle, and yet fittest to learn, so, in the case we are speaking of, both are true;

that youth is an age wherein we are too apt, if left to ourselves, to forget God and religion, and yet at the same time fittest to receive the impressions of it. (4) This is the most acceptable time of all others, because it is the first of our age. Our blessed Lord took great pleasure to see little children come unto Him; an emblem of the pleasure He takes that men should list themselves betimes in His service. St. John was the youngest of all the disciples, and our Saviour had a very particular kindness and affection for him; for he is said to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved." (5) This age of our life may, for anything we know, be the only time we may have for this purpose; and if we cast off the thoughts of God and defer the business of religion to old age, intending, as we pretend, to set about it at that time, we may be cut off before that time comes, and turned into hell with the people that forget God. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *The duty and advantages of early piety*.—1. Though we should begin to serve God even from our youth, our earliest service comes long after His favours. Before ever we come to years of discretion we have contracted a vast debt of gratitude to our Creator and Preserver; a debt which might make us very uneasy, because we can never discharge it, if there were not a pleasure in endeavouring to pay it, and if such endeavour were not all that God requires at our hands. 2. We should serve God in our youth, because that is the way to make the practice of our duty easy to us; and because, if we set out wrong, it is very hard afterwards to amend. It is true that persons have repented, though late, and have delivered themselves from the bondage of sin. There are examples of it, that none may despair; and those examples are few, that none may presume. 3. We should serve God in our youth, because, as virtue will have the first possession of us, we shall not be able to change for the worse without an uncommon resolution to do ill. The first love is usually the strongest and the most lasting. 4. Youth is also the time when, on several accounts, we are better able to serve God than we are in a more advanced age, if we have neglected our duty before. There are good qualities and favourable dispositions which often accompany it. Thus, in youth properly educated, there is a sincerity not yet lost by the practice of deceit and dissimulation; there is a modesty which is both a guard to virtue and a check to sinful actions; there is a respect for parents and masters, the natural result of a state of dependence; there is a flexibility and aptness to receive instruction, which lessens as we grow up, if self-love, pride, and conceit increase faster than understanding and judgment, and make us hasty, obstinate, and perverse; there is, lastly, a lively heat of temper, an activity both of body and mind, which, as it is dangerous when it is employed in the service of vice, so it can make a speedy progress in virtue. 5. Yet youth, with all its advantages, hath its disadvantages, and is the time when we are the most tempted to forget God; and therefore ought this precept to be inculcated upon that thoughtless age. 6. If there be joy in heaven over a sinner who repents, and God in the Scripture be represented under the image of the father in the parable, running forth to meet and to embrace his lost son as soon as he returns, yet it is very reasonable to conclude that the son who, from his youth, serves and never leaves his heavenly Father, must be dearer to Him. After we have sought happiness where happiness is not to be found, then to condemn our folly, to consider, to amend, and to bring forth the fruits of repentance is a wise part. But it is a wiser and a more generous behaviour to serve God before we have served other masters, not driven to Him, as to a last refuge, by afflictions, or disappointments, or by an immediate sense of danger, or by a weariness and dislike of the world. 7. Another reason for which youth should be well spent is the uncertainty of life. 8. We should serve God in our earlier days with a view to the ensuing days, which we may expect in the course of our life. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth," says Solomon, "while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." They will certainly come sooner or later, unless sudden death prevent them; and, therefore, if we be wise, we shall in our youth, before they overtake us, prepare to meet them, and provide ourselves all the assistance which we can procure to lessen those evils, and to support and comfort us under them. And what can they be, unless the favour of God, and the sense of a life spent in laudable industry, in acquiring useful knowledge, in discharging our duty to our Creator, in doing kind offices to our neighbour, in amending our faults, and improving in virtue? These are a treasure of which force and fraud cannot deprive us; which lies out of the reach of all enemies and all accidents. The calamities which fall upon us will then lose much of their weight; old age will

be unto us only a nearer approach to everlasting youth; and we shall meet death, if not with cheerfulness, at least with decency and resignation. 9. To these convincing reasons for an early piety I shall only add this, that it is in no respect hard and burthensome. Youth is cheerful; and so is religion. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *Early piety*.—I. It is the first advantage of early piety, and our first obligation to cultivate it, THAT OUR DUTY TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS THEREBY RENDERED EASY AND PLEASING TO US. That custom and practice render everything easy, and most things pleasant to us, is universally known and confessed; and will in a peculiar degree be found true of piety towards God. In this case, in addition to the delight naturally arising from the performance of what is familiar to us, we shall have on the same side the approbation of our own hearts; the pleasure of habit improved by the consciousness of duty. II. THE POWER AND EFFECTS OF CUSTOM will furnish yet another argument in favour of early piety; for they will show the danger of contracting opposite habits by showing the difficulty of correcting them. The reproaches of a wounded conscience, the conviction of having offended God, the anxiety to be restored to His favour, and the uncertainty whether that favour can now be deserved and obtained; all these considerations alarm and oppress the mind of him who is grown old in transgression; and form so many difficulties in the way of his returning to the hallowed paths of virtue and religion. He has, indeed, a double task to perform, to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well; and the abuse of his youth and health in the service of sin has left this task, with all its difficulties, to infirmity and old age. III. It will be another recommendation of early piety, THAT IT IS LIKELY TO BECOME THE MOST ACCEPTABLE TO ITS OBJECT; because the most suitable to his character and our own. In youth is generally found a sincerity and simplicity of heart, which recommend every part of human duty, and especially our duty to Him to whom all hearts are open. In youth, while not yet corrupted by intercourse with a corrupt world, are generally observed a diffidence and modesty, which not only form a constant guard to purity and integrity, but which bid fair to ripen into humility and devotion. In youth we find the greatest aptness to learn. IV. ONE UNFORTUNATE QUALITY IN OUR YOUTH, HOWEVER, TOO OFTEN COUNTERACTS THESE FAVOURABLE DISPOSITIONS, and retards their progress in piety. Too many of them are careless and thoughtless, apt to neglect the serious consideration of their Maker and His laws. Too many of them show a levity and fickleness of mind and temper, which disinclines them to the solemn offices of religion, and prevents the performance of those offices with due fervency and steadiness. V. It is another recommendation of early piety, and another obligation to the practice of it, that we shall thereby discharge, as far as WE ARE REQUIRED TO DISCHARGE IT, A DEBT OF GRATITUDE AND JUSTICE. The first tribute of our faculties is naturally due to Him who gave them. Children, then, should be early taught to meditate upon the blessings of their Maker. VI. Our last recommendation of early piety shall be drawn from a very obvious, but very interesting, source, THE SHORTNESS AND UNCERTAINTY OF HUMAN LIFE. Youth is not only the most proper season to engage in the service of our God, but perhaps the only season that may be allowed us. (*W. Barrow, LL.D.*) *An old sermon for young hearers*.—I. WHAT IS IT THAT SOLOMON COUNSELS YOUNG PEOPLE TO REMEMBER? He says, "thy Creator"; but what about God does He desire his hearers to keep in mind? 1. His existence, as He proves it. And He proves it most clearly by creating us; He is our Creator: He made us, every one of us, and He now owns us for His possession. 2. God's character, as He exhibits it. The heathen think God is cruel; so they insist He must be propitiated and pleased by bloody sacrifices. 3. God's providence, as He exercises it. Not a moment passes without our having His care. There was one very pleasant story told among the ancients about a person called Erichthonius: they said he was very comely in his body, from the waist upwards, but he had his thighs and legs like the tail of an eel, small and deformed; for a long time he did not understand that he was different from the rest of mankind, but as soon as he became conscious of his hateful weakness, he grew so melancholy that God pitied him; and then He showed him, in a dream, what gave him a fresh and splendid idea; that is to say, this poor shapeless creature was the inventor of the chariot or carriage, whereby his own want could be supplied; so God benefited him, and so he became a benefactor himself to men. Once when this story was related to a child, she suddenly said: "I suppose it is not true exactly; but if it had been, it would have been very kind, and just like God to do it, too." 4. God's Word, as He has revealed it. The Bible is a message sent directly from our Maker; so He expects us all, young and old, to

read it, and find out what it means. The Scriptures do principally teach what we are to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man. 5. God's Church, as He has organized it. He gave His only begotten Son that He might be made Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." II. WHEN, SPECIALLY, ARE WE TO REMEMBER OUR CREATOR? "Now, in the days of thy youth." 1. In the beginning, remember that the young can be Christians. Why not? All they have to do is to come and ask Christ to take them, and make them His children. 2. Remember, therefore, that it is easier for young people to be Christians than it is for others. The spirit of religion is precisely that of a little child, to start with; and a religious career is exquisitely in accordance with a youthful disposition (Matt. xviii. 3). 3. Remember, once again, that the young have often become Christians. In the Scriptures we have the account of Jeremiah, of Paul's sister's son, of Timothy, of John Mark. In the primitive Church the names come to us of Polycarp, who must have loved Christ when he was four years old; and Justin Martyr has often been quoted as saying that there were many boys and girls "who had been considered disciples of the Lord in their childhood, and continued uncorrupted all their lives." Later in history, we know Jonathan Edwards was converted before he was seven, and Matthew Henry before he was eleven years old, Isaac Watts before he reached nine. 4. Remember that the young ought always to be Christians. Many are the children of faithful training and of many prayers. God is true to His covenant, and "the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (C. S. Robinson, D.D.) *The warning not to forget God*:—We ought to mind this warning—I. FOR THE LORD'S SAKE. "I wish I could mind God as my little dog minds me," said a little boy, looking thoughtfully at his shaggy friend—"he always seems so pleased to mind, and I don't." That little dog obeyed his young master for his master's sake. He really loved him, and tried to show this love by the cheerful, ready way in which he obeyed him. This was the right thing for him to do; and it is just what God expects us to do. II. FOR OUR OWN SAKE. When we really begin to remember God, and to keep His commandments, God says to each of us, as He said to the Israelites in old time—"from this day will I bless you." And God's blessing is worth more to us than all the world besides. "Remember now thy Creator," was once said to a little boy. "Not yet," said the boy, as he busied himself with his bat and ball; "when I grow older I will think about it." The little boy grew to be a young man. "Remember now thy Creator," his conscience said to him. "Not yet," said the young man; "I am now about to begin my trade; when I see my business prosper, I shall have more time than I can command now." His business did prosper. "Remember now thy Creator," his conscience whispered to him. "Not yet," said the man of business; "my children must now have my care; when they are settled in life, I shall be better able to attend to the claims of religion." He lived to be a grey-headed old man. "Remember now thy Creator," was the voice which conscience once more addressed to him. "Not yet," was still his cry; "I shall soon retire from business, and then I shall have nothing else to do but read and pray." Soon after this he died, without becoming a Christian. He put off to another time what he should have attended to when young, and that caused the loss of his soul. Those two little words—"Not yet"—were his ruin. III. FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS. God's promise to Abraham, when he began to serve Him, was that he should be a blessing. And God says the same thing to all His people. And not only by our words, but by our actions, and by our prayers, we may be doing good, all the time, to those about us. (R. Newton, D.D.) *The young man's task*:—To them which are young Solomon shows what advantage they have above the aged; like a ship, which, seeing another ship sink before her, looks about her, pulls down her sail, turneth her course, and escapes the sands which would swallow her as they had done the other. So they which are young need not try the snares and allurements of the world, or the issues and effects of sin, which old men have tried before them, but take the trial and experience of others, and go a nearer way to obtain their wished desires. That is this, saith Solomon: if thou wouldst have any settled peace or heart joy in this vain or transitory world, which thou hast been seeking all the time since thou wert born, thou must "remember thy Creator," which did make thee, which hath elected thee, which hath redeemed thee, which daily preserveth thee, which will for ever glorify thee. And as the kind remembrance of a friend doth recreate the mind, so to think and

meditate upon God will supply thy thoughts, dispel thy grief, and make thee cheerful, as the sight of the ark comforted David; for joy, and comfort, and pleasure is where God is, as light, and cheerfulness, and beauty is where the sun is. Now if thou wouldst have this joy, and comfort, and pleasure to be long, and wouldst escape those thousand miseries, vexations, and vanities, which Solomon, by many weary and tedious trials, sought to make naked before thee, and yet held all but vanity when he had found the way, thou must "remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth" at the first spring-time, and then thy happiness shall be as long as thy life, and all thy thoughts while thou remainest on earth a foretaste of the glory of heaven. This is the sum of Solomon's counsel. Can a child forget his father? Is not God our Father? Therefore, who is too young to remember Him, seeing the child doth know his father? As the deepest wounds had need to be first tended, so the unstablest minds have need to be first confirmed. In this extremity is youth, as Solomon shows them before he teacheth them; for in the last verse of the former chapter he calleth youth "vanity," as if he should speak all evil in a word, and say that youth is even the age of sin. Therefore, when he had showed young men their folly under the name of vanity, like a good tutor he taketh them to school, and teacheth them their duty, "Remember thy Creator," as though all sin were the forgetfulness of God; and all our obedience came from this remembrance, that God created us after His own image, in righteousness and holiness, to serve Him here for a while, and after to inherit the joys which He hath Himself, which, if we did remember, doubtless it would make us ashamed to think, and speak, and do as we are wont. It is an old saying, Repentance is never too late; but it is a true saying, Repentance is never too soon. Therefore, we are commanded to run that we may obtain (1 Cor. ix. 24), which is the swiftest pace of man. The cherubims were portrayed with wings before the place where the Israelites prayed (Exod. xxv. 20), to show how quickly they went about the Lord's business. The hound which runs but for the hare, girds forth so soon as he sees the hare start; the hawk which flieth but for the partridge, taketh her flight so soon as she spieth the partridge spring; so we should follow the word so soon as it speaketh, and come to our Master so soon as He calleth. If our children be deformed in their youth, we never look to see them well favoured; so if the mind be planted in sin, seldom any goodness buddeth out of that stock. For virtue must have a time to grow, the seed is sown in youth, which cometh up in age. Try thy strength but with one of thy sins, and see what shifts, what excuses, what delays it will find, and how it will importune thee to let it alone, as the devil tormented the child before he went out; if thou canst not discharge one vice that thou hast accustomed thyself unto, when all thy vices are become customs, how wilt thou wrestle with them? Therefore we bend the tree while it is a twig, and break the horse while he is a colt, and teach the dog while he is a whelp, and tame the eagle while he is young. Youth is like the day to do all our works in. For when the night of age cometh, then every man saith, I might have been learned, I might have been a teacher, I might have been like him, or him, but the harvest was past before I began to sow, and winter is come, now my fruit should ripe. Thus every man that is old saith, he cannot do that which he thought to do, and orieth with Solomon, Catechize the child in his youth, and he will remember it when he is old; so corrupt him in his youth, and he will remember that too. There be not many Lots, but many linger like Lot, loath to depart, until they see the fire burn. If the angel had not snatched him away, Lot had perished with Sodom for his delay. There be not five foolish virgins and five wise, but five for one knook when the door is shut. There be not many Simeons, but many as old as Simeon, which never yet embraced Christ in their hearts. They thought to repent before they were so old, yet now they dont for age, they are not old enough to repent yet. Is this to seek the kingdom of heaven first, or last, or not at all? Woe to the security, woe to the stubbornness, woe to the drowsiness of this age. (*H. Smith.*) **While the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.—Preparation for old age:**—Old age is a distant port for which the whole human race start, toward which they steer. More than half perish at the commencement of the voyage. Thousands and thousands are born who should have had a right in life, but whose hold is so brittle, that the first wind shakes them, and they fall like untimely fruit. Some fall by accident, some in the discharge of duties which call them to offer up their lives as a sacrifice for the common weal. The greatest number, however, are deprived of a good old age by their own ignorance or by their

own misconduct; and those that reach that old age too often find that it is a land of sorrow. Now old age was not designed to be mournful but beautiful. It is the close of a symphony, beautiful in its inception, rolling on grandly, and terminating in a climax of sublimity. It is harmonious and admirable, according to the scheme of nature. The charms of infancy, the hopes of the spring of youth, the vigour of manhood, and the serenity and tranquillity, the wisdom and peace of old age—all these together constitute the true human life, with its beginning, middle, and end—a glorious epoch. Every one of us, but especially those who are beginning in life, is aiming at a serene and happy old age, and I propose to put before you some considerations which shall direct your attention to the methods of attaining it. 1. There are many physical elements which enter into the preparation for a profitable and happy old age. The human body is an instrument of pleasure and use, built for eighty years' wear. His body is placed in a world adapted to nourish and protect it. Nature is congenial. There are elements enough of mischief in it, if a man pleases to find them out. A man can wear his body out as quickly as he pleases, destroy it if he will; but, after all, the great laws of nature are nourishing laws, and, comprehensively regarded, nature is the universal nurse, the universal physician of our race, guarding us against evil, warning us of it by incipient pains, setting up signals of danger—not outwardly, but inwardly—and cautioning us by sorrows and by pains for our benefit. Every immoderate draft which is made by the appetites and passions is so much sent forward to be cashed in old age. You may sin at one end, but God takes it off at the other. I do not object to mirth or gaiety, but I do object to any man making an animal of himself by living for the gratification of his own animal passions. Excess in youth, in regard to animal indulgences, is bankruptcy in old age. For this reason, I deprecate late hours, irregular hours, or irregular sleep. People ask me frequently, "Do you think that there is any harm in dancing?" No, I do not. There is much good in it. "Do you, then, object to dancing-parties?" No; in themselves, I do not. But where unkitt youth, unripe muscle, unsettled and unhardened nerves, are put through an excess of excitement, treated with stimulants, fed irregularly and with unwholesome food, surrounded with gaiety which is excessive, and which is protracted through hours when they should be asleep, I object, not because of the dancing, but because of the dissipation. But there are many that I perceive are wasting their lives and destroying their old age, not through their passions, but through their ambition, and in the pursuit of laudable objects. I know of many artists that are wearing out their lives, day after day, with preternatural excitement of the brain; yet their aims are transcendently excellent. I know of musicians that are wearing out, night and day; yet their ambition is upward and noble. They are ignorant that they are wearing out their body by the excitement of their brains. While alcoholic stimulants waste and destroy life, and prevent a happy old age, the same thing is also done by moral stimulants. The latter is not as beastly, but it is just as wasteful of health. Whatever prematurely wears out the thinking machinery, or destroys health prematurely, carries bankruptcy into old age. 2. There ought, also, to be wisdom in secular affairs, in the preparation by the young for the coming of old age. Foresight is a Christian virtue. Every man should make such provision for himself as that he shall not be dependent upon others. Provision for moderate riches, which too often defeats itself. If men were more moderate in their expectations; if, when they had obtained a reasonable competency, they secured that from the perils of commercial reverses, more men, I think, would go into old age serene and happy. 3. In looking upon old age, we are forcibly struck with the necessity of taking pains early, and all the way through life, to accumulate stores for social enjoyment. Sociability is a part of Christian duty. Every man should take great care not to cut himself off from the sympathies of human life. Old men should take care that they be not deprived of enjoyment in the society of the young; and if a man would derive comfort from the young in his old age, he must cultivate an attachment for the young in his early life. In youth and middle age you are to secure the provision that shall supply you in old age, if you are to be nourished and made happy on such joys as these. Be not, then, selfish in your youth. Grow to your fellow-men, instead of growing away from them, and strive to live more and more in sympathy with them and for them. 4. Let me speak of the intellectual resources that are to help you in old age. Education has a more important relation to manhood than it has to the making of your outside fortune.

If you are to be a lawyer, a physician, a minister, or a teacher, you need an education in order to succeed in your calling; but if you belong to none of these callings, you need an education to succeed in your manhood. Education means the development of what is in man; and every man ought to be developed, not because he can make money thereby, but because he can make manhood thereby. Education is due to your manhood. Keep your lamp full of oil, and lay up such stores of intellectual provision, that when you go into old age, if one resource fails you, you can try another. If you have learned to look under your feet every day while young, and to cull the treasures of truth which belong to theology, natural history, and chemistry; if every fly has furnished you a study; if the incrustation of the frost is a matter of interest; if the trees that come in spring, and the birds that populate them, the flowers of the meadow, the grass of the field, the fishes that disport themselves in the water—if all of these are so many souvenirs of the working hand of your God, you will find, when you come into your old age, that you have great enjoyment therein. Let me, therefore, recommend you to commit much to memory. Oh, how much a man may store up against old age! What a price is put into the hands of the young wherewith to get wisdom! What provisions for old age do they squander and throw away! It is a great thing so to have lived that the best part of life shall be its evening. October, the ripest month of the year, and the richest in colours, is a type of what old age should be. 5. I have reserved for the last the most important, namely, the spiritual, preparation for old age. It is a beautiful thing for a man, when he comes into old age, to have no more preparation to make. If piety is the garment you have worn through a long and virtuous life, you may stand in your old age in the certainty of faith, waiting only that you may pass from glory to glory. A part of this spiritual preparation consists, I think, in living all the time with the distinct consciousness that our life is a joined one; that the best part of it is that which lies beyond; and that we are not to live for the life that lies between one and eighty, but for that which lies between one and eternity. The habit of associating all your friends and friendships with this future life, while it will afford you great comfort and strength all the way through life, will give its choicest fruits and benefits in old age. As you grow old, childhood's companions die around you every year; but if you have been living a true Christian life, although the world may seem desolate for a time, yet your thought is this: "My companions, my fellow-workers, have gone before me; I am left alone in the dreary world, but am every day being brought closer and closer to that world of everlasting blessedness. One has gone before; another has gone; the wife of my bosom, my eldest child, one after another of my children, and of their children, have gone; one after another of my neighbours and the friends of my youth have gone, and I am left behind; but I am close upon their steps. They are all there waiting for me. I have but a few days to wait, and I shall be blessed again with their high and holy society." (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Ver. 2. The clouds return after the rain.—*Sorrow unspeakable*:—Coming home from the burial of his little Agnes, the late Nehemiah Adams, D.D., of Boston, drew out of his pocket the ribbon-tied key of her casket. "I thought for a few minutes that I should lose my reason," he writes. "The clouds returned after the rain," and they were very dark and distressing. And who has not had similar experiences! And sometimes they are exquisitely painful as well as sorrowful, as when conscience reproaches us for unkindness, or remissness, or for hasty words and cruel alienation, or neglect of duty, as we hang over the coffin of a husband or wife, or parent or child, or friend, or come back from the new-made grave. The unnamed, unspeakable agony of a reproving conscience, when all redress or confession is impossible, is harder to bear than the blow itself. The after-cloud has no "silver lining"; it is murky, dismal, and almost unbearable, for it abides, and there is no relief from it. Let us be careful in life to give no occasion for such return of the clouds after the rain.

Ver. 3. Those that look out of the windows be darkened.—*Windows*:—In the description of the infirmities of old age, the window doubtless stands for the eyes, with lashes like lattice-work of an Oriental house, and the fringe of the iris regulating the light as a curtain. Observe that it is said, not that the windows, but "those that look out of them" are darkened: the reference, therefore, being not to the failing eyesight, as many have supposed, but rather to the growing

dullness of the inner person, the mind, which takes less and less interest in the world as one advances towards senility. A person may be blind in years, yet young in heart, if he only keeps alert to the life about him. Think of Ranke beginning his "Universal History" at eighty-three years of age, and finishing his seventh volume at ninety-one! The venerable Kaiser Wilhelm not long before his death was asked by his daughter if he had not better rest a little. "No," he replied, "I will have plenty of time to rest by and by." In a call upon George Bancroft, at eighty-eight years of age, I found him as full of questions about men and things that he thought I knew of as if I were the representative of old times and he the interviewer. The eyes of such men may be dim, but the spirits that look out of them are not "darkened." They are the really senile people who pull down the curtains of selfishness on amiable curiosity, on generous solicitude for the evils of society, and on delight in the good of the world, though they have not yet come to wear glasses. Let us keep at the windows until God closes them by dropping over them the curtain of the last night. And then, when the dusk of life's eventide has fallen around us, when secular things do turn dim, we may look up through the window at the infinite sky, and see the stars of a better world coming out. (*J. M. Ludlow, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. The doors shall be shut in the streets.—*Doors*:—Literally, "double doors." This occurs in the description of the decrepitude of an old man: "The keepers of the house (the arms) shall tremble, and the strong men (the legs) shall bow themselves, and the grinders (the teeth) cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows (our natural interest in the world) be darkened, and the double doors shall be shut in the street." By "double doors" is meant those bodily functions which have double organs—eyes, ears, nostrils, lips, the openings of sense and communication with the world. It is a great thing to have the house of the soul stored with good, with true thoughts, bright hopes, sweet loves, comfortable conscience, the various food of Divine promises, and best of all is to have God, the source of all good, inside with us when the double doors no longer open. I once heard a man cursing with screeching rage his coming blindness, and a paralytic swearing at his fate with half-palsied tongue, struggling impotently like a convict resisting the shutting of the doors of his cell. But, on the other hand, some of the sweetest-tempered persons are blind or deaf. Beethoven was full of music though deaf; the music was stored there in his knowledge of harmony through previous study. Milton's mind was full of light, though he was blind; the vast stores of knowledge were laid in before the doors were closed. (*J. M. Ludlow, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. The almond-tree shall flourish.—*The almond-tree in blossom*:—In January, Palestine is adorned with the blossoming of the almond-tree. It breathes its life into that winter month as a promise of God sometimes lightens up and sweetens the coldness and desolation of a sorrowing spirit. When the almond-tree was in full bloom, it must have looked like some tree before our window on a winter's morning, after a nightfall of snow, when its brightness is almost insufferable, every stem a white and feathery plume. Now you are ready to see the meaning of the text. Solomon was giving a full-length portrait of an aged man. By striking figures of speech, he sets forth his trembling and decrepitude, and then comes to describe the whiteness of his locks by the blossoming of the almond-tree. It is the master-touch of the picture, for I see in that one sentence not only the appearance of the hair, but an announcement of the beauty of old age. The white locks of a bad man are but the gathered frosts of the second death, but "a hoary head is a crown of glory" if it be found in the way of righteousness. There may be no colour in the cheek, no lustre in the eye, no spring in the step, no firmness in the voice, and yet around the head of every old man whose life has been upright and Christian there hovers a glory brighter than ever shook in the white tops of the almond-tree. If the voice quiver, it is because God is changing it into a tone fit for the celestial choral. If the hand tremble, it is because God is unloosing it from worldly disappointments to clasp it on ringing harp and waving palm. If the hair has turned, it is only the grey light of heaven's dawn streaming through the scant locks. The falling of this aged Christian's staff will be the signal for the heavenly gate to swing open. The scattering of the almond blossoms will only discover the setting of the fruit. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **Because man goeth to his long home.**—*Man's long home*:—Man

is on his way to a long home: his lot in his long home will be determined by the manner in which he walks that homeward way; therefore, in his homeward walk he ought to "remember his Creator in the days of his youth," and to "fear God" all his life long. It might be made to run thus: Live wisely that you may die happily. Live obediently unto God in this world that you may live joyfully with God in the next world. I. **THE HOME-GOING.** "Man goeth home." He does not enter it by a sudden leap or bound, but he is, as on a journey, continuously progressing nearer and nearer to it. This is life—a constant home-going. There are what we may call years of preparation for the conscious start. When the infant first breathes these mortal airs; when the child is growing in stature and developing in mind and soul, scarcely thinking, or even knowing that, right on before, there lies an eternal destiny; and when the youth is just catching the faint glimmerings of consciousness as to duty and responsibility, and the need for heroic spiritual efforts—then is the time of a silent equipment, physically and morally, for entering on the hard, rough way of the homeward journey. And only at its close is the thought borne in on the soul that life is not to be considered as an automatic, purposeless thing, but is a well-marked and controllable progression which ends somewhere in a "long home." When that thought is first clearly and earnestly realized by a boy or girl, then the real conscious start in the home-going is made. It usually happens, if not earlier, when the young people are in their teens. They can, at the very outset, if only they will, bound forward and gain splendid spiritual lengths. They have ardent affections, they have burning enthusiasms, which can go out untrammelled to what is highest and best. They have not yet entangled themselves with evil habits which have to be sternly battled with before they can be flung off. They have not yet come under the burden of life's many cares, which sometimes make the feet heavy and slow in the homeward way. Are your eyes dimmer, or your ears duller, or your limbs feeble, or your appetites blunter, or your hair whiter and scantier, or your soul less enthusiastic than in other days? Then, these are the Divine monitors telling that you are not to be always here—that, in your progressive home-going, you are fast ripening for the final exit. II. **THE LONG HOME.** "Man goeth to his long home," or, as the Hebrew has it, to "his house of eternity." Used by other and earlier writers, this may have been only a synonym for the grave; but more than this was meant by the writer of our text, for in ver. 7 he speaks of "the dust returning to the dust as it was, and the spirit returning to God who gave it." So the "long home" in his mind was, for the body the grave, and for the spirit an existence within the veil. May we not, therefore, think of man's "long home" as having an outer and an inner court? The outer court is the grave. That is the "long home" to which our bodies are daily, hourly, going—our poor bodies, which we deck and pamper, and on which we bestow such thought and care. The inner court is within the veil. And back from it, when the spirit enters, there is no returning to these earthly scenes. It is "our house of eternity"—an eternal home. About that unseen world we know so little that it is not wise to say much. III. **THE MOURNERS LEFT BEHIND.** When a man enters the long bright home, he receives the "Welcome home!" of the Saviour and of all the blessed. But his home-going throws a shadow on the earth: it causes an aching void, a bitter lamentation. "The mourners go about the street." Rather since they have gone to join in "the song of them that feast," ought we not to strive to catch the blessed infection of their celestial joy, and put on festal robes, and sing hymns of triumph over their departure? This is what we would do were the Christian hope and faith sure and strong within us. This is what we are asked to do. Listen, my mourning friends, listen! Your Saviour speaks to you, and says, Your loved ones have but come to their bright long home with Me. "Then why make ye this ado, and weep?" (*T. Young, B.D.*) "*The eternal house*":—By some scholars "long home" is translated "enduring house," or "perpetual house." It seems to them that the writer looked upon earth as the embodiment of the perishable, and that beyond the earth man passes into the unchangeable. This world is the place where silver cords are loosed, and golden bowls broken, and where the mourners go about the streets; beyond this all these dissolving views cease, and the spirit dwells amid the eternal. Its house is for ever, its love is for ever, its life is like that of God. I shall ask you to think upon this idea of "an eternal house" for man. Now that science is indirectly assailing this future house—assailing it by placing man among the mere productions of Nature, among the plants and the fishes and the birds—it becomes us all to place

as against such a form of science the longings of the mind, and to find in the soul's yearnings an antidote to the coldness of materialism. We must array spirit against dust. All that materialism rests upon is an analogy: the tree dies, the insect dies, the bird and the fish die, and therefore man dies and becomes nothing. But spiritualism can summon as good an analogy. It can say God lives. He passes on from age to age, and hence man passes onward parallel with this Maker. This argument assumes only the existence of a God. With that datum all becomes easy, for man sustains a closer resemblance to Deity than to the tree, the bird, the fish. He is an image of God, and hence analogy places man in the Divine class rather than in the mundane class, and makes man a partaker of the long being of Deity rather than of the short career of the vegetable or brute world. The analogy of man and God is as rational as the analogy of man and dust. All we need do in order to escape the annihilation inferred from material philosophy is to place man in the category of spirit, and then claim for him a parallelism with Deity. We shall not, however, argue the question of immortality. We design only to ask our hearts to ponder upon the idea of the "eternal house" of man, and see how grand it is, and what a bracing atmosphere surrounds it. No one carrying such a mind and soul as man is endowed with has any right to move along through these formative years without enveloping himself in the best possible atmosphere of truth, or of dream at least, if positive truth refuse to come. As invalids flee from low, damp valleys to climb up into mountain air, that their blood may find pure nutriment and flow with new life, so the soul and intellect born into the valley of ignorance should fly from the miasma, and seek mountain heights of belief and hope. There is no one reflection which has so commended the "eternal house" to me as the thought that this house is transient—painfully, almost unjustly transient. The children of earth are so pitilessly swept away into the tomb, with all their friendships and studies and arts and happiness and longings, that we are plunged into deep wonderment whether there is a God of love and wisdom all around this earth, as close as its atmosphere, and warm as the tropic sunshine. To preserve to us the idea of God comes this idea of the "perpetual house," an idea born out of the tears of earth, as a rose out of rain. Almost all that is valuable in this world lies back of its present living souls. The heroes that live are but a handful to the heroes that are gone. All the arts we now enjoy are the fruits of intellects and souls that have gone away. Our state was purchased for us by hands that have dissolved into dust. All the ministers of religion now living are not equal in power to the one Christ who died at Jerusalem eighteen hundred years ago. What has become of this sublime past—this past whose temples of law and art and worship are crumbling by the Nile, and by the great sea, and by the Tiber, and are covered with old ivy in England? There is but one answer worthy of our minds or our hearts: and that is, that this impressive human race has been called not to oblivion, but to its "Eternal House." These phenomena of earth, this great past display of intellect and love and learning and wisdom and morals, belong not to the realm of material, but to the realm of the Divine; and hence, as God reaches over ages, and is not subject to decay and annihilation, so He draws His children along after Him to His perpetual mansion. This is the only solution of man's being that does not make reason and morals and education and hope all unmeaning terms, and does not make the human soul a sounding brass full of noise without music. The words of the text, "eternal house," not only recall to mind a lost past to be provided for, but they awaken in our mind thoughts about the future. Our earth will some time cease to be habitable by man. As its geologic forms show that it did once at least become uninhabitable, and by perhaps some sudden extinguishment of the sun did become a globe of ice such that the great mammals were frozen to death as they stood; and as at some other epoch this same little globe did all melt and become liquid as a globe of molten iron, so again in the coming centuries it will cease, suddenly or slowly, to be the home of man, and nowhere upon its whole surface will there remain even a Selkirk for its deep solitude. It must be that from a star of such vicissitudes, from a star where death comes in a few years to all, and where it came in thirty-three years to such a being as Jesus Christ, and from which one hundred and fifty times all the dear hearts upon it have been swept away, the Creator is transferring these ephemeral myriads to a more lasting home. There must be, somewhere, a "perpetual house," into which we shall all fall when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved. (*D. Swing.*) *On death:*—

I. CONSIDER THE DEATH OF INDIFFERENT PERSONS; if any can be called indifferent

to whom we are so nearly allied as brethren by nature, and brethren in mortality. When we observe the funerals that pass along the streets, or when we walk along the monuments of death, the first thing that naturally strikes us is the undistinguishing blow with which that common enemy levels all. One day, we see carried along the coffin of the smiling infant; the flower just nipped as it began to blossom in the parents' view; and the next day, we behold a young man, or young woman, of blooming form and promising hopes, laid in an untimely grave. While the funeral is attended by a numerous, unconcerned company, who are discoursing to one another about the news of the day, or the ordinary affairs of life, let our thoughts rather follow to the house of mourning, and represent to themselves what is going on there. There, we should see a disconsolate family, sitting in silent grief, thinking of the sad breach that is made in their little society; and, with tears in their eyes, looking to the chamber that is now left vacant, and to every memorial that presents itself of their departed friend. By such attention to the woes of others, the selfish hardness of our hearts will be gradually softened, and melted down into humanity.

II. CONSIDER THE DEATH OF OUR FRIENDS. Then, indeed, is the time to weep. Let not a false idea of fortitude, or mistaken conceptions of religious duty, be employed to restrain the bursting emotion. Let the heart seek its relief in the free effusion of just and natural sorrow. It is becoming in every one to show, on such occasions, that he feels as a man ought to feel. At the same time, let moderation temper the grief of a good man and a Christian. He must not sorrow like those who have no hope. They whom we have loved still live, though not present to us. They are only removed into a different mansion in the house of the common Father. In due time, we hope to be associated with them in these blissful habitations. Until this season of reunion arrive, no principle of religion discourages our holding correspondence of affection with them by means of faith and hope. Meanwhile, let us respect the virtues and cherish the memory of the deceased. Let their little failings be now forgotten. Let us dwell on what was amiable in their character, imitate their worth, and trace their steps. Moreover, let the remembrance of the friends whom we have lost strengthen our affection to those that remain. The narrower the circle becomes of those we love, let us draw the closer together. But they are not only our friends who die. Our enemies also must go to their long home.

III. CONSIDER HOW WE OUGHT TO BE AFFECTED, WHEN THEY FROM WHOM SUSPICIONS HAVE ALIENATED, OR RIVALRY HAS DIVIDED US; they with whom we have long contended, or by whom we imagine ourselves to have suffered wrong, ARE LAID, OR ABOUT TO BE LAID, IN THE GRAVE. How inconsiderable then appear those broils in which we have been long involved, those contests and feuds which we thought were to last for ever! The awful moment that now terminates them makes us feel their vanity. Let the anticipation of such sentiments serve now to correct the inveteracy of prejudice, to cool the heat of anger, to allay the fierceness of resentment. When a few suns more have rolled over our heads, friends and foes shall have retreated together; and their love and their hatred be equally buried. Let our few days, then, be spent in peace. While we are all journeying onwards to death, let us rather bear one another's burdens, than harass one another by the way. Let us smooth and cheer the road as much as we can, rather than fill the valley of our pilgrimage with the hateful monuments of our contention and strife.

(H. Blair, D.D.) *Our long home*.—I. EXAMINE THE TERM APPLIED HERE TO DESCRIBE THE GRAVE—"the long home." We are not to look down into the earth, but up at the skies. Above the grave we may discern the glory. II. WHAT AN ADDED AND INTENSIFIED INTEREST BELONGS TO THOSE WHOM WE HAVE KNOWN WHEN THEY PASS AWAY FROM US INTO "THE LONG HOME," THUS EQUIPPED. 1. There was the process of the spirit disentangling itself from the body. 2. There was the new consciousness of the spirit, freed from the limitations of the flesh, and really entering the new world. 3. As we think upon the long home we cannot but remember that we too must finish with this world and die. 4. We, too, must be judged, our conduct and character will be examined by the Infallible Judge. 5. We, too, must prepare. We may well consider whether the preparation is really made, and whether it is continually enlarged and perfected. (Alfred Norris.)

Ver. 7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*—The death of the body, and separate state of souls.—I. DEATH REDUCES OUR BODIES TO THEIR PRIMITIVE DUST. 1. How doth this stain the pride of all flesh, and bring their glory into contempt! What are pedigree

and noble blood that mortal man should value himself upon them? 2. Why should we give way to the slavish fear of man? He is but dust, and must die as well as we; and God can easily stop his breath, and cut off all his designs against us, by bringing him down to the dust of death before us. 3. How illustriously does God display His glory in our dust! What a wonderful living machine has He made it! What strength and beauty has He put into it! How has He fitted every part for the office He designed it! And when it shall be dissolved into dust again, He will build it anew with greater improvements and refinements, sprightliness and glory, than ever before. 4. How great is the condescension of the Son of God, that He would clothe Himself with our dust, and so become a mortal man like ourselves! II. THE SOUL DOES NOT DIE WITH THE BODY. 1. Reason itself tells us that the soul is immortal. The very heathens themselves had strong apprehensions of the immortality of the soul; their apotheoses, and worshipping deceased men for gods, supposed their present existence in an invisible state; and the soul's surviving the body was such a common conjecture, at least, of all ages and nations among them, that Cicero calls it the voice of nature, and Seneca thought the consent of all mankind about it had the force of a considerable argument to prove it. But we have still a better proof to insist on, and that is—2. Divine revelation. (1) The Scripture gives us such descriptions of death as intimate a separation of the soul from the body. (Job xxiv. 14; Gen. xxxv. 18; 2 Tim. iv. 6; 2 Pet. i. 13, 14; Matt. x. 28.) (2) We have accounts in Scripture of souls which, after death, have returned again to their bodies. (1 Kings xvii. 21, 22; Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.) (3) We have an account of souls which do exist in another world separate from their bodies. (Heb. xii. 23; Rev. vi. 9, 10.) III. IMMEDIATELY AFTER DEATH THE SOUL APPEARS BEFORE GOD, TO BE CONSIGNED TO A SEPARATE STATE OF BLESSEDNESS OR MISERY IN ANOTHER WORLD. 1. The souls of believers, immediately after death, enter into a state of blessedness with Christ in glory. (Rev. xiv. 13; Ps. xlix. 15; lxxiii. 24; Isa. lvii. 1, 2; Luke xxiii. 43; 2 Cor. v. 1, 8; Phil. i. 21–23; Acts vii. 59; Heb. xii. 23, 24; Rev. v., vii.) 2. The souls of the wicked, immediately after death, enter into a state of misery. (Acts i. 25; 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20; Luke xvi. 19–31.) (*J. Guyse, D.D.*) *The two natures of man*:—1. As we lay our beloved in the grave, we recognize indeed their mortality; but at the same time we feel that this is not really they. The presence of death assures us afresh that our beloved is really the spirit which has passed out of sight. 2. This recognition of a spiritual nature as well as a material nature gives us a presumption of a higher as well as a lower destiny. We see how the frail body died inevitably: year by year it was always coming nearer to death; and we see how the strong spirit did not waste and decay in like manner, but ought to have survived. 3. We ask where the strong, sweet spirit has gone, and our hearts answer, with the Bible, It has gone to God; recalled to Him who gave it. Augustine says, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and we rest not till we rest in Thee." 4. To one who is not afraid to go to God, death is the triumphant conclusion of this life of trial. Those who pass the veil find hope changed to sight, prayer to praise. (*F. Noble, D.D.*) *The story of a soul*:—The story of a soul, its relations, its prospects, its future, is the one important thing to be considered; yet who dare draw aside the veil and read his coming history? The sacred penmen for whom the veil of the future was in part drawn aside caught glimpses of the soul's history in the future which they have sketched in brief and graphic lines. The text discloses to us the single fact of the separation of the soul from the body at death and its continued existence in another sphere. I. IT RETAINS A CONSCIOUSNESS OF ITS INDIVIDUAL EXISTENCE AND OF ITS PERSONAL IDENTITY. The effects of death upon the body we can distinctly trace from the suspended animation to the final dissolution. But who can show any influence of death upon the soul beyond the simple cessation of any visible action of the mind through its supposed organ the brain? If there were uniformly a decline of mental manifestations corresponding with the decline of the body through disease, if we saw that the mind always failed in perception, in memory, in reflection, and in action, just in proportion as the body failed in strength and in the power of locomotion, then we might infer that death had an influence upon the mind corresponding with its influence upon the body; yet even then we should not be warranted in saying that the mind itself had ceased to be, or that anything had occurred beyond the suppression of mental activity through its ordinary channels. You enter an apartment where a thousand wheels all connected by cogs and bands are in swift motion, and the shuttle is flying incessantly through

a score of looms. You do not, however, see the propelling force by which all this machinery is driven. Far down under the ground, in a vault of the strongest masonry, the great fire is fed that generates the steam which, conveyed through concealed pipes, imparts motion to the engine, and thence to the thousand wheels of the factory. Of a sudden the machinery stops; the wheels are motionless, the shuttle is arrested in the middle of the loom. Now, you are not warranted in inferring that the great fire in the vault below, which you have never seen, has been suddenly extinguished, or that the supply of water in the boiler has failed, or that the boiler itself has burst, or that from any cause the engine has ceased to move. Only some connecting pipe has burst, or some band or joint concealed from you is broken. The force exists there and needs only a connecting medium to manifest its presence. What more, then, are you authorized to infer when the machinery of life stands still than that the connection between the energizing will and the muscular framework has been severed? Would you be warranted in inferring that intelligence and will were annihilated, even if simultaneously with the decay of the body you always witnessed a corresponding cessation of mental activity? The machinery has stopped, but does that prove that the fire has been put out, that the motive power is destroyed? But we do not always witness a decline of mental activity corresponding with the decay of the body. How often does the mind continue the full exercise of its every faculty up to the very moment of death; how often, indeed, does its activity seem to increase as it approaches that crisis. How evident is it that the fire is burning, that the engine is moving, that the inner force is there even while the outer machinery drags heavily, and grates and pauses, from the snapping of one and another of its bands. You can show me nothing to prove that the mind is injuriously affected by death, you can bring no proof whatever that it is annihilated. And now, with no evidence from nature of the annihilation of the spirit at death, I turn to revelation to learn what then becomes of it. And here I learn first of all that it continues to exist, a conscious spirit, retaining its personal identity. There is no suspension of consciousness; or, if any, it is only as the momentary suspension of consciousness in sleep, from which the mind awakes with new perceptions and with augmented vigour. Abraham, Moses, Elias, Lazarus and Dives are the same persons after death that they were before it, and knew themselves to be the same. This is the first fact that we gain knowledge of in the future history of the soul. And how significant is such a fact as this. What an awful discovery to the man who has lived an atheist, who has flattered himself into the belief that death was an eternal sleep. The delusion then vanishes. When death comes and his connection with this outward world is severed, he wakes up to a consciousness of existence still; the same being and beyond the possibility of annihilation, and where death has no more power. What a discovery is this for such a mind to wake up to, and understand after death! II. **THE SOUL AFTER DEATH AWAKES TO A LIVELY AND A CONSTANT SENSE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD.** What a fearful thought for the men who have tried to convince themselves, and others, that there was no God, or that God was but a blind, indifferent, unobservant force. Think of such a mind waking up into the very presence of the living God. That is the soul's second experience after death—it wakes up to know itself alive, and it wakes up to a personal God. III. **THE SOUL AWAKES TO THE MEMORY OF THE PAST.** This is clearly intimated in the following context. The spirit will return to God for a judicial purpose. God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing. And in order to this, the soul itself will recall its secret and its long-forgotten sins. Indeed, there is great probability that at death the faculty of memory will be quickened into new activity and power; and that impressions buried under the dust and rubbish of years will be brought out as fresh as when first made upon the pliant but durable tablet of the heart. Now, the Scriptures teach us, as in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, that the memory is in most lively exercise after death. IV. **THE SOUL WILL AWAKE TO THE CERTAINTY AND THE NEAR PROSPECT OF THE JUDGMENT.** The spirit returns to God that it may answer for the deeds it has done here in the body. Retaining its identity, it retains its accountability; it retains its personal relations to the government of God, and to God Himself as a Ruler and a Judge. V. **THE SOUL AFTER DEATH WILL ENTER UPON THE EXPERIENCE OF AN ETERNAL RETRIBUTION.** This is the uniform representation of the Scriptures. The soul enters at once upon a state of happiness or of misery, and it knows that that state is to be eternal. O the unutterable joy or the unspeakable anguish of the mind when it first realizes the fact that it will be for ever blessed or for ever miserable! (J. P.

*Thompson.) Our destiny after death:—*I. **THE DESTINY OF THE BODY.** 1. Death is the severance of the two parts of man's complex being; the dissolution, not of the being, but of the union, between body and soul. 2. The text points to the origin of the body. "Then shall the dust return"—not "the body." It is described by what it was and will be: "Dust thou art," etc. (Ps. ciii. 14; Gen. xviii. 27). The Church, in the same way, commits the body to the grave, as "dust to dust," in the Burial Office. This is a humbling thought, and it is true, whatever view may be taken of the creation of the body. 3. It "shall return to the earth." "Unto dust shalt thou return," has in it the accents of Divine disappointment. An act of man has intervened, whereby the hindrance to corruption has been removed, and the corruptible body therefore pursues its natural course. "God made not death" (Wisd. i. 13), but man "called it to" him by forfeiting the grace which kept it away. The result is, "in Adam all die." 4. It is bodily death to which the text refers; and the words are true now, as in the Old Covenant—though Christ redeemed both body and soul. "The body is dead because of sin" (Rom. viii. 10), though "the spirit is life because of righteousness." II. **THE DESTINY OF THE SPIRIT.** 1. It pursues a different route, for its origin is different. "God who gave it." The words point to the spirit as being a special creation of God—the *infusio animæ*. God is truly "the Father of Spirits" (Heb. xii. 9), and it can be said of souls that they are His, because He directly creates them (Ezek. xviii. 8). They come from Him. 2. The spirit returns to its Source. The words, "Into Thine hands I commit" [or, "commend," Prayer-book Version] "My spirit," are used at the departing of the soul, when leaving the body. Thus death is regarded as the withdrawal of that which had been given. 3. Here is the belief in a future life, and in a book, too, which materialists and pessimists have thought favoured their views. The soul in its individuality; the soul as a supra-sensuous substance—the spirit; the soul as the express gift of God; the soul as an immortal principle beyond the reach of that disintegration which death produces in the "houses of clay" (Job iv. 19); the soul returning to Him "who only hath immortality" in an absolute sense, as Self-derived;—all this is in Ecclesiastes, before Christ had brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. III. **LESSONS.** 1. The remembrance of the end is one which is impressed upon us in Holy Scripture as most important (Deut. xxxii. 29; Ps. xxxix. 4). 2. This is most necessary in the time of temptation, in making some important choice, or when languid in devotion. It acts respectively as a curb, as an adviser, as a stimulant, on those occasions. 3. If death were annihilation, to view life from the standpoint of death would be morbid; but as death is the gate to higher life, such a view is not one of unmingled sadness, but fills this present life with interest, as its issues are seen to be eternal. 4. To seek more and more to realize how precious is the immortal spirit, God-given; and to learn how to preserve it from sin, knowing its destination. (*H. W. Hutchings, M.A.*) **The spirit shall return unto God who gave it.—The immortality of the soul:—**The immortality of the soul may be argued—I. **FROM THE SOUL ITSELF.** 1. The soul is a spiritual substance. This is evident from the fact that it possesses all the properties of spirit, and none of those that belong to matter—such as intelligence, reflection, and volition. 2. The soul is capable of endless improvement. The more knowledge the mind possesses, the better fitted it is for fresh acquisitions in knowledge. The mind possesses faculties that are but imperfectly exercised in this life; but as nothing is made in vain, there must, therefore, be a future state. 3. All men desire immortality, and are averse to annihilation. Can we suppose that a Being, infinite in wisdom and goodness, would plant such desires for immortality in His creatures if they were never to be gratified? 4. All human beings are disposed to be religious in some way. This is so natural to men, that some have chosen to define man a religious, rather than a rational, animal. All nations have their gods, to whom they pay adoration and worship; and there is nothing too mean and insignificant for man to worship, rather than to have no god. And all religions are founded in the belief of a future state. 5. The powers and faculties of the mind are strong and vigorous, when the body is weak and emaciated. "Though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." How often, when speech has failed, and the body has lost the power to raise a single limb, has the soul, by some token, evinced, not only that all its faculties remained unimpaired, but that it was leaving the world in the greatest peace. II. **A FUTURE STATE OF EXISTENCE MAY BE CONCLUDED FROM THE UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS IN THIS LIFE.** 1. If there be a God, He is a God of

justice; and if He be a God of justice, He will fully reward the virtuous, and punish the vicious—but this He does not do in the present world; and, therefore, there must be a future state. 2. The natural tendency of virtue is, indeed, to produce happiness, and that of vice is to produce misery. But though these positions hold true in general, still there are innumerable cases in which the virtuous suffer much, and the vicious little or nothing in this world. We are therefore led to conclude that the present state is only a small part of the great plan of God's moral government. 3. That the present life is a time of trial, or probation, is admitted on all hands, with very few exceptions. And a state of trial implies that there will be a time of review, or examination, when the probationers will be rewarded, or punished, according to their works. But this time cannot come till the state of trial is finished. 4. The doctrine that there is no future state destroys all proper distinction between virtue and vice. And, indeed, if this be the case, they have no existence but in name; for neither is the one rewarded, nor the other punished. There would be no motives to virtue, nor any checks to vice. Do away a future state, and there is nothing for the vicious to fear, nor for the virtuous to desire. III. THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL AND A FUTURE STATE ARE MOST CLEARLY REVEALED IN THE SCRIPTURES OF TRUTH. 1. There are certain persons of whom it is said that they shall never die. But none are exempt from the death of the body. It is, therefore, the soul that shall not die. 2. The immortality of the soul may be inferred from Scripture instances of committing the spirit to God. 3. We learn from the Scriptures that the soul, on the death of the body, goes immediately to happiness or misery. 4. The Scriptures speak particularly of the existence of the soul, after the death of the body. Christ affirms that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were living in His time, in quoting and commenting on the words of the Lord to Moses at the burning bush. IV. INFERENCES:—1. If the soul be immortal, it must be exceedingly valuable. 2. If the soul be immortal, the loss of it must be indescribable. (*O. Scott.*) *The individuality of the soul:*—Nothing is more difficult than to realize that every man has a distinct soul, that every one of all the millions who live, or have lived, is as whole and independent a being in himself as if there were no one else in the whole world but he. We class men in masses, as we might connect the stones of a building. Consider our common way of regarding history, politics, commerce, and the like, and you will own that I speak truly. We generalize, and lay down laws, and then contemplate these creations of our own minds, and act upon and towards them, as if they were the real things, dropping what are more truly such. Take another instance: when we talk of national greatness, what does it mean? Why, it really means that a certain distinct definite number of immortal individual beings happen for a few years to be in circumstances to act together and one upon another, in such a way as to be able to act upon the world at large, to gain an ascendancy over the world, to gain power and wealth, and to look like one, and to be talked of and to be looked up to as one. They seem for a short time to be some one thing: and we, from our habit of living by sight, regard them as one, and drop the notion of their being anything else. And when this one dies and that one dies, we forget that it is the passage of separate immortal beings into an unseen state, that the whole which appears is but appearance, and that the component parts are the realities. We still think that this whole which we call the nation is one and the same, and that the individuals who come and go exist only in it and for it, and are but as the grains of a heap or the leaves of a tree. Again: when we read history, we meet with accounts of great slaughters and massacres, great pestilences, famines, conflagrations, and so on; and here again we are accustomed in an especial way to regard collections of people as if individual units. We cannot understand that a multitude is a collection of immortal souls. I say immortal souls: each of these multitudes not only had while he was upon earth, but has, a soul, which did in its own time but return to God who gave it, and not perish, and which now lives unto Him. All those millions upon millions of human beings who ever trod the earth and saw the sun successively are at this very moment in existence all together. Moreover, every one of all the souls which have ever been on earth is, in one of two spiritual states, so distinct from one another, that the one is the subject of God's favour, and the other under His wrath; the one on the way to eternal happiness, the other to eternal misery. This is true of the dead, and is true of the living also. All are tending one way or the other; there is no middle or neutral state for any one; though as far as the

sight of the external world goes, all men seem to be in a middle state common to one and all. Yet, much as men look the same, and impossible as it is for us to say where each man stands in God's sight, there are two, and but two classes of men, and these have characters and destinies as far apart in their tendencies as light and darkness: this is the case even of those who are in the body, and it is much more true of those who have passed into the unseen state. What makes this thought still more solemn, is that we have reason to suppose that souls on the wrong side of the line are far more numerous than those on the right. It is wrong to speculate; but it is safe to be alarmed. This much we know, that Christ says expressly, "Many are called, few are chosen"; "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat"; whereas "narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be who find it." What a change it would produce in our thoughts, unless we were utterly reprobate, to understand what and where we are—accountable beings on their trial, with God for their friend and the devil for their enemy, and advanced a certain way on their road either to heaven or to hell. Endeavour, then, to realize that you have souls, and pray God to enable you to do so. Endeavour to disengage your thoughts and opinions from the things that are seen; look at things as God looks at them, and judge of them as He judges. Avoid sin as a serpent; it looks and promises well; it bites afterwards. It is dreadful in memory, dreadful even on earth; but in that awful period, when the fever of life is over, and you are waiting in silence for the judgment, with nothing to distract your thoughts, who can say how dreadful may be the memory of sins done in the body? (J. H. Newman, D.D.)

Ver. 8. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity.—*Two reviews of life* (with 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8):—These two preachers were both distinguished men, aged men, men of wide experiences. Thus far they resembled each other; but the results of their experience are a perfect and a startling contrast. You would expect, with the experiences behind them, that their verdicts would be contradictory. You would expect the man for whom earth had plucked her choicest roses to present life as a gorgeous garden; and you would expect the man whose course had been a martyrdom to give a shaded view. Yet the contrast is the precise opposite of what you expect. It is from the man who has had the world's choicest gifts lavished upon him that you hear as sad an epitaph as ever described a human life—"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." It is the man who has passed through tribulations, and experienced the worst ills of life who gives us the ring of triumph in his review. I. **THE FIRST CONDEMNES LIFE AS A FAILURE**—"All is vanity, and vexation of spirit." What was there in his life which could explain this disappointment? I think if you look at Solomon's life you will see it had self for its centre, earth for its circumference, human energy for its working power, and failure for its result. II. **THE SECOND REVIEWS LIFE AS A TRIUMPH.** "I have fought a good fight," etc. The whole is a review of trial and triumph. 1. The trial consisted in the apostle having been able to endure to the end, to carry on the struggle without being turned aside. Men had called his faith fanaticism, but he did not let go his faith. Men called his hopes delusions, but he cherished them still. Men sneered at his motives, but no slur or scorn cast upon him could lead him to renounce Christ or the work given him to do. He reviews his life as a triumph simply because of this patience. In all this there is to me a great hope and comfort. Had the triumph lain in the works which he had wrought, you and I might well despair of reviewing a life such as his. But this we may review—fidelity to Christ. 2. Let us look now at the elements which made the apostle's life such a triumph. We will place them in contrast with those we were noticing in the life of Solomon. (1) In the apostle's life Christ was the centre; everything revolved around Him. (2) The spiritual was the sphere of life in which the apostle lived. (3) The working power of his life was faith. (4) Its result was a glorious triumph—a triumph which led to a crown. All true triumphs end in crowns, and this is a crown of character, not merely a reward for righteousness. Righteousness is the very material of which it is made. It is the crown of a spiritual sanctified character, and hence the crown fadeeth not away. (C. B. Sykes, B.A.) **The vanities:**—I. **OFFICIAL POSITION WILL NEVER GIVE SOLACE TO A MAN'S SOUL.** II. **WORLDLY WEALTH CANNOT SATISFY THE SOUL'S LONGING.** III. **LEARNING CANNOT SATISFY THE SOUL.** Solomon was one of the largest contributors to the literature of the day. IV. **IN THE LIFE OF THE VOLUPTUARY THERE IS NO COMFORT.** (T. De Witt Talmage.) *On the proper estimate of human life:*—I. In

WHAT SENSE IT IS TRUE THAT ALL HUMAN PLEASURES ARE VANITY. I shall studiously avoid exaggeration, and only point out a threefold vanity in human life, which every impartial observer cannot but admit; disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment, uncertainty in possession. 1. Disappointment in pursuit. We may form our plans with the most profound sagacity, and with the most vigilant caution may guard against danger on every side. But some unforeseen occurrence comes across, which baffles our wisdom, and lays our labours in the dust. Neither the moderation of our views, nor the justice of our pretensions, can ensure success. But time and chance happen to all. Against the stream of events, both the worthy and the undeserving are obliged to struggle; and both are frequently overborne alike by the current. 2. Dissatisfaction in enjoyment is a further vanity to which the human state is subject. This is the severest of all mortifications; after having been successful in the pursuit, to be baffled in the enjoyment itself. Yet this is found to be an evil still more general than the former. Together with every wish that is gratified, a new demand arises. One void opens in the heart, as another is filled. On wishes, wishes grow; and to the end, it is rather the expectation of what they have not, than the enjoyment of what they have, which occupies and interests the most successful. This dissatisfaction, in the midst of human pleasure, springs partly from the nature of our enjoyments themselves, and partly from circumstances which corrupt them. No worldly enjoyments are adequate to the high desires and powers of an immortal spirit. Fancy paints them at a distance with splendid colours; but possession unveils the fallacy. Add to the unsatisfying nature of our pleasures, the attending circumstances which never fail to corrupt them. For, such as they are, they are at no time possessed unmixed. When external circumstances show fairest to the world, the envied man groans in private under his own burden. Some vexation disquiets, some passion corrodes him; some distress, either felt or feared, gnaws, like a worm, the root of his felicity. For worldly happiness ever tends to destroy itself, by corrupting the heart. 3. Uncertain possession and short duration. Were there in worldly things any fixed point of security which we could gain, the mind would then have some basis on which to rest. But our condition is such that everything wavers and totters around us. If your enjoyments be numerous, you lie more open on different sides to be wounded. If you have possessed them long, you have greater cause to dread an approaching change. Even supposing the accidents of life to leave us untouched, human bliss must still be transitory; for man changes of himself. No course of enjoyment can delight us long. What amused our youth, loses its charm in maturer age. As years advance, our powers are blunted, and our pleasurable feelings decline. We project great designs, entertain high hopes, and then leave our plans unfinished, and sink into oblivion. II. HOW THIS VANITY OF THE WORLD CAN BE RECONCILED WITH THE PERFECTIONS OF ITS DIVINE AUTHOR. If God be good, whence the evil that fills the earth? 1. The present condition of man was not his original or primary state. As our nature carries plain marks of perversion and disorder, so the world which we inhabit bears the symptoms of having been convulsed in all its frame. Naturalists point out to us everywhere the traces of some violent change which it has suffered. Islands torn from the continent, burning mountains, shattered precipices, uninhabitable wastes, give it all the appearance of a mighty ruin. The physical and moral state of man in this world mutually sympathize and correspond. They indicate not a regular and orderly structure, either of matter or of mind, but the remains of somewhat that was once more fair and magnificent. 2. As this was not the original, so it is not intended to be the final, state of man. Though, in consequence of the abuse of the human powers, sin and vanity were introduced into the region of the universe, it was not the purpose of the Creator that they should be permitted to reign for ever. He hath made ample provision for the recovery of the penitent and faithful part of His subjects, by the merciful undertaking of the great Restorer of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. 3. A future state being made known, we can account in a satisfying manner for the present distress of human life, without the smallest impeachment of Divine goodness. The sufferings we here undergo are converted into discipline and improvement. Through the blessing of Heaven, good is extracted from apparent evil; and the very misery which originated from sin is rendered the means of correcting sinful passions, and preparing us for felicity. III. WHETHER THERE BE NOT, IN THE PRESENT CONDITION OF HUMAN LIFE, SOME REAL AND SOLID ENJOYMENTS WHICH COME NOT UNDER THE GENERAL CHARGE OF VANITY OF VANITIES. The doctrine of the

text is to be considered as chiefly addressed to worldly men. Then Solomon means to teach that all expectations of bliss, which rest solely on earthly possessions and pleasures, shall end in disappointment. But surely he did not intend to assert that there is no material difference in the pursuits of men, or that no real happiness of any kind could now be attained by the virtuous. For, besides the unanswerable objection which this would form against the Divine administration, it would directly contradict what He elsewhere asserts (Eccles. ii. 25). How vain soever this life, considered in itself, may be, the comforts and hopes of religion are sufficient to give solidity to the enjoyments of the righteous. In the exercise of good affections, and the testimony of an approving conscience; in the sense of peace and reconciliation with God through the great Redeemer of mankind; in the firm confidence of being conducted through all the trials of life by infinite wisdom and goodness; and in the joyful prospect of arriving in the end at immortal felicity; they possess a happiness which, descending from a purer and more perfect religion than this world, partakes not of its vanity. Besides the enjoyments peculiar to religion, there are other pleasures of our present state which, though of an inferior order, must not be overlooked in the estimate of human life. Some degree of importance must be allowed to the comforts of health, to the innocent gratifications of sense, and to the entertainment afforded us by all the beautiful scenes of nature; some to the pursuits and amusements of social life; and more to the internal enjoyments of thought and reflection, and to the pleasures of affectionate intercourse with those whom we love. Were the great body of men fairly to compute the hours which they pass in ease, and even with some degree of pleasure, they would be found far to exceed the number of those which are spent in absolute pain either of body or mind. But in order to make a still more accurate estimation of the degree of satisfaction which, in the midst of earthly vanity, man is permitted to enjoy, the three following observations claim our attention:—

1. That many of the evils which occasion our complaints of the world are wholly imaginary. It is among the higher ranks of mankind that they chiefly abound; where fantastic refinements, sickly delicacy, and eager emulation, open a thousand sources of vexation peculiar to themselves.
2. That, of those evils which may be called real, because they owe not their existence to fancy, nor can be removed by rectifying opinion, a great proportion is brought upon us by our own misconduct. Diseases, poverty, disappointment and shame are far from being, in every instance, the unavoidable doom of men. They are much more frequently the offspring of their own misguided choice.
3. The third observation which I make respects those evils which are both real and unavoidable; from which neither wisdom nor goodness can procure our exemption. Under these this comfort remains, that if they cannot be prevented, there are means, however, by which they may be much alleviated. Religion is the great principle which acts under such circumstances as the corrective of human vanity. It inspires fortitude, supports patience, and, by its prospects and promises, darts a cheering ray into the darkest shade of human life.

IV. PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS. 1. It highly concerns us not to be unreasonable in our expectations of worldly felicity. Peace and contentment, not bliss and transport, is the full portion of man. Perfect joy is reserved for heaven. 2. But while we repress too sanguine hopes formed upon human life, let us guard against the other extreme, of repining and discontent. What title hast thou to find fault with the order of the universe, whose lot is so much beyond what thy virtue or merit gave thee ground to claim? 3. The view which we have taken of human life should naturally direct us to such pursuits as may have most influence for correcting its vanity. (*H. Blair, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. **The words of the wise are as goads.**—*A wise preacher aims to move his hearers:—*I. A WISE PREACHER WILL AIM TO IMPRESS THE MINDS OF HIS HEARERS. 1. Every wise preacher knows that unless he impresses the minds of his hearers, he can do them no good by his preaching. Hearers must feel what they hear, or what they hear will be like sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 2. Every wise preacher knows that his hearers will not feel the truth and importance of what he says unless he makes them feel it. Hearers look upon it as the part of the preacher to make them feel. They mean to be passive in hearing, unless he makes them active. II. **How he will preach in order to attain this desirable object.** When any person proposes a certain end, the end which he proposes naturally suggests the proper means to accomplish it. This holds with respect to a wise preacher, who makes it his object to penetrate and impress the minds

of his hearers. 1. This end will naturally lead him to use the most proper style in preaching. He will choose the best words, and place them in the best order, to enlighten the mind and affect the heart. 2. His design to penetrate and impress the minds of his hearers will lead him to exhibit great and interesting truths. He will bring much of the character, perfections and designs of God into his public discourses. He will preach Christ in the greatness of His nature, and in the glory and grace of His mediatorial character and works. He will exhibit man in the dignity of his nature, and in the importance of his destination. And he will unfold the scenes of a general judgment, and of a boundless eternity, in their own native awful solemnity. 3. For the same purpose he will explain Divine truths and describe Divine objects. 4. The wise preacher, who intends to impress the minds of his hearers, will arrange Divine truths, and exhibit Divine objects, in such an order as to reach every power and faculty of the soul, in its proper turn. Instruction should always go before declamation. It can answer no valuable purpose to inflame the passions before light is thrown into the understanding and conscience; but rather serves, on the other hand, to produce the most fatal effects. 5. The wise preacher, who means to impress the minds of his hearers, will always apply his discourse according to their particular characters. What belongs to saints, he will apply to saints; and what belongs to sinners, he will apply to sinners. III. IMPROVEMENT. 1. We learn from what has been said, the importance of ministers being good men. Piety is necessary, both to dispose and enable them to penetrate and impress the minds of their hearers. 2. We learn from what has been said, the importance of ministers giving themselves wholly to their work. If they mean to penetrate and impress the minds of their hearers, they must exhibit, in the course of their preaching, a rich variety of Divine truths. But they will soon lose a variety, and fall into a sameness in preaching, unless they constantly improve their minds in the knowledge of the doctrines and duties of religion by reading, meditation and prayer. 3. We learn from what has been said, the manner in which a minister should appear and speak in the pulpit. His voice, his looks, his gestures, and his whole deportment, should be wholly governed by his ultimate end, which is to penetrate and impress the minds of his hearers. 4. We learn from what has been said that it is not very material whether a minister preaches with notes, or without. If he aims to impress the minds of his hearers, he may attain his end by either of these modes of preaching. 5. We learn from what has been said, the great absurdity of those ministers who studiously avoid penetrating and impressing the minds of their hearers. Solomon and Christ, the prophets and apostles meant to penetrate and impress the minds of their hearers; and, by the manifestation of the truth, to commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. These are examples, which it is wise in preachers to follow, though it should give pain and even offence to their hearers. 6. If it be the wisdom and duty of ministers to penetrate and impress the minds of their hearers, then they have no reason to complain of the most close and pungent preaching. They always desire such plainness and fidelity in other men, whom they employ to promote their temporal good. They wish their attorney to examine their cause with care, discover every flaw, and tell them the plain, naked truth. And they heartily desire their surgeon to probe their wounds to the bottom, and apply the most effectual remedies, though over so painful and distressing to endure. Why, then, should they complain of their minister for dealing plainly and faithfully with their souls? This is an absurdity in its own nature, an injury to their minister, and may be eternal destruction to themselves. 7. If it ought to be the aim of the minister to penetrate and impress the minds of his hearers, then there is blame somewhere if their minds are not penetrated and impressed. Either the minister does not aim to impress their minds, or they mean to resist the impressions of Divine truth. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The words of the wise*:—I. THEY ARE STIMULATING, "as goads." Wise teaching, however attractive (ver. 10), is never pointless. It is penetrating, incisive. It stimulates to—1. Hatred and opposition. Ahab (1 Kings xxi. 20; xxii. 8). The Pharisees (Mark xii. 12). 2. Conversion. Saul of Tarsus (Acts ix. 5. See also Ps. xlv. 2, 5). 3. Progress and effort (2 Pet. i. 12; iii. 1). II. THEY ARE ABIDING, "as nails," etc. "Masters of assemblies," either those who assemble persons together to hear them, or perhaps "masters of collections," those who collect and arrange wise words. In either case they are teachers, by word of mouth or in writing. A nail "fastened" or "planted," not only penetrates, but abides. The impression made by wise teaching is lasting. It abides—

1. To be pondered. The Blessed Virgin (Luke ii. 19, 51. See also chap. i. 66, and Gen. xxxvii. 11). 2. To be acted upon, as fixed principles, regulating the conduct. "Having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit," etc. (Luke viii. 15; see Ps. cxix. 11). 3. To be added to; a nail (a "peg," as we say) on which to hang much else. Compare the promise to Eliakim (Isa. xxii. 23-25). III. THEY HAVE ESSENTIAL UNITY, "given from one shepherd." 1. The human teacher making his own (so giving harmony and unity to "words of the wise"), drawn from many sources. 2. God, the Author of all wisdom (Prov. ii. 6), the Great Prophet and Teacher of the Church (John xvi. 13; 1 Cor. ii. 9-13). Harmony and unity of truth, as taught by inspired writers, and those whose teaching accords with them. IV. CONCLUSION. In this description we have a rule by which—1. The teacher should guide himself. 2. The hearer should try himself. (*Archdeacon Perowne.*) *The Christian ministry of literary men:*—There is a Christian ministry wider than that to which men are consecrated through ecclesiastical offices. They also belong to the "great company of preachers," or teachers, who explore the heavens, or who decipher the records graven on rocks, or who analyze material forms, or who trace the evolutions of life, with those who delineate or embody the beautiful in art; all these are co-workers with "the apostles and prophets" in the service and worship of God the Father. Some of God's servants stand nearer to the altar than others, but the sacrifice and service of those in the outermost range are ever and everywhere acceptable to Him when offered or done "in an honest and true heart." And among these diverse gifts of God's Spirit, who divides to men "severally as He will," we may surely count the gift of the genius which has enriched the world with so many sweet and inspiring thoughts in the varied forms of literature. Charles Lamb has said, in his own quiet, quaint way, "I am disposed to say grace upon twenty other occasions in the course of the day besides my dinner. I want a form for setting out upon a pleasant walk, for a moonlight ramble, for a friendly meeting, for a solved problem. Why have we none for books, those spiritual repasts—a grace before Milton, a grace before Shakespeare, a devotional exercise proper to be said before reading the 'Fairy Queen'?" For literature, even in its lowlier forms, has been a ministry of comfort and help to millions. It has filled days in the lives of multitudes with solace or with sunshine which otherwise had been "dark and dreary." Many devout people have a horror, I know, of what they call works of "fiction"; nor am I insensible of the demoralizing influence of the baser sort of such literature. But let us discriminate here, as we do in music and in painting and in poetry, nor condemn that which is wholesome with that which is vicious in books of amusement or recreation; for the greatest writers of so-called fiction have done good and blessed service often in the cause of morality and religion. There is more "pure gospel," in the substantial sense of that cant phrase, in the writings of Charles Dickens, for instance, than in seven-tenths of our printed sermons. Think of the gentleness, the pathos, the Divine charity which pervade his books! while even the homely, the ludicrous and the seemingly profane are always friendly to virtue. What a power he has been in the regeneration of English manners! Then think of a similar service done by his great compeer in English letters; by him who lashed the follies and the vices of "Vanity Fair," doing a work which the pulpit was impotent or afraid to do in rebuking the fashionable extravagance and profligacy of the age; for literature could find audience in circles which were closed to homilies and Episcopal pastorals, insinuating truths which had been resented coming in dogmatic shape. And the results are marked in every sphere of English life, for it is not to an increase of ecclesiastical activity that the improved manners and morals of the English people are to be solely or chiefly traced. The influence of the press has become supreme; our greatest prophets speak through books. No man can estimate the debt which modern civilization owes to the men the weapon of whose warfare has been the pen. They have been ever forward to expose hypocrisy, to resist the tyranny of power, to plead the cause of the oppressed, and sometimes at a bitter cost. Of all powers merely human, poetry has been the most potent over the cultivated thought and feeling of the world. It holds more condensed wisdom, it speaks more directly to the primal affections, it incites the soul to grander aims, it is more nearly akin to the unction of the Divine Spirit than any other instrument or influence controlled by man. The art of making verses may be acquired, but the true poet is inspired, having deeper insight into men and things with finer faculties of interpretation: the teacher at whose feet all other men sit to catch the flow of har-

monious wisdom. All gifts of genius are from heaven, but the brightest and the best is "the vision and the faculty Divine" of the poet. He is the teacher of teachers. The best thoughts of the cultivated world had birth in poetry. Every other species of intellectual power has been inspired by it. Religion, morals, government have all been penetrated and purified by it. Take one name and all it represents out of the literary annals of England, and what a void would be visible wherever the English tongue has gone! "Take the entire range of English literature," says the late Canon Wordsworth; "put together our best authors who have written upon subjects not professedly religious or theological, and we shall not find, I believe, in them all united so much evidence of the Bible having been read and used as we have found in Shakespeare alone." Who can take his thoughts and reflections into the study or the closet without coming forth with deeper and diviner feelings in him—without a more awful estimate of life and its great issues? (*J. H. Rylance, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. Of making many books there is no end.—*Books*.—If true so many years before Christ, how much more true so many years A.D. ! We so often see books, we have no appreciation of what a book is. It took all civilizations, all martyr fires, all battles, all victories, all defeats, all glooms, all brightness, all centuries to make one book possible. A book; the chorus of the ages; it is the drawing-room in which kings and queens, and philosophers and poets, and orators and rhetoricians came forth to meet. If I burned incense to any idol I would build an altar before a book. Thank God for books—good books, healthful books, books of men, books of women—above all, for the Book of God. "Of making many books there is no end." The printing press is the mightiest agency for good or evil. I have an idea that it is to be the chief agency for the rescue and evangelization of the world, and that the last great battle will not be fought with guns and swords, but with types and presses, a gospelized printing press triumphing over and trampling under foot and crushing out a pernicious literature. You must apply the same law to the book and the newspaper. The newspaper is a book swifter and in more portable shape. Under pernicious books and newspapers tens of thousands have gone down. The plague is nothing to it. That counts its victims by the thousands; this modern pest shovels its millions into the charnel-house of the morally dead. Is there anything that I can do to help stem this mighty torrent of pernicious literature? Yes. The first thing for us all to do is to keep ourselves and our families aloof from iniquitous books and newspapers. If you ask me to-day is there anything we can do to stem this tide, I say yes, very much every way. First we will stand aloof from all books that give false pictures of human life. Life is neither a tragedy nor a farce. Men are not all either knaves or heroes. Women are neither angels nor fairies. Judging, however, from much of the literature of this day, we would come to the idea that life is a fitful, fantastic and extravagant thing, instead of a practical and useful thing. Those women who are indiscriminate readers of novels are unfit for the duties of wife, mother, sister, daughter, the duties of home life, the duties of a Christian life. We will also help to stem the tide of pernicious literature by standing aloof, we and our families, from books which have some good but a large admixture of evil. I do not care how good you are, you cannot afford to read a bad book. You say, "The influence is insignificant." Ah! the scratch of a pin may produce the lockjaw. You out of curiosity plunge into a bad book, and you have the curiosity of a man who takes a torch into a gunpowder mill to see whether or not it will blow up. If you want to help stem the tide of pernicious literature you and your families must also stand back from books which corrupt the imagination. In the name of God, I warn some of you that your children are threatened with moral and spiritual typhoid, and if the evil be unarrested, there will be the funeral of the body, the funeral of the mind, and the funeral of the soul—three funerals in one day. If you want to help stem this tide keep aloof, you and your families, from all books that are apologetic for crime. Many of the fascinations of book-binding are thrown around sin. Vice is horrible anyhow. It is born in shame, and it dies howling in the darkness. Paint it as writhing in the horrors of a city hospital. Cursed are the books which make impurity decent, and crime honourable, and hypocrisy noble. I must in this connection call to your mind the iniquitous pictorials of our time. For good pictures I have great admiration. An artist with one flash will do that which an author can accomplish in four hundred pages. Fine paintings are the aristocracy of art. Engravings are the democracy of art. A good picture on one

side of a pictorial will sometimes do just as much good as a book of four or five hundred pages. But you know our cities are to-day cursed with evil pictorials. These death-warrants are on every street. A young man purchases perhaps one copy, and he purchases it with his eternal discomfiture. That one bad picture poisons one soul, that soul poisons fifty souls, the fifty despoil a hundred, the hundred a thousand, the thousand a million, and the millions other millions, until it will take the measuring line of eternity to tell the height, and the depth, and the ghastliness of the great misdoing. Remember that one column of good reading may save a soul, that one column of bad reading may destroy a soul. Years ago, a clergyman passing along through the west stopped at an hotel and saw a woman copying from a book. He found the book was Doddridge's "Rise and Progress." This woman had been pleased with the book, which she had borrowed, and was copying a passage that impressed her very much. The clergyman happened to have a copy of Doddridge's "Rise and Progress" in his valise, and gave it to her. Thirty years passed along, and that clergyman came to the same hotel and was inquiring about the family that had lived there thirty years before, and was pointed to a house near by. He went there and said to the woman, "Do you remember seeing me before?" She said, "I don't remember ever to have seen you before." "Don't you remember thirty years ago a man giving you a copy of Doddridge's 'Rise and Progress'?" "Oh, yes, I remember that; that saved my soul, that book. I lent it to my neighbours and they read it, and they all came into the Church, and we had a great revival. Do you see the spire of a church out yonder? That church was built as a consequence of that book." Oh, the power of a good book! Oh, the power of a bad book! Crowd your minds with good books, and there will be no room for the bad. The bushel full of the wheat, where can you put in the chaff? (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments.—*The purpose of life:*—I. LIFE HAS A PURPOSE. The architect intends the building he designs and erects to answer a specific end; so is it with the engineer, the ship-builder, the mechanic, the artist, the creator and fashioner of any work. Surely God must have had some end in view in making the universe, and in making us what we are, and in placing us in the midst of such wondrous realities. II. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE? 1. It is our business to see that we get into right relationship with God. By nature and by practice we are in a state of alienation from Him; there is a breach of our own making—between Him and us. Our prime concern should be to get that breach healed. This is possible. 2. Our reconciliation to God effected, we should constantly love Him and obey Him, and seek His glory. For this He has given us life, physical strength, mental endowments, our spiritual nature. He has placed us here that we may do His will. This should be our continual aim. To engage in this employ should be considered rather a privilege than an obligation. In all pursuits and circumstances we should seek to live for God. Indeed, we can only fulfil this purpose by attending to details. It is only by being faithful in the least that we can be faithful in much. In mosaic, it is the filling up with small pieces that often gives completeness and beauty to the design. The neglect of little things sometimes leads to serious results. Let life's details be "with God." If we take heed to this, all our work will be done well. 3. The purpose of life embraces love and service to all mankind. In the sins and sorrows of men; in their struggle with poverty—aye, and with riches; in their temptations, and need of succour and sympathy; in all these see your field of toil. Up to your work. Perform it with glad heart and diligent hands; and never grow weary—at all events, never grow idle—till you can say, as your Master said—"It is finished." When Dr. Donne was dying, he said, "I count all that part of my life lost which I spent not in communion with God, or in doing good." (*W. Walters.*) *The moral of it all:*—There are times when every one of us is either constrained by sorrow, or invited by the hope of profit, to take stock of his recollections. We have all desired eagerly, we have all toiled; not one of us but has had his aspirations and his disappointments. Life has turned out, and will, we suppose, turn out differently from what we either hoped or found when we sallied forth upon its ways untried. The book is sympathetic with all who have lost their illusions; with all who watch the bright dreams die out one by one like the fairy lamps of some summer's festival. How often have we exclaimed with the Preacher, as the hollowness of each pretence of this most pretentious world has been exposed by our own trial:

"This also is vanity!" But there is another side to the subject. Some things are real. Never does the author of this book speak of religion as if it were an illusion, or of God as if He were other than true. The spiritual part by which we are related to God and know God is our genuine self. It is because the soul wants truth that it discards so impatiently the counterfeits of truth that press upon its notice. If there were not a vital spark of worth in the soul it would never criticize so severely the mass of worthlessness which surrounds it. That, then, is our subject—the vanity of the world and the worth of religion, and each of these seen, and seen only, in contrast and foil to the other. 1. We may name three things on which the moralist writes the legend of vanity—human labour, human knowledge, human pleasure. (1) One of his thoughts about labour is that it seems a fruitless fretting against the fixed forces of nature. "The earth abideth for ever." Suns arise and set; the wind shifts from quarter to quarter; the rivers flow to the sea, and the brooks flow to the rivers. There are times when we are oppressed with this thought, and it becomes unbearable. As one of our English noblemen, who had a mansion overlooking the beautiful valley of the Thames, said: "I cannot understand why people delight in the view of the river; there it is—flow, flow, flow, always the same!" How speedily the effect of man's toil vanishes from the face of Nature! There is nothing more beautiful than the sight of well-ordered gardens or cultivated field; yet how quickly does Nature, as if in defiance of man's effort at improvement, come rushing back with her weeds and wildness! (2) Again, the contrast of human knowledge and wisdom with the sameness of human nature leads to the same reflection of disappointment. Increase of knowledge means increase of sorrow. The study of history brings to light a long series of passionate struggles after truth and good, which have incessantly to be begun anew. (3) The Preacher turned with sickness of heart from the toil of knowledge, and betook himself to refined pleasures. The thought of death, levelling all distinctions, intruded itself upon him. The wise man is equalled in the earth at last with the fool. Life became odious to him because the work wrought under the sun was grievous to him; for all was vanity and vexation of spirit. 2. And now we come to "the conclusion of the whole matter." If this legend, "Vanity and vexation of spirit," is to be written upon the objects of human desire and delight, if the world sounds hollow wherever we touch it, where is reality to be found? The simple answer of the Preacher is, it is to be found in religion: "Fear God, and keep His commandments." God is real as the soul is real. He is, as Augustine describes Him, the Life of our life, the core of our hearts. God is that pure and perfect Being for alliance and communion with whom we long. And it is the light we have from Him and in Him which makes the world look so dark, the perception of His rightness which throws into painful contrast the crookedness of men's ways, and of His beauty which makes their wickedness so deformed. And our happiness must lie, for each one of us, in loyalty to Him, in the keeping of His laws, whether they be known to us through the study of Nature or of sacred Scriptures, or by attentive study of our own hearts and the oracular spirit of holiness, whose influence is felt therein. It is in weariness of the world that we fall back upon the sweetness and truthfulness of pure religion for our refreshment and solace; it is when we have given up the conceit of being wiser than our forefathers, and the hope of setting crooked things straight, that we see distinctly the cultivation of our souls to be our main concern, and the only way to better the world is by reverently attending to our duty in wholeness and simplicity of heart. It is an ill thing for us if, when we have found out the hollowness of this bubble-like world, the trickiness and imposture of human nature, we say: "We will live like the rest, we will not take things seriously, we will pass on our way with a smile and a jest, trusting nothing, hoping nothing." It is only the presence of God that is of substantial and eternal good, that can console us for the vanity of earthly things, as the Preacher found so long ago. (*E. Johnson, M.A.*) *Making the most of life*.—What is meant by "making the most of life"? The answer may be given in four distinct yet related propositions. I. **THE WISE RECKONING OF LIFE IN ITS END, AIMS, LIMITATIONS, AND POSSIBILITIES.** Life is a serious and tremendous reality; life is short at best; life is freighted with infinite possibilities of good and evil; life is a responsible trust of infinite solemnity and importance. To enter upon such a life and spend its precious years, and part with its priceless opportunities, without due consideration, with no serious thought of the future—the end, the obligations and the final issues of life—is to act the part of a fool and a wanton sinner. II. **THE RIGHT CHOICE OF MEANS FOR THE**

SECURING OF LIFE'S GREAT END. Life is a rational, fearful trust, which God has put into our hands, and He will hold us strictly responsible for the use and outcome of it. On the right choice of means and their wise and faithful application will depend mainly the tone, the character, the fruit, and the final outcome of life itself. III. A JEALOUS HUSBANDING OF ALL THE RESOURCES AT OUR COMMAND, IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH LIFE'S END AND MISSION. IV. THE UTMOST OUTLAY OF WILL AND ENERGY AND EFFORT TO GET THE BEST POSSIBLE RESULTS OUT OF THIS BRIEF PERIOD OF PROBATIONARY EXISTENCE. The present is the seedtime of an eternal existence. Brief as this life is it affords the only chance of heaven. Our days are "numbered" from the start—enough, but not one too many, for the work given us to do. We must up and haste. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *The fear of God*:—The fear of God which he holds up before us, as the whole work and duty and happiness of man, is such a fear as blends with love, and issues in all holy obedience, in the keeping of God's commandments, heartily, impartially, universally. I. THE PRINCIPLE OF RELIGION. This is the fear of God, not such a dread as wicked men have, and which makes them tremble—like the devils in their prison beneath, but a holy and reverential sense of His majesty—a belief in His presence, power, and goodness—the adoration of His love and wisdom—the reliance upon His providence and the dread of His displeasure. By consequence, the fear of God includes our belief in Him, as He has revealed Himself to us in His Word. The fear of God which I now commend to you is a mixed feeling—love, faith, confidence must blend with it. This is the inward principle of religion—without it there can be no acceptable worship. There are two extremes from which it is alike distant. The one extreme is that dread, which engenders superstition and human devices for its palliation and removal. II. THIS FEAR IS SEEN IN ITS RESULTS—it necessarily leads to practice; it is in connection with duty and obedience. When we see the movements of a clock, or any complex machine, we know that there is a power at work within. If the hands of a watch move, we know that there is a cause; the result follows of course. It is so with the outward acts of religion when they are right; they spring from the inward principle. The great virtue of this inward principle is, that it actuates man in his conduct universally; it gives a right aim and tendency both to his desires and affections—both to his words and works. To govern the tongue, to restrain the appetites of the body, to correct the temper, to keep down the swellings of pride, the suggestions of malice and revenge, to curb all dishonesty in desire and action, to secure temperance, soberness, and chastity; "to keep the hands from picking and stealing, and the tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering;" to establish truth and integrity in the deep places of the heart; these are all results flowing from an inward principle of the fear of God. III. THIS IS THE WHOLE OF MAN; his whole duty, his highest achievement, his noblest work. (*H. J. Hastings, M.A.*) *What is the whole duty of man*:—The Book of Ecclesiastes resembles that of Job—its aim is not disclosed till it ends. It might be called the Book of Awakening and Renunciation. If we look at life from a mere earthly point of view it is not worth living. All is vanity; what's the use? As the book closes it reveals the true philosophy of life. I. THE FEAR OF GOD. This includes a variety of feelings. 1. Reverence. This may be viewed as threefold, according to Goethe's profound view of education—reverence for what is above us, reverence for our equals, and reverence for what is below us. 2. The fear of offending God by doing what is sinful. 3. This fear, which springs from reverence, has in it no torment, and is closely allied to hope. II. THE OBEDIENCE OF GOD. To keep His commandments includes the whole duty of man; or this is every man's duty. The tree of duty supports many branches. 1. Our duty to God. 2. Our duty to ourselves. 3. Our duty to others. III. SOME REASONS. 1. Our whole life shall be judged. 2. Every secret thing in the whole of life shall be revealed in the judgment, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (*L. O. Thompson.*) *The summary of manhood*:—There is no need to caution men against the fear of God. The tendency to-day is not to fear too much, but too little. I. FEAR GOD. Godly fear is salutary. 1. It fosters reverence. 2. It guards virtue. 3. It restrains from sin. 4. It impels to obedience; to the—II. KEEPING OF GOD'S COMMANDMENTS; of the commandment. 1. To repent. 2. To believe in the Lord Jesus. These are preliminary—to keeping—3. The great commandment; and—4. That "like unto it," and the command—5. To walk in "all the statutes of the Lord." III. "THIS IS THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN;" rather, "this is the whole"—that is, this is everything—"so far as man's life is concerned." This is everything as it relates—1. To faith. 2. To experience. 3. To conduct. 4. To

service. Thus you get the complete man. (*R. C. Cowell.*) *The whole duty of man*:—This suggests as a theme for meditation the fact that the religion revealed by God includes the entire sphere of possible human activity; that there is nothing good that a man can think, do, or say, or feel, which cannot in its highest forms be shown to be rooted in, and a fruit of, the religion which God has revealed. "Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." I. The first point to determine is **THE MEANING OF THE WORD FEAR**. It is not slavish fear; it is not the feeling that a man might have who was writhing on the earth at the approach of a despot, and expecting to be ground into dust by the stamp of his iron heel. The scriptural meaning of fear is what we suggest by the word *revere*. "Revere God, and keep His commandments." This is the "fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom." Revering God as our Creator, as the Sovereign of the universe, as the one Lawgiver, is the union of the intellect which approves, and the heart which loves, and the will which consents. They are all in the single word *revere*. When reverence for God exists in a human soul, the natural attitude of that soul is the attitude which led St. Paul, while yet his name was Saul, to cry out: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" II. When a child of God, revering Him, asks this question, he finds **THAT THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD INCLUDE HIS DEVOTIONS**. The explanation of prayer, of the holy Sabbath, and of the Word of God is to be found in the fact that they create, maintain, and increase reverence. III. Observe, also, that God's commands **TAKE THE FORM OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THESE COMMANDS ARE SIMPLIFIED, AND THEN DETAILS ARE PRESENTED UNDER THEM**. The first and great commandment is that "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, and strength." The only definition of the love of God which can satisfy the mind or the heart is "to have an intense desire to please Him." It will apply equally to spirits in the body and out of the body. And the second is like unto it: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This does not mean more than thyself, as some fanatics have supposed, but as thyself; not in the sense of caring for thy neighbour as for thyself, or of caring for his house, his children, his life; but in this sense: that thou wilt do good to thy neighbour as thou hast opportunity, and that thou wilt not do evil to him even for thine own transient advantage. (*J. M. Buckley, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.—*The great day of judgment*:—I. **PROVE THE ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY OF A DAY OF GENERAL JUDGMENT**. 1. By the Bible (*Jude 14; Job xix. 25; Ps. ix. 7, 8; l. 3-6; Dan. vii. 9, 10; Matt. xxv. 31-46; Acts xxiv. 15, 25; 2 Pet. iii. 10-12; Rev. xx. 11-13*). 2. Conscience, influenced by the Holy Spirit, and resting on the inspired volume for theological information, points to the Day of Judgment for rewards and punishments to be distributed at the end of our probation. 3. The equality and justice of God's administration are incontestable proof of a Day of Judgment. II. **THE JUDGE, THE CIRCUMSTANCES ATTENDANT ON, AND THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF, THE DAY OF JUDGMENT**. 1. The Judge. Jesus Christ alone, as exhibited in the Bible, is adequate for the great work of judging the world in righteousness. As Son of God, He understands all the rights of the eternal throne, the requirements of law, and the demands of justice; and as Son of man, He knows the extent of our ability, the feelings of our hearts, and the state of our nature, and can, therefore, be a merciful, gracious, and just Judge in things pertaining to God and man. 2. The circumstances attendant on the Day of Judgment, and the immediate results of the decisions of the Supreme Judge. (*IV. Barnes.*) *Human responsibility*:—In the argument in which we are about to engage, we shall assume the great truth of the immortality of the soul; we shall assume, at least, that man is to live after death; for if this be denied, there is little place for reasoning as to human accountableness. I shall perhaps bring this grave question most plainly before you by imagining certain cases, in which a creature would not be accountable, or in which his being held accountable by a Supreme Power would confessedly be at variance with justice. Supposing, then, that I were to tell you of one of the inferior animals, a horse or a dog, as held accountable for its actions, so that the Creator of that animal would call it to a reckoning, and reward or punish it according to its works; there would be an instant feeling in your minds that this could hardly be true. You cannot think that the animal has intelligence enough to be placed under any law; the distinctions between right and wrong have never been apprehended by it, and because of its want of intelligence and

of its supposed utter inaptitude for any moral rule, it would seem to you as though to bring the horse or the dog were little better than to bring a machine into judgment. Now, take another case; the case of an infant, or a very young child. You would declare it palpably unjust were this infant or child alleged accountable for its actions; you would instantly say, "The child is in no sense master of its actions; its reason is not strong enough, and its conscience not formed enough, for discerning between right and wrong; and certainly, if there be accountableness in any case, there cannot be in that in which moral difference has as yet no existence." You would do precisely the same with the idiot. You would say, "The lamp has been quenched or never kindled in this being, by whose shinings he might have been turned from evil and directed to good: how, then, can he justly be brought into judgment for his actions? how can he be a fit subject whether for punishment or reward?" Neither is it only infancy or idiocy which would make you put a human being beyond the range of accountableness. If it could be shown that a being was under some invincible constraint, actuated by a superior power, forced by irresistible passions, or compelled by irreversible circumstances, to a certain course of conduct, you would decide, and we think very justly, that he could not be accountable for his actions. A free agent alone can be accountable; one free, in such a measure, that he can make an election between evil and good, and is under no necessity of acting in this manner rather than in that. We must admit, also, another exception from accountableness. If a being be so placed that he has not sufficient information as to what is his duty, or that he is without adequate motive to its performance when discerned, it would seem unjust to make him responsible for his actions; as he must be free in order to be accountable, so he must have light enough for his direction, and inducement enough for his obedience. We are now to see whether any of these allowed pleas against accountableness can be urged by men in general; for if not, there will be an end of all objection against the doctrine of human responsibility, or that doctrine will stand out in thorough consistence with the attributes of such a Being as is God. Now, first, as to the free agency of man. You may all have heard of what is called the doctrine of necessity, or fatalism. We are told, that inasmuch as there is a succession of causes and effects in the universe, and every cause must produce its effect, there is no possibility of things being otherwise than as they are; we have no power over events, and none over actions; we cannot act but in one way, we can arrive at but one result; and it is ridiculous to talk of our being accountable, when we are but machines which do not regulate themselves. Now, this doctrine of necessity, if true at all, must be true universally. But I can see that the doctrine of necessity is false in matters of common life. It is not true that things are beyond our control; it is not true that they proceed just the same, whether we interfere or whether we do not. The fields do not wave with harvest, whether we till them or whether we do not; and it does make a difference, whether we put out a fire or suffer it to burn. Be, then, consistent, ye modern fatalists! Carry out your doctrine of necessity in all its extent, and do not confine it to religion and morals. But setting aside this doctrine of necessity, is there any real liberty of action—are not men the creatures of circumstances? are they not under an insuperable bias? is it not practically undeniable, that they will act in one way and not in another? Nay, not so; man is no machine, when the utmost has been allowed as to the tendencies and circumstances of his nature. Man is a being who can be swayed by motives; and a being influenced by motives cannot be a being impelled by necessity. Judge for yourselves; are you not conscious, when you do many things, that you might forbear to do them?—that if a greater inducement to the forbearing were presented than is urging you on to the doing, you would forbear? Then assuredly your actions are so far free, that you may justly be held to account. But a being may be free, and on that account responsible, yet he may be left in such ignorance, or possess so little moral power, that he can hardly discover the right, or follow it if discovered. There is an end of moral government, unless a rigid proportion be maintained between the demands of the ruler and the powers and opportunities of the subject. When St. Paul delivered those memorable words, "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law," he quite settled the question, with all believers in revelation, as to accountableness varying with advantages, so that there shall be different standards for different circumstances. But, withal, we do not think you can find us the tribe of human beings whose circumstances can be given as sufficient to

excuse them from the being accountable at all. You have never any right to look at those in whom the moral sense seems almost extinct, without looking also at others in whom that sense is in vigorous exercise. We gather from the fact of a moral sense being found where man has not thoroughly degraded and sensualized himself, that this moral sense is actually an element of our nature; yea, an element not destroyed, but only overlaid in the most degraded and sensualized. For no tribe has been met with in whom conscience could not be awakened; awakened, we say; it was not dead, but only slept. There is not one of you without a conscience. Let men say what they will as to the strength of various motives, the strongest, the most uniform, the most permanent motive with you all is the sense of duty. I do not say that this is the motive to which you most commonly yield, but I do say that this motive is always pressed on you through the instrumentality of conscience; so that whilst every other is transient, this is abiding. I dare affirm, that in every mind duty is secretly placed before interest or pleasure, though it is a hundred to one that practically interest or pleasure will carry it over duty. There is a light vouchsafed unto all—there is a voice which is audible by all—there is power in all to attempt the walking by the light, and the hearkening to the voice. And, therefore, with every admission that accountableness is not a fixed thing, but must vary in degree with the circumstances and capacities of the individual, we may contend in the general that God will only be acting with the most thorough justice if He act on the principle of the text—the principle of bringing “every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” Now, it has not been our object throughout our foregoing argument to show you that God does or will hold man accountable, but rather that there is nothing in the circumstances or capacities of man to militate against the doctrine of his accountableness; on the contrary, that those circumstances and capacities are such as to prove it quite just that he should be held accountable. And you may tell me that this leaves the question of human responsibility unsettled; for that God will call men to account is no necessary consequence on a proof that He might call them to account consistently with justice. Now, here again we are at issue with you; we think that the one is a necessary consequence on the other; for if God would be just in holding man accountable, would He not be unjust in not holding him accountable? The justice results from the capacities with which He has endowed man, and the circumstances in which He has placed him; and He would be unjust were He not to deal with him according to those capacities and circumstances; unjust because having proposed an end, His perfections demand of Him that He inquire whether or no it have been effected. But, in truth, if men require from us a rigid mathematical proof of their being responsible, we fairly own that it is not easy to give. We can show that the elements essential to accountableness are all found in man, and yet it may not be easy to draw out a demonstration that man is accountable. But why is this? Only because things on which there is the least doubt are often the hardest to prove. A man asks me to prove to him that he is responsible; I ask him to prove to me that he exists. He will tell me that he is his own evidence as to his existence; and I tell him that he is his own evidence as to his accountableness. That there should be such words in common use with reference to man, is itself convincing proof, that there are facts which correspond to them in his nature and condition. The whole structure of society is based on the fact of human responsibility, and it is this responsibility which keeps it together. You have only to establish that men are not accountable for their actions, and there is an end of all confidence, an end of all law, an end of all decency; the commonwealth is sick at its core, and the mainspring is snapped which actuates all the system. Neither are our modern philosophers prepared for this. They want to keep man responsible so far as accountableness may be necessary, as the cordage of society; and then they wish to prove him irresponsible, so far as accountableness has to do with his relation unto God. Vain effort! futile distinction! There is no accountableness, except accountableness to God. If I am responsible to man, it is only in a subordinate sense. I see where men want to draw the line of accountableness. They have no idea of not holding one another accountable, when their present interests are concerned; but they would like to be rid of the restraints which God’s moral government imposes, and they manage, therefore, to fix the point of human responsibility just where, if responsible, they stand exposed to eternal destruction. This will not do. We cannot admit that principles which are either universally true or universally false, shall be partially

applied, chopped and squared, as may suit man's passions or accord with his interests. We will have them everywhere or nowhere. They shall use their principles wheresoever they are applicable; they shall carry them into politics, they shall carry them into science; they shall be fatalists everywhere, they shall be responsible nowhere. And until this be done there shall be no place for argument against human accountableness, and the testimony of Scripture shall remain thoroughly consistent with all the conclusions of reason, that "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." (H. Melvill, B.D.) *The reasonableness and credibility of this great principle of religion, concerning a future state of reward and punishment:—*

I. THE SUITABLENESS OF THIS PRINCIPLE TO THE MOST NATURAL NOTIONS OF OUR MINDS. We see, by experience, that all other things (so far as we are able to judge), minerals, plants, beasts, etc., are naturally endowed with such principles as are most fit to promote the perfection of their natures in their several kinds. And therefore it is by no means credible that mankind only, the most excellent of all the other creatures in this visible world, for the service of whom so many other things seem to be designed, should have such kind of principles interwoven in his very nature as do contain in them mere cheats and delusions. 1. This principle is most suitable to the general apprehensions of mankind concerning the nature of good and evil. And as the one of these doth in the essence of it imply comeliness and reward, so doth the other denote turpitude and punishment. 2. This principle is most suitable to those natural hopes and expectations which the generality of good men have concerning a state of future happiness. The better and the wiser any man is, the more earnest desires and hopes hath he after such a state of happiness. And if there be no such thing, not only nature, but virtue likewise must contribute to make men miserable; than which nothing can seem more unreasonable to those who believe a just and a wise Providence. 3. This principle is most suitable to those fears and expectations which the generality of wicked men are possessed with, concerning a future state of misery. Now, as there is no man whatsoever that is wholly freed from these fears of future misery after death, so there is no other creature but man that hath any fears of this kind. And if there be no real ground for this, then must it follow that He who framed all His other works with such an excellent congruity, did yet so contrive the nature of man, the most noble amongst them, as to prove a needless torment and burden to itself. II. THE NECESSITY OF THIS PRINCIPLE TO THE RIGHT GOVERNMENT OF MEN'S LIVES AND ACTIONS IN THIS WORLD, AND THE PRESERVING OF SOCIETY AMONGST THEM. Nothing can be more evident than that the human nature is so framed as not to be regulated and kept within due bounds without laws; and laws must be insignificant without the sanctions of rewards and punishments, whereby men may be necessitated to the observance of them. Now, the temporal rewards and punishments of this life cannot be sufficient to this end; and therefore there is a necessity that there should be another future state of happiness and misery. 1. Not all that may be expected from the civil magistrate; because there may be many good and evil actions which they cannot take notice of, and they can reward and punish only such things as come under their cognizance. 2. Not all that may be expected from common providence; for though it should be granted that, according to the most general course of things, both virtuous and vicious actions are rewarded and punished in this life; yet there may be many particular cases which this motive would not reach unto, namely, all such cases where a man's reason shall inform him that there is far greater probability of safety and advantage by committing a sin than can be reasonably expected (according to his experience of the usual course of things in the world) by doing his duty. But the thing I am speaking to will more fully appear by consideration of those horrid mischiefs of all kinds that would most naturally follow from the denial of this doctrine. If there be no such thing to be expected as happiness or misery hereafter, why, then, the only business that men are to take care of is their present well-being in this world, there being nothing to be counted either good or bad but in order to this. Those things which we conceive to be conducive to it being the only duties, and all other things that are cross to it being the only sins. And, therefore, whatever a man's appetite shall incline him to, he ought not to deny himself in it (be the thing what it will), so he can have it, or do it without probable danger. Now, let any man judge what bears and wolves and devils men would prove to one another if everything should be not only lawful, but a duty, whereby they might gratify their impetuous lusts,

if they might either perjure themselves, or steal, or murder, as often as they could do it safely, and get any advantage by it. But there is one thing more, which those who profess to disbelieve this principle should do well to consider, and that is this: that there is no imaginable reason why (amongst those that know them) they should pretend to any kind of honesty or conscience, because they are wholly destitute of all such motives as may be sufficient to oblige them to anything of this nature. But, according to them, that which is called virtue and religion must be one of the most silly and useless things in the world. As for the principle of honour, which some imagine may supply the room of conscience, this relates only to external reputation, and the esteem which we have amongst others, and therefore can be of no influence to restrain men from doing any secret mischief.

III. THE NECESSITY OF THIS PRINCIPLE TO THE VINDICATION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE. It is well said by a late author, That not to conduct the course of nature in a due manner might speak some defect of wisdom in God; but not to compensate virtue and vice, besides the defect of wisdom, in not adjusting things suitably to their qualifications, but crossly coupling prosperity with vice, and misery with virtue, would argue too great a defect of goodness and of justice. And perhaps it would not be less expedient (saith he) with Epicurus, to deny all Providence, than to ascribe to it such defects. It being less unworthy of the Divine nature to neglect the universe altogether, than to administer human affairs with so much injustice and irregularity. IV. APPLICATION. If this be so, it will concern us then to inquire—1. Whether we do in good earnest believe this, that there shall be a future state of reward and punishment, according as men's lives and actions have been in this world. If not, why do we profess ourselves to be Christians? 2. Do we at any time seriously consider this, and revolve upon it in our minds? 3. What impression doth the belief and consideration of this make upon our hearts and lives? Doth it stir up in us vehement desires, and carefulness of mind in preparing for that time? (*Bp. Wilkins.*)