

WISE COUNSELS.

WISE COUNSELS.

A BOOK FOR YOUNG MEN.

BY

THOMAS BINNEY.

LONDON:

W. KENT & CO., 23 PATERNOSTER ROW.

1866.

Quinta Press

Quinta Press, Meadow View, Weston Rhyn, Oswestry, Shropshire,
England, SY10 7RN

The format of this volume is copyright
© 2019 Quinta Press

For proof-reading purposes the line breaks are in the same place as
the original, hence the stretched text

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following Lectures were taken down and reported at the time of their delivery, now several years ago. They were the only lectures of the course, so far as the Editor knows, that happened to be thus taken. They appeared at the time without the sanction or revision of the preacher. They are now republished by one who thinks that, with all the disadvantages of their original appearance, they are adapted to be exceedingly useful to young men. He applied to the author for permission to issue them, who gave that permission, but accompanied it with the advice that, as they would no doubt need much verbal correction, which he had no time to attempt himself, he (the Editor) should do his best to remove the worst of the rudenesses of both speaker and reporter. He has done this to the

best of his judgment and ability, and may be allowed to regret that it could not be attempted by a more competent hand.

May the hints and suggestions, of which these Lectures for the most part consist, deposit some of their seeds of thought in the hearts of many young men, guiding them to the conclusion that wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. THE TRUE COMPANION,	9
II. YOUTHFUL LUSTS,	24
III. THE VOICE OF WISDOM,	34
IV. THE DELIGHTS OF WISDOM,	47
V. WISDOM AND FOLLY,	58
VI. SOLOMON'S SEVEN AGES,	69
VII. FOOLISH IN UP,	84
VIII. MONEY AND CHARACTER,	96
IX. MORAL AND SOCIAL LAWS,	110
X. PRACTICAL GOODNESS,	125
XI. THE POWER OF THE TONGUE,	136
XII. GOOD AND EVIL,	151
XIII. THE FOOL'S BIBLE,	163
XIV. GOOD AND BAD PRINCIPLES,	175
XV. THE CLOSING APPEAL,	186

WISE COUNSELS.

I.

THE TRUE COMPANION.

“When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.”—PROV. vi. 22.

“WHEN thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.” What is it that will do this? The context in the preceding verse has “the *commandment* of thy father and the law of thy mother.” The commandment and law of religious and well-instructed parents come to be equivalent to the law of God—they stand for that upon which they are based, and from which they are drawn; and, therefore, I should like you to consider that the word *it* standeth for this book—the Bible; and that it is here said with respect to the Word of God, “when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.” Now, mark the context,—“bind it upon thine heart, tie it about thy neck,”—that is to say, if the book is to do this, it must be a thing to be loved, or a thing that is loved; it must be taken to the heart and clung to with affection. It must be a thing of which you are not ashamed—which you are not to be laughed out of, which you are not to be indifferent about, which you are not to treat with scorn, or, hearing it treated with scorn, to be ashamed and silent. But bind it about thy neck, as an ornament, a thing which thou art not ashamed to show—lay it upon thy heart as a thing

10

that thou lovest; and if thou thus takest it to thy soul, "when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." There is great beauty in the word that is used here, expressive of that familiarity and friendship which there will come to be established between the mind and heart of the young man, and the wisdom of God personified and embodied in this book—that they shall come face to face, speak mouth to mouth, as a man speaketh with his friend; a sacred familiarity, an affectionate friendship, an intercourse of tenderness; not the thunder and terror and the voice of words, which, when the people heard, they entreated that it might not be spoken to them any more, but in softness and beauty it shall come upon the soul, like to the entering of music into the ear—God in His Word talking to thy heart.

Now, observe, in the next place, the things that will characterise this sacred converse and intercourse. But I wish, first, to call the attention of you young men to a preliminary observation to this effect—how greatly we are influenced by those we talk with, and by the habit of talking into which we get. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise;" he that habitually converseth with men of intelligence and gravity, and who are familiar with things which have in them inherent importance, and who talk of them, converse about them in a maner which befitteth the dignity of that nature to which God has given this wonderful faculty of speech—why, the man is influenced—influenced necessarily, by converse like that. The conversation of the ignorant, the stupid, the dull; the converse of the flippant, the vain; the conversation of men of no reading, or of nothing but light reading; the conversation of the corrupt, the licentious, the vicious—why, the influence of the habitual talk of one man like that must tell very greatly upon the habits of another. Let me hear a man talk unreservedly—show himself by his talk, and I will tell you what sort of company he keeps, and what kind of people talk

II

with him. We naturally fall into the same modes of thought, and imitate the language, and even the gestures and expressions of countenance of those we habitually converse and talk with; and so shall we be influenced for our benefit by converse with this embodiment of the great thoughts of God.

Now, I must go, you know, upon my usual plan of throwing out merely brief hints—pregnant as I can make them—and leaving the matter to be pursued by yourselves, and, therefore, now let me very briefly notice, as I said, some of the things that will characterise this converse. And, in the first place, it will talk with thee *on the most important subjects*—all that has ever occupied the attention or excited the curiosity of men. It will talk with thee about God, about creation, about Providence, about sin, about law, about redemption, about holiness, about duty, and about destiny; nothing insignificant, nothing mean, but the great subjects with which our own inward life, and outward nature, habitually come into contact,—all that is profound in the anticipations of the human heart in relation to the future, the present, and the past; and whatever it talks upon, you will find that its thoughts are not only good, but the best.

Again, it will talk to you *with constant variety*, with incessant *interest*. It will talk to you about individuals, about races,—in poetry, in parable, and by precept; in all sorts of ways it will present the subjects of its thoughts. It will illustrate and embellish, and thus stimulate the faculties, giving as much pleasure by the mode of its converse, as it will benefit by the subjects of its discourse. Besides, it will talk *with authority*, it will talk like one that has a right to be heard; and you will be willing that it should be, if you are in that state of mind and heart, which is requisite and necessary, if it is to talk with you at all. You will be willing that it should talk with you as a master, and a teacher, as well as a friend. There will be nothing harsh, nothing grating in that authority

12

if your heart be right. "This man speaks with authority, and not as the scribes." But the people were attached to Him, for grace was poured into His lips, and He spoke with meekness and gentleness, as well as power; and you will find this book, which is like a personification of Himself, will do the same. My young friends, it will talk with you *with honest plainness*. It tells us that God disliketh those that have learned to use flattering words, and you will find that it illustrates itself: those flatteries which young men often hear from one another, by which many are seduced, you will hear nothing of when you come into contact with this book. Many a friend, from a want of moral courage, dare not say to you what he thinks, and many a one will not, but will say directly the contrary; and there is nothing that will be so injurious frequently in its influence upon the young mind, as flattering words of this sort. The book will not speak to you thus, but it will speak to you with openness and honesty, and with all the plainness of reproof; sometimes its words may be very severe, the stroke may come heavily from the hand, but you will find that those reproofs will be the reproofs of a faithful one, and they will be as an excellent oil that shall not break the head. It may break the heart, but only to better it and then make it whole again, that the man may go on his way strengthened, firmer, and bettered, by the reproof.

These are some of the characteristics of the converse; but let me just say, that there are two or three things that you must carry with you in order that this converse may be beneficial. In the first place, you must be *on terms of perfect sincerity and earnestness with the book*, that it may answer sincerity with sincerity. You must not come reluctantly, nor with doubt, nor with ridicule. You must not come in any improper spirit to question. There is a proper spirit in which to question—in that you may come, and it will talk with you, talk to you, clear your understand-

13

ing, and remove your doubts. But there is another Spirit, and if you come in that, it may perhaps not talk with you, for it is wonderful how this book will just treat you as one man another. If a man feels that another cometh to him *without sincerity* and without sympathy—and there is an instinct in the soul that tells if a man is sincere and in earnest—if such an individual cometh, he will close the lips and shut the ears. Words may be spoken, sentences uttered, which a man may take away, but they will only perplex him if he does not come to another in a right state of heart and mind. So with this book—“with the froward it will show itself froward.” If you come in a bad and improper spirit, the book will let you go away more ignorant and perplexed than you came; but come with sincerity and honesty of heart, and the book will take you by the hand, and talk with you, reveal its profound recesses, open to you its pages, and open your inward eye by the Spirit that dwelleth in it and cometh from it, that you may perceive that which it reveals.

Another thing, young man; there must be *serious and earnest prayer for his influencing and guiding Spirit*, that the law of truth, as objectively presented by the book, may be subjectively applied to your heart—that your reason may be aided in its appreciation of the truth. This exercise may not be congenial to you. Ah! you will find one day, when you are older, that prayer is a blessed privilege. If you can live without prayer now, the time will come when you will find that you cannot do without it. God forbid that you should only find it out when it is too late, for God says it may be too late; that a man may so go on neglecting to ask after truth, neglecting to inquire after God, that when he cometh in mere terror and crieth, he shall not be heard. Now, carry away with you that great truth, that if you want this book to converse with you and open itself to your heart you must be very earnest and very sincere in your

14

prayers for the enlightening and illuminating Spirit, that God may open your inward eye that you may see the wondrous things that are written in God's law; open your inward ear, that you may hear the meaning of what the book says when it talks with thee. And, my young friends, there must be frequent, and sometimes prolonged and deep meditation on the words of the book, as it talks them over with you. Talk them over with yourselves; turn them on all sides; let them lie upon the heart; let them gradually make their impression; let them sink in; let them be absorbed; let them become a portion of your inward life; let them change the colour of your thoughts and affections, till by long intercourse with them you shall come to have another Bible written on your heart by the first, so that the word shall dwell in you richly in all wisdom, so that when the book converses with you, it shall find, as it were, a repetition of itself. You shall seem to it as a mirror, reflecting from within its beauty and wisdom, its glory and light.

I must just request your attention to one other point here. "When thou *awakest*, it shall talk with thee." Now, my young friends, just illustrate that to yourselves. I will tell you three ways in which you may illustrate the time here indicated. In the first place, suppose you take it literally *when you awake*, when you come back in the morning to your consciousness. What a thought it is to have a thing of heaven at your side ready to talk with you; thoughts of heaven, words of God, all that is great, all that is beautiful, all that is true, useful, and elevating, ready to talk with you. Let the life, day by day, be in harmony with that beginning of the day: when every morning as it cometh has such a beginning, and every day such a character, what blessed and solid satisfaction will be the result. Talk, then, with the book in the morning; a slight converse it may be, very brief, little may pass, a very few words, but every word is weighty, every sentence resting upon your heart may

15

come to be like a sure guiding light. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. Day by day it shall be thy guide, and it shall illuminate thy path, "for the commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light;" it shows the path; nay, it enlightens the soul to such a degree, that the man does not need the leading which he had at first. He has become a light and a law unto himself, and he walketh in the light of knowledge, and in the path of understanding, Let a young man be brought to a spiritual perception of God, and the results will be purity, devotion, religious faith, and holy contemplation. He shall so begin the day and pass through it in peace, and then at night shall be canopied and sheltered by the fatherhood of God, by His paternal keeping. And thus, when he sleepeth, he is secure, and then when he awaketh it shall talk with him. What a blessed round of the twenty-fours that! How different for a man to awake in a place of sin, at the house of infamy! How dreadful for a man to awake up in any place after a day of injustice, idleness, wrongdoing,—to awake with his conscience to talk with him, and that conscience only echoing the terrors of the law. How fearful will it be to begin the day with talk like that. Such discourse is often heard, and that not only in the morning: sin often gives conscience a tongue all night long; the man is filled with tossings to and fro, fearful apprehensions oppress his brain, as the thought of his errors keeps him in a continual state of wakefulness and unrest. How different the man whose sleep is sweet unto him, who rests in the consciousness that he is living wisely, and in the delightful knowledge that he is sheltered by God, and who has only to wake up "to talk with Him."

Again, you may illustrate the statement, figuratively—that it refers to a particular time when, by the force of inward thought or outward circumstances, a young man may suddenly wake up to a knowledge

16

of his peril, foolishness, sin, duty, the past and the future, and who may have been brought to this state of mind by the death of a friend, the death of a father, death of a mother, death of a sister, the loss of a companion; the loss of a situation even may cause this waking up in his soul. Or, this state of mind may be induced by the mere force of inward thought suddenly throwing open the door of his consciousness. Sin is like a sleep—vanity is like a dream. The man that waketh suddenly thus, if with bitter and honest contrition, and \n sincerity of heart, he come to the book, “it will talk to him.” It may speak first in a manner that will pain and mortify; it will set thy sins in order before thee, it will speak to thee with honesty and severity, not in wrath but in love; by and by it shall speak words of consolation, bind up thy broken heart, and lead thee to that fountain opened for sin and uncleanness—revealing to thee Him who is thy great salvation.

But the last thought here. I should like you, young men, to illustrate the expression figuratively, by considering youth as a time emphatically of waking up to the realities of life. The young man who has just entered into the world feels himself in a very different situation from what he was when a child at home, or a boy at school. An object of the perpetual care of others, everything was made and provided for him. Presently, as a youth entering into the world, he has waked up to something like his individuality. The parent bird, as it were, without the least diminution of affection, has thrown him from the nest, and he must fly or fall; he must use his wings in order to escape without danger. The young man findeth himself waking up to obligation; he feels that his success in life now depends upon himself, his judgment, and conduct.

Now, when thou awakest to this, young man, before thy heart has been corrupted, before thou hast been led astray, before the wicked hath talked with thee, and before thy judgment has been perverted and thy mind debauched,—when thou wakest up to the greatness of

17

life, and its duties, let the book talk with thee—be its pupil, be its friend. It will take thee by the hand, and speak to thee most wisely; it will inform thy judgment, and keep thee from the pollutions that are in the world through lust; it will guard thy steps that they never wander on the dark mountains, and keep thy soul from lying down among the congregation of the dead.

Now, young men, with respect, in the next place, to the way in which the book talks to you in this chapter—the discourse throughout this chapter may be stated to be a warning against the things that may injure or ruin you in a worldly point of view, with respect to your success in life, your property, and so on. And mind, there is far greater connexion between the ruin of a man considered in a worldly aspect, and the ruin of the soul, than many people are apt to imagine. Mind, there is a great difference between a man *being* poor, and *becoming* so. Suppose a man to be poor—it makes no matter in what station of life he may be placed, for there are poor in all stations. We say “a poor working man,” but there are many poorer than he; it is not merely that a man gets only a guinea a week that makes him poor,—there may be various kinds of poor, because of the different positions in which men are placed. And poverty and work, whether by hand or head, muscle or brain, may be an element of strength, of protection to a man; he may be virtuous and spiritual in spite of his poverty, and it may be an instrument in the promotion of spiritual life. But this is a very different thing from a man becoming poor,—being ruined, especially if that comes with the loss of character,—and it is very seldom disconnected with it; then there is the loss of self-respect, the loss of those feelings that will preserve and protect. And it is almost certain, when there is thorough ruin in worldly substance, there will follow the loss of moral standing and character, and destruction, to such a man; this is almost as certain as the grave.

18

Well, then, observe here, the book talks in this particular chapter with the voice of warning against what may be a hindrance to your worldly life; but I can only just glance at this subject. There are three things here. In the first place, you may be ruined by the *want of caution*. "He that hateth suretiship is sure." You may be led by inconsideration into striking hands with a friend or a stranger; in the intercourse of business you may give your name to a bond, a guarantee, or whatever it is called, and then your property is no longer in your own keeping, but in the keeping of another, and is dependent on him. Now, I don't think that we should understand this book to teach that under no circumstances are we to be sureties or under bonds for one another; but, under any circumstances, it is a matter to be looked at by the man of business, especially the young, with extreme caution. No man ought to be bound for anything which he cannot afford to lose, because he may lose it—the very supposition of loss lies at the basis of the thing. You are brought to stand in the place of another in the estimation of a third party, because he can put confidence in you if the one for whom you are surety should fail to pay—and the possibility of that lies at the basis of suretiship—and you may have to find, produce, and bring forth the amount for which you became surety. No man, therefore, should place himself in this position, unless he can afford to lose that for which he becomes responsible. "My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth"—snared by thy hand. Then get rid of the bond; use means; try to be delivered; use any means. But it is not so easy; the written signature remains; it is not an easy matter to get it erased; no arrangement, perhaps, can be made with the man; he will just sit down, and let the thing take its course. Therefore, my son, thou hadst better avoid the thing altogether, or as much as possible. Never come into those cir-

19

cumstances which may cause you to awake with remorse in the morning, to think of what you have done over night. If the loss of the money would not affect your circumstances, so as to hurt your family or your business, why it is a different thing; in that case, you are at perfect liberty to become surety for any one you please. This chapter opposes all hazardous speculation, which is a species of gambling—trying to get the substance and the profit without giving the sweat. The law is—eat, but earn it; give the sweat of the brow or the brain for it, and then take it. But all your hazardous speculations, your gambling transactions, are endeavours to avoid this law. Therefore, says the wise man, have nothing to do with this sort of thing,—“Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler,” If you do get out of the net, take care that you are not entangled again. I need not tell you of the large amount of speculation that is going on in our own day, and the evil consequences that it produces, not only to the temporal but the spiritual well-being of men; for most of you know more about it than I do, and could preach a better sermon on the subject to me than I can to you.

Notice a second thing by which a man may be ruined—*indolence!* “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise, which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O Sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.” Some men have actually turned that which was meant to be merely a means, an instrument of invigoration, into an end of itself,—a thing to be desired for its own sake! Now, this love of ease, this sluggishness, is not merely indicated by lying in bed, by sleeping, and slumbering, and folding of the hands to sleep. There are some people who seem to be asleep all day long; they go about

20

their business as if they did not care for it. Now, if they don't care for it, it won't care for them. I like to see a man thoroughly in his business, and his business thoroughly in him. I like to see a man active, earnest, energetic, full of tact, with his eyes open, intelligent, quick, a strong hand and a bright eye, ready to do everything well. All you young men should remember that you are not to go about the business duties of the day as though you had been up all night, and as if you had lost all your vigour of body and presence of mind too—as if you were both tired and stupid. No, go not about your work thus, but with vigorous, elastic activity, as if you loved it, and did it as a joy. Be in your work so while it lasts, and then, when it is over, and you have your hours for yourselves, just be as energetical in giving the mind something that shall be a joy to your own soul. The lazy, sluggardly man is sent to the ant to get wisdom, and very remarkable little creatures they are. But I have not time to dwell upon this. You young men would find much information and deep interest in a little book entitled "Insect Architecture," which is fully worth the small sum that it costs. You will find that there are many different kinds of ants; among them, are mason ants, carpenter ants, and builders, some who make nests five hundred times higher than themselves—which if we did, our houses would be somewhat higher than they are! The indolent man shall become poor,—“thy poverty shall come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.” like a man that travelleth; he was coming a long time, though unperceived, and at length he gets to the door, and, unwilling as you may be to give him entrance, he will force his way, and with him will be another—Want, gaunt, absolute distress, like an armed man, will force his way in and make you wretched;—and all this the result of sluggishness, or want of proper exercise of mind and heart in the business that God made yours.

The last thing to notice is, that you may be ruined

21

by *profligacy*. I shall not dwell on this, because my sermon this day fortnight was exclusively on that subject—the sin of impurity and licentiousness. There is a somewhat different aspect given of the thing here: there is here not only the seduction of man by the harlot, but there is the injury of man by man—the higher and more complicated crime; and most graphically is it represented, the absolute folly of the conduct by which an individual may excite the jealousy that is the rage of a man, that intense indignation which may smite him in a moment. A man that is guilty of any form of this vice “lacketh understanding, and destroyeth his own soul.” “The adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon coals, and his feet not be burned?” By a course of profligacy, saith the wise man, a man may be brought to a piece of bread. You start in life’s gay morning with all that heart can wish,—plenty, prosperity, substance, fortune, station, and friends; but all will soon be gone, you may be brought to a piece of bread, if you make companions of harlots. Such a man may be brought to a state of infamy and wretchedness, rejected by his friends and shunned by society, and his own bosom full of remorse, as he hears the cries, and sees the tears of his victims, and knows that their blood is upon his soul—so that he may *not* be able to say, “I will arise and go to my father.” “Oh, how it hardens all the heart, and petrifies the feeling!” and very generally the conscience too.

I have not time to dwell upon the topics presented to us in the middle of the chapter; there is introduced the characteristics of a man who is on the road to ruin. The prominent point noticed is, that he hath an evil imagination and a false tongue:—“He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers.” There is something remarkably expressive about all that. “Wherever a man finds that a plain tongue and right honest English will not serve

22

his purpose, but that he must get signs and secret intimations, that man is very far gone from the paths of uprightness, transparency, honour, and honesty. A man of this stamp will talk by his signs, in a room full of company, while none but his paramour and partners in guilt shall understand; it shall be intelligent converse to them. No wonder the wise man said of such a one—"his calamity shall come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy," dispersed as the chaff before the wind.

Now, my dear friends, let me just say three or four words before closing. Let me invite you, and I think you may do it without being fanciful, to give a spiritual impression to the truths here brought before us. We have been looking at the moral, now look at the Divine side, and see if there be not deep spiritual thought that you may get out of it. And, in the first place, let us all now acknowledge and feel that we are guilty, sinful men, that we are in the sight of God not only debtors but bankrupts, and that freedom never could have been ours but for Him who became our surety, and died "the just for the unjust to bring us to God." It cost Him much; and let the love of Christ constrain us thus to judge, that one died for all, all being dead, and that He is our representative and surety in the work of mediation and mercy, and that He died to give His life a ransom for many; and by that Divine suretiship, we can be relieved, redeemed, and saved.

In the second place, let me invite all you young men to accept the faith of Christ, and the redemption that He has offered; begin life so, and then enter laboriously into the Christian work; "be not slothful, but be ye followers of them who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises." Fight the good fight of faith, take the whole armour of God, and quit yourselves like men; in understanding be men and not children; and having faith, add to your faith virtue—manly force—and to manly force know-

23

ledge, and to knowledge patience, and to patience temperance, and to temperance godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity, so shall you neither be barren nor unfruitful in the work of the Lord.

Thirdly, having given your hearts to God, being devoted to this Divine life, a part of God's holy Church, His beautiful, blessed bride, a part of that holy companionship—see that ye be not induced to fall from your steadfastness and to violate the covenant of your God, by the seductions of the world, the flesh, and the devil. See that you be on your guard against those seductions that might lead you away to sin, departure, and apostasy.

In conclusion, dear young men, remember to be habitually conversing with all those noble, holy, pure, and Divine words which you will find in this book, so that your life and duty may be continually in harmony with God's will, so that you may not be surprised into any sinful act;—one act, remember, may destroy completely your position, character, and reputation. One sin may lead to the beginning of a course that leads to hell. May God enable you to look up to Him continually, and by His grace may you love this book, that, day by day, it may talk with you! Punishment must follow sin; you can no more stay the working out of God's laws, or alter them, than you can turn the sun from its course round our world. And these laws are working out fearful results to the disobedient; be on your guard, then, against the beginning of evil, any single act of sin—flee from temptation.

“My youthful friend, of every act beware,
Lest *one* false step should bring an age of care,
Ever thy credit keep: 'tis quickly gone;
Though gained by many actions, *lost by one?*”

II

YOUTHFUL LUSTS.

“The lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: but her end is bitter as worm-wood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them.”—PROV. v. 3–6.

THIS chapter was addressed by the wise man to his young pupil; and consists of caution, and warning, against licentiousness,—the lawless and irregular indulgence of the passions,—what are called in Scripture, emphatically, “Youthful lusts that war against the soul.” We shall endeavour to glance very briefly at the different portions of the chapter, and shall rather attempt, simply, to draw a general outline for your own reflections and meditations, than a particular illustration and minute analysis of the passage.

A great peculiarity in the constitution of humanity seems to be the combination and the union in the same being of two opposite natures,—the animal and the spiritual: there is an animal nature, with the impulses and appetites of the brute; and a spiritual nature, with its godlike aspirations and its capacities of intelligence and religion; and these two are one. All the representations of Scripture, and all the reflections of man, lead to the idea that the highest condition of intelligent, spiritual, moral nature, is not this in which we now are,—that, in that world where intelligence is perfect, they neither marry nor are given in marriage: the animal body, with all its instincts and

25

passions, is gone; and if there be a body, it is spiritual,—for the spiritual unconnected with the animal is that condition of mental being in which the spirit can find its highest, its most perfect development. But in the condition in which we now are, whatever may be the aspirations of the soul, whatever may be the high-throbbing impulses within us, we always find that there is an animal nature as really and truly *us* as the spiritual itself. The lower animals are swayed and governed by their impulses—blind impulses—which are their law; they act under them, and for the most part they herd together promiscuously. In man, the animal impulses are in a large measure subject to the spiritual and moral nature—the mind of man: his sensibilities and affections elevated and purified by moral virtue, and his appetites sanctified by marriage, his mixed nature may become a source of the purest and most elevated satisfaction. The conjugal relation is associated with all pure ideas, and is the source and fountain of the purest joy; the family circle is the nursing-mother of all virtue. All licentiousness—the lawless, irregular indulgence of mere appetite—would subvert all these connexions; without love, without permanence, having no regard to family, offspring, and respectability, it is the corrupt source of that which degrades the individual, and pollutes and blasts society. One cannot think of the position in which the female seducer is placed without disgust; it is the most offensive aspect in which a woman can be viewed; the mind revolts from the contemplation. Idolatrous nations—nations in a condition of deep degeneracy—have always been distinguished by vices of this degrading and disgusting order; and it is used in Scripture as the source of the strongest imagery, to set forth spiritual apostasy from God, or God's truth, and as being the precursor of everlasting ruin and destruction from the presence of the Lord.

Now, just give me your serious attention to a few

26

words based upon different portions of this chapter. "A strange woman;" a name used from the circumstances that the Jewish law was so framed, as not to suffer any of the daughters of Israel to sink to this state of degradation, and therefore, such, when they were found, were generally persons from the surrounding idolatrous peoples. The term, however, was continued even in subsequent times, when some of these unhappy persons were the daughters of Israel, "who had forsaken the guide of their youth, and forgotten the covenant of their God." She is represented as having "lips like an honeycomb, and a mouth smoother than oil." Her flatteries and seductions were such as if she would make every individual believe that he was all the world to her. She endeavours to excite his vanity and self-love. But "her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword." The immediate consequence of vice of this order—the humiliation, the consequent loss of self-respect, the inward disgust and self-loathing, the bitterness, is sharp as a two-edged sword, piercing, flaming into the soul. The ultimate consequences of the sin, were it to become a habit—"her feet go down to death, her steps take hold on hell:" he that has come under the influence of the fleshly lust that wars against the soul, is going downward with fearful rapidity—"her steps take hold on hell," rush to it, as it were, as if life was not going fast enough for the sinner to get there. "Lest thou shouldst ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them." Her enticements and flatteries are varied, lest thou should ponder the path of life—think of what you have been doing; for she knoweth that such reflection, such pondering on the path and its end, would lead any one, who is a man, to shake off the bonds and cords by which he is tied, and to arise and go to his Father; and so, by various appliances and blandishments she seeks to prevent this happy result. Young man, mark, what a powerful thing is

27

the habit of manly reflection! Neither the devil nor the devil's agents can do you much harm if there is manly reflection in thy soul; ponder, then, like a man, the path of thy feet, and like a man look up to God, seek God, cling to God, and He will guide and keep thee in the right path.

Now, though I thought it my duty—a duty, I do not hesitate to say, I should have been glad to have avoided—to take up this subject and say a few words upon it, I shall not think myself bound to go into a minute exposition of every portion of the book, where the same subject is introduced; and therefore I say to you here, that the most graphic and perfect illustration of persons of this description you can meet with, is found in the seventh chapter, which I shall pass over in the course of my exposition, because I leave that to be taken and appended to the words we are now considering. There you will find in what her “moveable” ways consist—the flatteries, the snares, the enticements, the representations, by which she seeks to seduce. And mark, it was “a young man void of understanding,” who was ensnared; and he reflected not on his folly and sin “till a dart pierced through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.” “Her steps take hold on hell.”

Now these verses are, very probably, a portion of the instruction of David to Solomon, which Solomon records in the previous chapter, and which is continued so far here; and then upon this description, on which his father grounded this particular admonition to him, he bases the application of it, and the instructions that follow. So, you might observe that the next thing that follows after this description, is a very earnest, serious warning of his youthful pupil against the sin,—“Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way from her, and come not nigh the door of her house.” The old divines used to say that there are some people who tempt the devil to tempt them. Now, many

28

people do that. The young sometimes do that, thinking that they can go into certain places and to certain companies, or they can read certain books, without evil results. Perilous experiment! Go not nigh. Be on the watch against thyself. Have a care or you may fall in a moment.

Then follows a description, which is a kind of accumulated exhibition of all the consequences of the sin,—“Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel.” Oh! the lip like an honeycomb, and the fascinating endearments, they belong to the cruel of heart, the insincere, the selfish. What is an individual to thee without love? And what will she care for *thee*? Come not nigh, “lest thou give thine honour unto others.” What! to give your good name into such keeping—thy life “unto the cruel!” I have had to do with many persons, who, with disturbed consciences, have come to me for guidance in the greatness of their sorrow. I have known some, who for years have been kept in perpetual perturbation and distress, always expecting a visit, or a letter, or a demand for money. Ah! thine honour, thy reputation, thy life, are under the perpetual power of the cruel, that care nothing for them. What can be got by him? That is all they seek. There is no friendship between the wicked; and the seducer that will at one time utter a thousand endearments, will at another time dig a grave and hold a pistol;—we have seen it done. “Lest strangers be filled with thy wealth, and thy labours be in the house of a stranger.” THERE IS NOTHING SO EXPENSIVE AS SIN. Now, if you forget all my sermon, don't forget that—*there is nothing so expensive as sin*. “And he divided unto them his living.” And the younger went away and spent all he had in riot and harlotry, and then, when he had consumed all upon his lusts, “he began to be in want” He had lost that which was his, with which he might have traded and made more; he might have been placed in a position of stability and honour, but it was no

29

longer his—it had changed hands—the strange woman had gotten possession of his substance. How many constitutions, how many fortunes have been blasted and wasted through early subjugation to lust? “And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed.” God has written His law, not only upon the tables that He gave to Moses, not only in the book, but He has written His laws as distinctly and plainly as it was possible for the finger of God to write anything, in the constitution of man. God has associated with habitual vice, and even with vice that is not habitual, such a condemnation, such an utterance of His wrath and disapprobation, and especially against this vice which we are now considering, as is fearful to think of. Not only is there the physical suffering, but the mental suffering, “when the flesh and the body are consumed.” It is too much the habit in the present day, in a great deal of the popular literature, to gloss over sins of the flesh—there is too much the habit of looking at the side upon which may be written *misfortune*, not *guilt*. The eye is turned away from guilt and is called upon to pity. Pity is all very right and proper in its place: we say concerning God, “the pitifulness of Thy mercy.” But God is not all mercy. By the working out of His laws, He gets the sinner in His grasp, who has to bear the consequences and results of an habitual violation of these laws, and of the power of One who strongly and sternly can carry them out.

I am afraid that many of you are reading books without that proper reflection with which they ought to be read, and so get false views of things. “And *thou mourn* when thy flesh and thy body are consumed.” But before they are consumed, and while they are consuming, for it may be very slow and lingering, out of the midst of that corrupting carcass thy soul may mourn. And observe, the sinner does not reproach God now—he does not strive to find excuses and palliations for his conduct; he is not heard talking about the force of the temptation—God’s discipline has taught

30

him better, and his reflections turn upon himself:—“How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.” In places sacred, in places, above all others, where external circumstances should have operated upon my better nature, in these very places my better nature has been subdued and governed by the worse. “Their eye is full of adultery, they cannot cease from sin.” It was all my fault, says the suffering sinner. I had instruction, but I would not give ear to it. He finds no apologies nor excuses for the sin, the consequence of which he is suffering; but the fault all comes right down upon himself, and—there it rests.

I will now very briefly touch upon the second idea involved in this description and deduced from these principles. The next idea by which he urges obedience to God’s laws, is the happiness, purity, and beauty of a well-ordered, wise, and prudent conjugal connexion. The language which he uses is highly figurative, after the manner of the East, and exceedingly beautiful and impressive. On the opposite side of the misery which is produced by what is evil, irregular, and criminal, he puts a beautiful picture of a man rejoicing in the wife of his youth: she is to be as the loving hind and pleasant roe—or, as the word means, a gazelle, graceful and beautiful. She is loving and kind, calling forth all the individual affections, and the man is to live joyfully with the wife of his youth, and let her ever be the object of complacency and delight, even as the lovely and beautiful gazelle; and thus entering into such a connexion according to the will of God, with pure love and affection, why, then there is the person *appropriated*—she is thine own—thine own pure fountain of delight and joy; rejoice in it and be glad. And out of this association, this pure union, this isolation of one individual from all else, as thy sole property, shall arise unnumbered blessings. This

31

institution of wedded love is from God himself; but "if," as Herbert says, "God had made all common, man would have been the encloser." He would have drawn one above all others to himself, and surrounded her as a well-enclosed garden or a fountain sealed. Rejoice, then, says he, that it is an institution of God, the order and law of the universe of which thou art a part. To persons in this relation, God denies nothing consistent with innocence, and deprives them of no part of their nature that can be attuned to virtue. Is not this a scene of the greatest satisfaction and joy? Thou canst look with complacency upon thy children, and not be ashamed of them; but canst thou rejoice in the children of shame, or feel happy in the thought that they know thee not, nor thou them, as they flow into the stream of society? "It shall be that the pride of thy heart shall be thy children's children." Oh, my son, with such a condition of things as this, with all these pure blessings at thy right hand, why wilt thou embrace the bosom of a stranger? See the evils that flow from evil connexions and irregular desires, and then look upon the beautiful picture of wedded, and especially of early love. This is what is set before the young man, and then the whole is closed by three weighty considerations which we will just touch, and then terminate our exposition.

First, the young man is surrounded by God Omniscience,—“the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.” The adulterer waiteth for the twilight, and the darkness of the night, saying, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,” the Lord knoweth not. But behold the darkness shall be as the day, for the darkness and the light are both alike to God—the ways of a man, wherever he is, are before the eyes of the Lord, “and *he pondereth* all his goings.”

IF YOU WON'T PONDER YOUR WAYS, YOUNG MAN, GOD WILL—REMEMBER THAT! However you may avoid and neglect this great duty, God will ponder all your

32

ways and see what they are worth; He will form an opinion, and will bring thee into judgment to hear that opinion pronounced in a sentence from which there is no appeal.

The second, concluding, and weighty word is the tendency of iniquity, and especially sins of this sort to gain a fixed habit. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins." There is nothing so utterly repulsive as that of one who has grown old in habits of grossness, till his conscience is seared, as it were, with a hot iron, the eye of his understanding is darkened, and his moral sense and sensibility are obliterated. Some such wretches do exist, but the vicious generally die young; yet some grow old, and to illustrate the idea here put forth—"he shall be holden with the cords of his sins"—he seems to take a diabolical satisfaction in recalling images of immortality, and is fascinated with their baseness.

The last weighty word is, "*he shall die*," "he shall die without instruction"—without receiving it, because he neglected it, and because he became hardened against it. He shall die because he would not receive instruction, and because "in the greatness of his folly he went astray." In the greatness of his folly he broke bounds, and trampled upon the best feelings and sensibilities which God had implanted within him. And, brethren, remember, this was the description of a man that had all the advantages of earthly wisdom, and the instruction of the ancient Church of God. The individual here described is a man who had the advantage of Divine revelation, and the moral instruction of the priest and the Levite, the prophets and teachers; and yet would not give his heart to the instruction, but "in the greatness of his folly he went astray." As the end of all this, God says "he shall die," yes, and let him die!

There is a strong determination in the Divine character, written upon the unalterable of the

33

world, which proves to us that God shrinks not from the infliction of capital and condign punishment upon the unrepentant sinner. He says, "Let him die; he shall die; for in the greatness of his folly he went astray;" "Because I called and ye refused, I stretched out my hand but ye did not regard it, therefore I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh"—when your fear cometh like a desolation, when distress and calamity come upon you.

Now, this is the way in which I think that we should look at sin, and that you young men should hold upon your guard against a great deal of the foolish sentimentality that is abroad in the world, and that has a tendency to lessen your feelings of the enormity of sin, and of the condign punishment that it deserves. I am not now going to preach the gospel. I tell you that there *is a gospel*, that there is a revelation of mercy, that there is "blood which cleanseth from all unrighteousness"—a way by which the sinner can be saved. And it may be said, and doubtless will be said, with respect to some impure man or woman who have been led away by their sins and lusts, as it was said of many in the first Christian Church at Corinth, "Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

There is a gospel, and you know where to find it, but I have to do now with the terrors of the law. I am not now going to weaken the effect of this chapter by turning to another writing, but I am just going to leave this truth upon your consciences and upon your souls; and we tell you that God can and will be true to His Word—if you go on with pollution and guilt upon your souls, why then, according to the greatness of your folly, *you will die*,—and you will be *dammèd*.

III.

THE VOICE OF WISDOM.

“Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.”—PROV. viii. 1–9.

I PASS over the preceding chapter, as I mentioned to you that I should, because, in addressing you from the fifth chapter, the whole discourse was on the subject of “youthful lusts that war against the soul,” and I had occasion, in that discourse, to make some pointed reference to those sins; I therefore do not feel it necessary to take up the seventh chapter at all, but I refer you to it as an illustration of the portion on which we last discoursed. This seventh chapter is an illustration of the actions of the seducer—the tempter to vice. “In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night,” she is represented as waiting at the corners of the streets for her prey. But we pass over all that, and we come in this chapter to her who would not seduce, but who would direct to duty and to God. The voice of wisdom is here personified as the utterance of maternal or sisterly love; not uttering itself in darkness, but in light, in the open places, in the

35

centres of concourse, and calling to you, O men, even the sons of men, to hearken and to receive her lessons. To the verses which I have read to-night we shall now direct your attention.

There is a question discussed by theologians upon this chapter which I just notice in passing. The wisdom here spoken of is thought by some to be a representation of the Divine Logos—the wisdom of God that became incarnate in Jesus; and they suppose that the allusions and utterances in this chapter can be interpreted with reference to HIM. I don't think so. I don't think that it was meant by the writer; I think the hypothesis would prove too much as to what was in the mind of the writer at this age and period of revelation in the Church. I don't mean, therefore, to interpret the chapter on that hypothesis, but to take it, as I think it was meant, as one of those beautiful and suggestive personifications of the Oriental mind in which wisdom is thus brought and presented to the imagination as a female uttering her voice to mankind. One that hath prepared her house, and set up her pillars, and lain in wait to seduce, we read of in the former chapter; and here we have one presented to us as standing a daily instructress to the sons of men. This, I think, is the true hypothesis of the passage; and we will now just meditate for a little upon the few verses which have been read, which is all I shall be able to bring before you to-night.

Now, I will try to give you young men something like a connected outline of thought, which you must dwell upon and fill up for yourselves. We will take up the points of the passage in a few distinct particulars.

In the first place, let us just see, as your eye glances over this portion of Scripture, and your mind and heart are fixed upon it in devout thought, what is included in the notion of Wisdom which is represented here as continually addressing you—speaking always and everywhere. I think, in the first place, it is right

36

to consider that, in the general idea, you are to include all things in heaven and on earth and in society; you are to consider that by the laws which govern all things, and in the working out of those laws, God is perpetually addressing us and seeking to instruct us; that His wisdom is embodied in all his works, in all the laws by which nature and man are governed, and under which they are placed. His lessons are thus represented to us, not in theory, not in speculation, but in the concrete, in the absolute fact, passing before the eye, to be viewed and meditated upon by His creatures; and by that meditation they are to draw out of them the instruction that He intends to convey. These lessons are embodied in everything about us. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." God has so constructed things that we should ever be surrounded by teachers. He has written the great Book, and placed us here to learn its lessons. The lesson of wisdom is most prominently referred to in this book—the wisdom of practical life. The written book is to be studied; and by your learning its lessons, it is to become in you an embodied fact; but God's book consists of embodied facts. The first book that is set before you—that which God has put together, on the pages of which He has inscribed His lessons, a great leaf of which is turned over every day, upon which you are to look in society—the words in this book which fill its ample pages are facts; this book, which you have first to learn, is embodied fact, and God is perpetually speaking to us through it. God created the universe, and set all these natural and moral laws in motion, not that He might read it and be instructed, but in order that we might learn something about Him, and about ourselves, and about the laws under which He

37

has been pleased to place us,—lessons, very probably, we could never have learned if they had not thus been embodied and illustrated. Then there are in this book means for those who have learned these lessons to become preachers to others. The men, who have studied the book longer and better than others have arrived at general principles, who have illustrated those principles by observation, and in their experience have embodied them in their personal life, are officially placed in the Church. Under the law they were Levites, who kept the mysteries of God; under the gospel they are the teachers and bringers out of those great principles of love and duty of the Divine government. Thus the living voice utters the living experience of the heart, and mankind are taught the lessons which God has written on the pages of His vast volume of nature.

Then, above all, and in connexion with all others, are the superior and supernatural communications, as I deem them, which we have in the Written Word, ever bringing before us and uttering in our hearing high and important spiritual truths, a knowledge of which, without this book, we could never have attained. Yet an acquaintance with these things was rendered especially necessary from our peculiar condition as subjects of temptation, sin, and death, and all moral evils which mark an apostate and fallen world; a state of things which the book of nature was never meant to meet, because when it was written they did not exist. What was wanted was a further revelation, and which revelation we have—a revelation of redemption and of duty—further developments which the first book did not meet; and all those objects by which we are surrounded, society, man, nature, the world, are God's illustration of this book. Springing from this revelation are all those institutions for teaching and for instruction which in a state of society and a state of things like ours was so much needed; and with which we are favoured.

38

When you have endeavoured to fix this upon the mind, you come, in the next place, to observe what is said about *where* this wisdom is to be found: "Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors." Now, I think here is a great truth that may be taken and illustrated, and that rises out of what I have already said, that, if you look for it, there is wisdom for you everywhere and at all hours. That which I am principally endeavouring to inculcate upon you young men, by endeavouring to give a general exposition of this book, is, THE PRACTICAL WISDOM OF LIFE. Why, it is crying to you everywhere. In addition to the official teaching of the Sunday, in addition to the living voice of the preacher and the lessons of the Scriptures, in addition to the precepts and saying of wise men and the many human productions which are meant to instruct you,—why, you young men ought to understand, that with respect to the great truths and the great proprieties that should mark and regulate your conduct in life, why, where does not wisdom cry? You may hear its voice in the shop, in the warehouse, in the exchange, in the bank, in the market-place, in the streets, in the resorts of commerce, in places of business,—in all these places, "doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice?" Is not her voice heard in the streets? I mean this,—don't you see in that book of God, which I have told you is a book of embodied fact, the actual illustrations and working out of the laws that He has established? Why, it meets us in this shape everywhere—in the conduct of men, in the results of that conduct, in the rise of their reputation, or in the loss of reputation. In the fact that everything relating to the comfort or well-being of men depends upon their actual conduct, don't you see that you are surrounded by lessons which it becomes you to learn?

39

And don't you know that many a man who goes on in his folly, trampling upon, and shutting his eyes to, and neglecting these lessons which are everywhere and at all times placed before him, wakes up at last and finds himself a fool? Now, "Doth not wisdom cry?" I think you may illustrate it in that way very fairly and very properly.

Observe, next, the *audience* that wisdom wants: "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart." Now, I don't mean to say that man was the audience that Wisdom addressed when the earth was without form and void, when all the elements were in chaotic confusion, when all things were gradually evolving and rising into order, when the globe was taking shape and form. And I don't mean to say that there was no spiritual being whatever who was instructed and taught by the lessons of the progress so going on; but I do mean to say, that I believe all the time God was composing the book, previous to the world becoming habitable by man,—when He was blotting out and putting in, refining and beautifying, and perfecting, He was making the book for men. He was not making it for angels. They might be, and I daresay they were, taught by the process; and they "sung together for joy" when it was completed, when its ample pages were unfolded and its lessons inscribed thereon; but, from the very first, out of the depths of eternity, Wisdom tells us she rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and her delights were with the sons of men; that is, by anticipation of the time when the world should become the habitation of man, when the book should be put together, and she could address herself to him and teach lessons with respect to this mortal life, and lift him to a better. Man is emphatically the audience that is wanted by Wisdom. All men she seeks to listen to her instructions—men of high degree and men of low degree, Mark, my

40

young brethren, the universality of Wisdom's call; the whole population of the globe is sought to become one audience to this Divine teacher. Mark, also, how this applies to the gospel, the highest form and manifestation of Divine wisdom.

Now, with respect to Judaism itself, it appears to have been intentionally limited and contracted, without a universal or missionary spirit. Still, the Jew for a season, though an ignorant, low, stiff-necked, vulgar being—speaking in the light of his previous history and of his past history—was made for a time the librarian, the keeper and preserver of books which had in them the elements of universality and fitted them for all mankind. The very circumstance of their being found in his hands, kept by him so long, and yet so superior to him, surpassing his conceptions and understanding, proved that they were not from himself, but from a higher source. God always meant, through all His dispensations, however limited they might appear, however fixed and humble for a period, that the walls of limitation should be broken down, and that what was meant for mankind should become the possession of the world. When the highest and most perfect form of Divine wisdom came, this principle of universality was fully brought forth, a lustre rested upon the Church; and if the Church had been faithful to its commission, and had thought more about realising the idea of its Divine Head, rather than splitting into pieces and fighting about little ideas of its own, the thing might have been far more universal than it is; the higher and more Divine system of the gospel might have got an audience worthy of itself. But because it has not, say some, because a great length of time has passed, and the gospel has not been universally spread, therefore it never will. I don't believe such an argument is worth a rush; but I am not now going into that; I am only illustrating the particular idea here, and I say it is here intimated most plainly that God means

41

ALL men to be His pupils, and the gospel addresses the universal conscience of humanity, just as the first book spreads its leaves before the eyes of all mankind.

“O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.” Come, ye simple ones, and I will take and tend you. The lessons of Wisdom are loving, wise, adapted, discriminating. Sometimes she can use the words of reproof; she will speak with the voice of kindness to man; but if he refuses to listen, she will be grieved at the hardness of his heart, and will sometimes break it, but only to soften it, and to infuse into it the lessons of Wisdom, and then heal it up again.

You will reflect, in the next place, upon what is said here respecting the *excellency* of the lessons. Wisdom says, “Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things.” Its words will be truth and righteousness; nothing forward or perverse, nothing abominable. Now, I should like you to illustrate this in your thoughts upon the matter thus: every man knows that the excellent, the true, the pure, and holy, all that is elevating and divine, all that will cleanse the heart and the imagination, is good and conducive to man’s happiness. Now, every man knows that this is the character of the Bible. “Thy word,” said David, “is very pure.” There are pages here and there, which can be accounted for and explained, on which some have put their hands and said, “Now, look how impure and bad your Bible is.” But is it not the conviction of every man, I should like to know, or every society of men, that this book is really an enemy to all that is impure, low, vile, gross, unjust, bad? Why is it, in general, that people dislike the book? Why, because it reproves their ungodliness and their sins. Why is it that men often won’t read it? Why, because they don’t want to be reminded of its restraints. The book would elevate, purify, and breathe into the heart a divine life. This is known, and it is disliked because ungodly men don’t

42

want to be put under a course of discipline, and have their evil tendencies and unholy passions subdued by its power.

I think that this applies to all Christian Churches as well as the Bible. The tendency of each and all is to elevate. This is a great peculiarity, which runs through the whole of them—different sects, whose theological peculiarities are exceedingly diverse and opposed to each other—theologies which are the good, the better, the worse, all unite to benefit men. There are some doctrinal views which would seem almost logically and consequentially rather to discourage than to encourage—to lessen, than to increase, the principles of morality and goodness;—I repeat, there are some theological and doctrinal peculiarities, the tendency would seem rather dangerous to morality than otherwise; yet even with respect to these doctrines, the worst of them in a Christian sense—and it is very remarkable, however philosophy may be unable to account for it—that with respect to all such teaching, the tendency is to purify and elevate. There is a fact for philosophers. The book then, and the teachers of the book, tend to elevate; and this is also true with respect to the teaching of the first book, the book of nature, the book, as I said, of absolute fact; for, the lesson in society is really this, “You cannot govern society on the principles—if principles they may be called—which conduce to and encourage badness, untruthfulness, fraud, vice, sin, crime; you cannot set up shop, you cannot work a manufactory, you cannot keep society together, and make it work harmoniously, as it ought, in order to conduce to the benefit of all, upon the principle of falsehood and dishonesty; you know you cannot.

What does that mean? It means that God is teaching you in these great embodied lessons, by the working out of His laws, that you must be true and holy, in order to prosper and be happy—safety and blessedness is intimately associated with the real, the true, the

43

right, the good, the pure; and Wisdom speaks of these things, and hence she says, "Hearken! hear! Listen to me, O ye sons of men, and I will teach you excellent things; ail my lessons shall be true." And so they are.

Notice, further, that with respect to these lessons it is said, "They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge." Those words uttered by Christ are very memorable, and should be deeply pondered by you young men,—“If any man will do the will of my Father, he shall know of the doctrine.” If you are sincerely, intensely desirous of obtaining a knowledge of truth, you will get it. You need not fail of the lesson—you cannot fail of the lesson, if you are sincere in wishing to learn it. Come to the task with a pure, honest, sincere, humble, and devout heart; for God taketh such a man by the hand and teaches him; as it is written in the Psalms, “The meek will He guide in judgment and the meek will He teach His way.” With respect to the lessons belonging to the practical government of life, you all know that the statement of the text is perfectly true, that “they are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.” They are willing to understand—that is the idea. You know very well that there must be something exceedingly wrong about any man’s understanding who would dare to hold up his face to you and argue and reason in defence of the wrong and the impure. You know it; and you know that, with respect to the great practical lessons which bear upon life, the lessons which this book would convey are plain, perfectly plain, if you wish to understand; and if you don’t wish to understand, I will tell you what may happen. It may happen by the inevitable operation of a fixed law of man’s nature, that your understanding and your mind may be so perverted, your judgment so blinded, your whole nature so distorted, and your heart so deceived, that you will call darkness light, and bitter sweet. There is nothing

44

that produces such a withering, blasting, effect upon a man's understanding, so deadens his sense of propriety, weakens his resolution, and warps his judgment, as a long continued course of sin. Such men will come to jabber about moral questions like idiots, which are all plain to him who wishes to understand; especially in the morning of life, before the heart has been corrupted and the understanding weakened. But where these things have come to pass, men are sometimes given over to themselves, that they may "believe a lie and be damned."

Now look, in the next place, at the result where the lesson is welcomed and learned. The man who has learned this lesson, and put it to the test by actual experience, comes to understand what a blessed life it is to serve God; by joyful experience he can testify that "in keeping God's commandments there is great reward." And though nature at first may have rebelled a little against the light, against the restraint, against the yoke, yet the yoke, when it has been worn a little, feels as if it were lined with velvet. Such a man finds out by experience the blessedness of a divine and holy life. If he be a simple man, acquainted only with that wisdom which cometh by experience, the sceptic and the infidel may argue with him, and he will say, "I cannot answer your arguments; I don't see to the bottom of them; I don't exactly understand them, or perceive their force: but I won't give up my life; I won't give up what I have experienced, what I know, what I have positively written upon my soul, in the actual history of my mind and life, because your arguments are above my comprehension: 'they are all plain to him that understand, and right to them that find knowledge.'"

Now, these are just a few ways by which you may illustrate this portion of Scripture, and I leave them with you. Remember them, try and recollect them, put them together, and, under God, make the best improvement of them that you can. By way of wind-

45

ing up our meditation, let us notice one or two things. First, we should recollect that God hath in the gospel added to all His other endeavours, and by it communicated to men what could not be taught by Creation and Providence. Very frequently, I think, Christian teachers write and speak as if the ancient Gentiles had learned nothing, or made out very little. Now, I think, with respect to some, they made out a great deal; unaided by revelation, and groping in the dark after truth, these ancient Gentile men gave birth to some of the finest thoughts and most beautiful representations, in relation to human duty and human virtue—the laws of mind, morals, and so on; so much did they make out in this direction, that you will remember all the terms which expressed moral ideas in the New Testament, were terms found in the language of those Gentile men—those Greeks. The Greeks had in their language all the terms expressive of moral ideas and moral distinctions, so that the Christian writers took the terms of the language to express their own ideas; and the language could not have had these terms, if the men had not attached to them appropriate meanings. Some of the terms are used in a particular sense, and have assumed a Christian aspect, but the idea is still there. They did a great deal in the sphere which reason was capable of reaching and investigating, but the gospel brought a revelation of mercy, of which they were before ignorant, so that now we have a complete unfolding of divine truth in both the books that God hath written for our instruction. The first came to all mankind, and the second was given to the Church, but which will be common to all mankind when the world is the Church.

In the second place, I think that you young men might dwell upon the advantages which you possess, in hearing this voice of Wisdom, which is represented as crying to you everywhere, and seeking to teach you. What a blessed institution is this day—the

46

Sabbath of rest! The shops are shut up, business is suspended, and a vast number of places are open where individuals may assemble together, and hear that which has a tendency to quicken thought, to help men to reason and argue, to contemplate spiritual truth, moral principles, character, life, duty, eternity. What a wonderful institution, and how well adapted is it for Wisdom to cry to the sons of men! Think of the multitudes that in consequence of this institute are brought together to listen to processes of thought on the most important and sublime subjects, every week; what a great good it must accomplish for the minds and souls of men! Because it is so common, I fear we do not certainly estimate it enough.

When Julian, commonly called the Apostate, sought to govern the Roman Empire upon the principles of philosophy, he recommended the teachers of this philosophy to imitate the Christians in their meetings, so that the people should be got regularly together, to hear from the living voice orations upon the principles of morality and philosophy. He was wise enough to perceive the tendency of this plan, that it was calculated very greatly to establish his system.

My dear young friends, let me say just one thing. I wish you would lay it to heart, that the God of wisdom is as ready to hear you as He is anxious that you should hear Him. Don't forget that, and don't forget to act upon it. Wisdom crieth aloud, lifteth up her voice; she is everywhere addressing her lessons, and just as really and certainly as God is anxious that you should learn these lessons, is He ready to hear your voice in supplication and prayer, that He may purify your soul, and refresh and strengthen your mind. God grant that the lesson may be devoutly loved and you divinely taught!

IV.

THE DELIGHTS OF WISDOM.

“When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment,” &c.—PROV. viii. 27–36.

I FORGET whether in my last lecture I mentioned to you, that in looking at the preceding chapter of this book, it might just be worth while to notice the contrast between the two. That we have there presented to us, that principle of evil which would take hold of the lower part of our nature, and drag man down into the animal, and immerse him in fleshly lusts, in the person of a vile and abandoned harlot, that waiteth in the twilight, that lurketh in the corners of the streets, seeking to seduce young men by her flatteries and fascinations, while her house is the way to hell, and her steps take hold on death; and that in this chapter we have presented to us Divine Wisdom, seeking to purify our nature, to raise it out of the animal and elevate it into something noble and holy. And this principle of goodness is personified as a female going forth inviting and soliciting you to give heed unto her, counselling you, and seeking to take hold of the higher part of your nature, that she may elevate it to God. She does not linger in the twilight at the corners of the streets, but cometh forth into the open places, into the centres of concourse. If I remember rightly, I mentioned to you that I could not myself, with the appro-

48

bation of my reason and conscience, interpret this chapter in any other way, than as the strong and poetical Eastern manner of speaking. I think the Divine Wisdom here spoken of, is one of those suggestive and beautiful personifications of the Oriental mind which we so frequently meet with in the Scriptures, and which are so common with Eastern writers. I don't think it is Christ, the Divine Logos, or anything of that sort. I think it would be assuming too much; on that principle of interpretation, a great deal more is put into the chapter than the writer of it had any notion of. If the Divinity and pre-existence of Christ has no better foundation than this, it does not stand very securely; but I believe it has a better foundation, and that it does not depend upon any argument drawn from this chapter. Now, with these brief preliminary remarks, I proceed to make three or four equally brief observations upon the passages that I have read. In the first place, there is something said here about wisdom, and then, in the second place, there is something about what wisdom says. We will just glance at both of these things.

In the first place, here is something said about wisdom. Read from the twenty-second to the twenty-sixth verses. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world."

This is the first thing, which I think is introduced to convey to us the one great truth, that from all eternity God was, and from all eternity He possessed the attribute of infinite wisdom inherent in Himself; that from all eternity God had infinite understanding—before the earth, before time, before matter, before any-

49

thing was, He was, and that Wisdom was with Him. All the different expressions which we find here, just amount to that, and they involve, you know, ideas like this,—that the material universe is a creation—mark that—*that the material Universe is a creation*; that it had a beginning, that there was a time when it was not, that God was before it; that there was a time when He was the universe, and the time came when the universe was distinct from Him, to which He gave being; that the universe was not always in existence, and that the universe is not *Him*. “Very mysterious!” says the philosopher. Yes, it is very mysterious; and think you, that you are to get through this wonderful life of yours, without having to contend with mysteries? “Very mysterious!” “What!” say they, “are we to believe that God existed from all eternity in a state of inaction? Why did He begin to act? What moved Him to it? When was the moment? Immutable and unchangeable God! Surely there was a great change when He began to create! How was it?” Well, I suppose you are all aware that questions may be asked by a child in relation to these matters, that all your philosophers and priests cannot answer. It is very mysterious—very! But it is easier to believe that God was from eternity, and that matter was not, than it is to believe the contrary. If He was not from eternity, whence could He be at all, and if matter was from eternity, why then matter is God! But this cannot be. Matter bears upon it everywhere the marks of something which is not mind, but something upon which mind has operated. The belief, then, in a personal and eternal God, however incomprehensible and mysterious, is much more rational than the contrary. This mystery helps to explain other mysteries by which we are surrounded. Taking our stand upon this primary mystery, we get light upon every other. We can understand something of what we are, and whence, and for what purpose we are here. Man must answer the end of his being by bowing down to

50

worship and adore his Creator; but till mystery begins you can have no religion.

The second thing in the passage extends from the twenty-seventh to the thirtieth verse,—“When He prepared the heavens, I was there: when He set a compass upon the face of the depth: when He established the clouds above: when He strengthened the fountains of the deep: when He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment: when He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” *Before*, and *when*. You have seen the idea presented by this first term, and we now advance to the second term—from *before* to *when*. He who existed from all eternity and possessed the attribute of infinite wisdom as seen in the creating, forming, and fashioning matter through all processes—laying the foundations of the earth, giving it its form, setting His compass on the face of the deep, embellishing it, hanging it upon nothing, making the sun, moon, and stars, everything He did was done according to the suggestions of His infinite wisdom—wisdom presided over all, its impress was seen on all that was created, everything was done by weight and measure, rule and compass. Wisdom so presided over everything, so directed everything, and so fashioned all the productions of the Divine mind, that it is represented as a favourite child, as one brought up with Him, who is daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him. This is the second idea: it is not necessary to expatiate upon it. “The works of the Lord are great, in wisdom hath he made them all,” and they are to be sought out by every one that hath pleasure therein.

Having noticed the *before* and the *when*, we now come, in the next place, to the ultimate *what*—“Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.” The Divine mind reposed in this great ultimate effect—intelligence,

51

moral and spiritual intelligence. The Divine mind could only repose in something congenial; all this complicated work of creation had been carried on and completed for an ultimate end—that the earth might be inhabited by the sons of men. What a beautiful representation of the Divine Creator; He had received pleasure as each of the successive processes were completed, but this pleasure arose from a contemplation of the end towards which they all tended. These things were not ends in themselves—the earth was to be inhabited, and the Creator delighted in the anticipated appearance of the sons of men, for He did not want a mirror of His works in order to give back the reflection of Himself,—and the universe could do nothing else. The material universe could not understand what was inherent in itself, could not pay voluntary obedience, could not worship, could not desire to please, could not love, could not yield obedience to moral law. The universe without man was a book, without a reader! The Author did not need the book Himself: He that had the book within Himself did not need to write it in order that He might Himself read what was put upon the page, its substance was already within Him; but He composed the book and unfolded its ample leaves that moral agents with capacities for love and worship might look upon it, and there see reflected the power and wisdom of their Creator. Though God himself did not need the book, it was certainly necessary for a creature like man. And Wisdom rejoiced at heart because a creature was to be brought forth with capacities of fellowship and communion with herself, and who should be capable of receiving the lessons which Wisdom could impart. With complacency and delight, Wisdom anticipated the creation of a moral and spiritual intelligence, because of its possessing a nature so superior to all the productions of the preparatory process in the material creation, that it was possible, if the whole creation was swept away, and sent back to its primitive nothing-

52

ness, for the being that was anticipated still to hold fellowship with God, and to receive spiritual enjoyment and blessedness in the Divine presence. Wisdom rejoiced in the thought of having such pupils to instruct, to guide, and mould into her own image, and raise them to happiness and God. These are a few thoughts which I think are fairly suggested by this passage—highly figurative as I admit it to be.

We now come, in the next place, to look at those things which are said by Wisdom to us. And they all resolve themselves into persuasives to you young men to attend and give ear to the divine instructions of this book. The time will not permit me to extend and illustrate them very largely, neither is this my purpose in these familiar expositions; but my aim is rather to draw a rough outline for yourselves to fill up. We will proceed, then, to notice very briefly the three persuasives which are employed in the latter part of the passage, to induce you to listen to that Wisdom which is speaking.

The first persuasive may be considered as taken from what has been before advanced. "Now therefore," because of what has been said, "hearken unto me, O ye children." "Therefore"—because I was ever with God, because I was God's delight, because as long as God hath been, I have been with Him, because in me He has ever felt supreme complacency and delight. And now I have condescended to be your Teacher and Guide—stooping from that eternal throne, and from that loving bosom, I utter my voice to you. Therefore, O ye children, hearken unto me, give ear to my divine instructions. I look upon you with interest, my heart is open to you, and my affections are centred upon you, for you know I told you that I anticipated your existence with joy. My delights are with you; I rejoice in the habitable parts of the earth,—therefore, reject not my words; they shall come down upon your hearts like dew, refreshing and invigorating them, and lifting them up to God. Turn not away,

53

O ye children, refuse not, reject not her who would take you by the hand and lead you into all truth and goodness. Now, I think this is the first persuasive. I have illustrated it figuratively, in harmony with the book. You see the great thought that is embodied in the figure. What an idea: God himself, with His infinite wisdom, opening the stores of that wisdom and pouring out the riches before us in this word of His truth! In this revelation of Himself, He has become our Instructor and Teacher, and has condescended to ask, invite, and urge us to come and listen to His word.

The second persuasive is drawn from the happiness which there is in the process of learning her instructions. "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." The very act of learning, watching, waiting, looking, longing for the lesson, giving ear to it with the consciousness of getting a divine addition to your knowledge, a new thought, a beam of divine light coming into the intellect,—oh, there is pleasure, rapture, blessedness, in this! How many solitary students of science, when they have arrived at the desired result, have been heard exclaiming with hearts swelling with rapture, "I have found it, I have found it!" and how many have experienced the utmost pleasure in the pursuit of truth, without even once thinking of the practical results. The pleasure of the search, the joy of feeling that they were seeking to be in possession of another truth, was a sufficient compensation for their toil. What satisfaction and delight there is in watching and waiting at the feet of Divine Wisdom for her lessons, and then to feel that you have acquired a divine thought—a new idea, which, as far as it is right and true, accordeth with its fellow, which existeth in the mind of God; that there is a harmony between my intellect and the Divine, so far have I succeeded in acquiring the lessons of Divine Wisdom. There is a joy and satisfaction, deep and unutterable, which, they only can know who

54

sincerely and devoutly love truth, and set their hearts upon the acquisition of Divine Wisdom.

The third persuasive for you to learn the lessons of Wisdom, is drawn from the ultimate results, which are set forth and brought out in a very striking manner—the results of learning and obeying the lessons of Wisdom are placed in contrast with their opposite—the results of folly and sin. “For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord: *but* he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me love death.” Wisdom seems to say, I deserve to be heard for what I am. There is satisfaction, joy, and blessedness in the process of learning the lessons which I have to impart; but the ultimate result is greater still—“He that findeth *me* findeth *life*.”

He only that hath been taught of God, and hath the spiritual knowledge which God hath given to man—meaning by that, the whole of that knowledge which God hath revealed—he only who is thus enlightened and taught, really liveth as a man ought to live. When a man is thus taught, he riseth into the proper life of humanity, hath his reason opened to discern good and evil, his faith is called forth and his aim elevated, and he riseth out of the mere animal and sensual life, into the life of God. Wisdom speaketh here in relation to this life, “He that findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.” So that in every respect, he that delighteth in me, and constantly hath me before his eyes as an object of complacency, delighteth in that which I make like myself, and hath within him these lessons of Divine Wisdom which I have to impart, tending to loving and worshipful obedience, is wise, and findeth favour of the Lord. The Lord looketh upon him with favour and delight. But the wicked are not so, they are “like chaff which the wind driveth away. They shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” The man who rejecteth the teachings of Wisdom—who will not receive

55

the truth, doth not live like a man, but sinketh down into an animal and sensual life, and becomes like the beasts that perish—"all they that hate me love death." There is the result of the sin and folly of disputing and rejecting the divine instructions of Wisdom—"eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord."

Now, the last thing I have to do, as there is to be a collection for the missionary society to-night, is, to draw a single argument from the central idea of the passage in favour of the missionary enterprise. I ask, then, just five or ten minutes to put this argument before you, which I dare say has already suggested itself to most of you, on behalf of the missionary enterprise, which rises out of the central idea of the passage, "Rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." Rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth, not merely as habitable, but ultimately as inhabited; the earth shall be full of people. God knoweth that He doeth a great thing when He sendeth a new man into the world. He rejoiced in the earth by anticipation of its being inhabited. Just turn to that passage in the 8th chapter of Zechariah, which I read to you at the beginning of this service—"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." Thus spake the prophet as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. The Divine Wisdom in that form, whose delights are with the sons of men. This state of things was represented to the Jews as a great blessing—that their city Jerusalem should again be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Their clear ringing voices in their sport and play-time—why, it is music that should cheer our hearts, and fill us with good and joyous thoughts. His delights were with the sons of men. "Ah," it may be said, "very true, if man had remained virtuous and innocent, if God's original idea

56

His great Divine thought, had been from the first preserved intact!" Well, but you remember, that even admitting the fall, the apostasy and degradation of man, God thinks that the world after all is not so bad as to be forsaken. He gives the very same command, Go forth, increase, and multiply; replenish the earth; fill the world with people—for His delights are still in the habitable parts thereof. Now, if that be so, it follows that everything which is opposed to this idea—everything that interferes with the world being full of men, must be a contravention of the Divine idea. Sin introduced death—not into the creation, so far as the lower animals are concerned—but into the human family. I look not upon death, in one sense, as a contravention of the Divine idea, for God gave the world a limited extent, and therefore population could not go on for ever increasing. There must be change—departure from this world; but, if man had remained innocent, this might not have taken place till the entire habitable space was quite filled, and it might have been by other means than death, as a dark and terrible thing—removal from this world might have been looked forward to with pleasurable anticipations.

There is another thought arising out of this:—If solitude nor the material creation were ends on which the Divine mind could rest; if it could find repose in nothing but the habitable parts of the earth, how shall we suppose the Divine mind can look with complacency upon man perverted, depraved, corrupt? It is a fearful thought that the sons of men, in the prospect of whose existence God from all eternity took delight, should of their own voluntary will have become rebels against their Maker, and become so wicked, that He should be obliged to lift His arm in anger and sweep them from the earth! That little ark riding there upon the bosom of the dark and turbulent waters, contains just a remnant of the thousands who had previously existed. Man had so corrupted his way upon the earth, that God repented of having made him.

57

If these things are so, put them altogether in your thoughts, and consider if the missionary enterprise ought not to have your sanction and support. It is clearly very important that you should endeavour to send forth through the earth the instructions of this Divine Wisdom, that all men may be in possession of the principles and laws of the gospel, obedience to which shall bring them into harmony with the Divine mind, and further the Divine idea of their Creator. For the spirit, principles, and precepts of the gospel are all favourable to the virtue and happiness of individuals and nations, and will raise them to their true position as immortal beings. Let the hearts of the people be filled with love, and their reason be purified by faith, and their minds will thus be brought into harmony with the mind of God—then the glory of “the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” Let us each seek to learn the lessons of Divine Wisdom for ourselves, and then seek to realise their universal diffusion and triumph; which may God grant, for Christ’s sake!

IV.

WISDOM AND FOLLY.

“Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens; she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither,” &c.—PROV. ix.

SOME of you will remember, that when we first proposed to attempt a brief exposition of this book, we mentioned to you that it might be divided into three parts, with an appendix. That the first part extended from the beginning of the first to the end of this ninth chapter; that the second part extended from the beginning of the tenth to the end of the twenty-fourth; that the third part extended from the beginning of the twenty-fifth to the end of the twenty-eighth; and that the twenty-ninth and thirtieth chapters were two short appendixes. The first part of the book is written in a very different style from the other parts. The style is highly poetical and diffuse, abounding with parables and figures; and has a good deal of connexion in the process of thought. It is addressed to the young—not the very youthful, those who are just entering upon the earth, but to those who have attained to manhood,—and exhorts them by very frequent repetitions to give their attention to Wisdom, and adverts three or four times to those youthful lusts that war against the soul. The second part is of a very different structure. Any of you will see the difference. Some of you may have already observed it.

59

At the beginning of the tenth chapter you come into a completely different style. There is no connexion of thought. Very seldom is one idea extended over three or four verses. They are all separate sentences, having no relation to each other, called emphatically, "the Proverbs of Solomon/' The third part is similar to the second, but differs from the second inasmuch as it is said to consist of Proverbs of Solomon *which the men of Hezekiah King of Judah copied out* In the first section we have the weighty sayings which Solomon put together himself, and in the other we have the weighty sayings which were collected together after Solomon's death, in the time of Hezekiah. The two last chapters are a sort of appendix—the one containing the words of Agar, and the other the words of the mother of King Lemuel.

Well, now, to-night we conclude this first part. I don't see that there is anything new in the chapter to which we are to direct our attention. There is nothing here but what we have had before. However, you may perhaps put it before your minds in a somewhat new aspect. It will not be necessary to be very minute in any remarks that I may make, or I should only be repeating what I have already advanced upon previous chapters. I will, therefore, only just cut a channel for your thoughts. I should like to think that you would fill the channel when I have cut it. I should like to think, that at least some of you young men, after you have gone home from these lectures, sit down and try to recall the train of thought which has been presented to you, and thus get the matter impressed upon your reason and memory. In sitting down to meditate upon this chapter, you may regard it as a contrast between spiritual wisdom and sensual folly, presented in the ordinary language of common life. You have here, in the Eastern manner of writing, a contrast between virtue and pleasure: spiritual goodness listening to duty, loving duty, and following it, on the one side; and on the other, mere sensual

60

gratifications. Then you have the reflections of a sagacious and wise man, who has been looking on and observing how the mass of mankind treated the solicitations of wisdom and goodness. And then you have, in conclusion, just one parting word, one last weighty saying, which the wise man would leave with us, and which I, though not so wise a man, would leave with you, my young friends, as the conclusion of the whole matter to which we have come, by going over this first part of the Book of Proverbs.

We have, then, a contrast between duty and pleasure. You perceive two figurative representations,—wisdom and folly, at the beginning and end of the chapter; for we will, if you please, understand this foolish woman that is here spoken of to represent *folly*. Folly is clamorous, ignorant, impudent, and knoweth nothing. Folly, pleasure, would do so and so. Thus, by this little change, you have beautifully set before you, at the beginning and at the end of the chapter, the contrast to which I have referred. You will understand that I am not going to find a meaning in all the little particulars which are presented to us here. “Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars.” Some of the old fathers, as they are called, would have us believe that these seven pillars represent the seven sacraments which they have got in the Roman Catholic Church; but that is nonsense. “She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wines; she hath also furnished her table.” Some people have found a spiritual meaning in all that, of which we may be sure the writer of the book never thought; yet, of course, you can look at the lessons here given in a Christian aspect. Indeed, you can hardly read over this description of wisdom having prepared her feast, and sent forth her maidens to invite guests to enter her house and partake of what she had prepared, without having your thoughts immediately directed to the similarity between it and the parable put forth by our Lord, when he told, us

61

that the kingdom of heaven was like a marriage feast, which a certain king had made for his son, who, when his fatlings were killed, and his dinner prepared, sent forth his servants to invite the guests to come and freely partake of that which he had provided. It does not require any great ingenuity, any great force of mind, to see what the representation is. Just as really as the great God that has sent you and me into this world, and has given us this bodily life, bodily wants, bodily appetites; just as really as He has provided in His providence to meet these wants, and support this life, has He given us a spirit with capacities for knowledge, duty, and worship, and given spiritual food to supply these spiritual necessities. Just as really as He has placed man with man in society, has He given the power of contemplating moral principles, understanding the right and the true, and the ability to love and follow duty, which if lovingly and faithfully followed will produce a blessed and beneficial effect upon the heart. So still more really is it true, that He has presented, in the revelation of His word, the gospel, those great objective spiritual truths which are presented to our faith, and which we are to believe, and, believing, to receive that "living bread which came down from heaven," of which we may eat and live for ever. A feast, then, has been provided for mankind, "a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees well refined," and wisdom cries unto them, both in the universe and in the Scriptures, to come and partake thereof.

Well, now, this is the general idea; we had something like it before. There it is clothed in the beautiful drapery of the East. The maidens were accustomed, and, I believe, are accustomed yet, sometimes, to be sent forth to give invitations to the feast in the manner here described. We see, next, the class of persons whom wisdom invites. "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither." The simple, the young, the untaught, the yet unsophisticated. "As for him that

62

wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Forsake the foolish, and live." Those that wanteth understanding, wanteth heart; those who have begun to be corrupted, begun to walk in the wrong way, she inviteth them to return, to "forsake the foolish, and live." Thus it is that God, by the laws of nature, and by the precepts of His word, invites all men to give attention to those things which belong to the highest part of our nature, and will bring us into harmony with Himself. "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live;" there is the invitation, you see, to those who are surrounded by evil associates, and have begun to walk in the way of corruption and sin, to forsake it, "and go in the way of understanding."

If you noticed the manner in which I read the chapter over at the beginning, you will see that we have presented—first, the idea of a feast being prepared, then the invitation, and then, by passing over the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth verses, the result of accepting the invitation. "Forsake the foolish and live; and go in the way of understanding; for by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased." By not listening to wisdom you may live in such a way as very soon to break down the whole machinery of life; living too fast, dying young, the sinner not living out half his days. But, says wisdom, those who hearken to me, they shall live long in honourable reputation, and in the future they shall live too, for I, "heavenly wisdom"—I, in a Christian sense, "the Gospel of Christ," have "the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Now, all this you young men can take and lay before yourselves and meditate upon it. This is what you are to do, for "the works of the Lord are great, and sought out of all them who have pleasure therein." God has erected the great temple of the universe, set up the seven pillars, filled it with light and beauty;

63

and every page of the great book is worthy of the deepest reflection.

In the pursuit of true science we shall acquire great ideas of God and of His goodness, His nature and attributes, and come to understand the blessedness mere is in keeping His commandments. And then, further, in addition to what God has done in the material universe, He has made a revelation of His will to meet our cases as sinners, to meet our condition as apostates, and the revelation made to us. is, that we may receive pardon for our transgressions, and be reconciled to God by the death of His Son. "He that eateth of my flesh and drinketh of my blood hath life"—and none else. We may wisely and properly make these reflections on the topics suggested by this chapter.

And now look at the contrast which is here made between wisdom and folly—virtue and pleasure. Folly, pleasure, is clamorous, loud, noisy, rude, ignorant—knowing nothing. Lust, and everything of that sort, you cannot call by any name bad enough. Folly would make you young men understand that it was just the best thing you could do to have a short life and a merry one. Its language is, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." We know that we have got a body, but we don't know whether we have got a soul, which must live throughout eternity. This is a matter upon which everybody is divided, therefore let us just live for the day—"live while we live." What a perfect fool a man makes himself that talks thus, even if there were to be no life after this. Why, suppose you have not a soul that is to live for ever, you have something that you call a soul that is living now. Would you wish us to say that you have no understanding? Would you like to be told that you have no faculties, no knowledge, common sense, imagination, or reason, none of those things which distinguish humanity? Do you really wish us

64

to say that you have none of those attributes which distinguish men from brutes—that you have nothing but this visible body of yours? Surely you do not! Well, then, suppose the soul that you have, with its wonderful capacities, if it had not to live for ever, if there was no eternity, why, it is worth making the best of life. It is worth making life a great thing, if a great thing it can be made. It is worth while to make it fifty, sixty, or seventy years, if there is no hereafter, tljat you may have the full enjoyment of this world in which you are placed. It is worth keeping in the path that we call duty, being what we call moral and good. It is worth understanding and loving those principles which will make a noble, manly, glorious, and virtuous life. It is worth keeping the animal under, that the higher faculties may be developed, if only for this life. I hold, that it is pure folly and madness not to make the soul that magnificent and glorious thing which it certainly is when it acts in harmony with the laws of God, and duty presides over, restraining and governing the animal appetites and propensities. But folly is clamorous, and, knowing nothing, says, “No, you know that you are an animal.” Then be an animal, and nothing more! Ah! it is a dreadful thing for a man to have faith in nothing but his stomach and his lusts; that because he has an appetite, and can eat, and drink, and enjoy, therefore he can believe in a body, but nothing else. Oh, it is a dreadful thing for a man to have no greater faith than that!

We now proceed a step further. “Folly is clamorous: she is simple and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat on the high places of the city, to call passengers who go right on their ways.” That is to say, even those who have been well trained,—young men who as boys have been trained in right principles; youths who were started in life well, but without high principles and noble purposes within them. They are going on in their way

65

when the seductions of the sensualist will attract them, and invite them to turn aside, just as wisdom asks them to leave the way of sinners, and forsake the foolish, and live. You see with what impudence folly assumes and imitates the language of wisdom. "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither." The very words that wisdom uses. She suits her language to the occasion, just as infidelity does. You will find that infidelity has very much changed its tone of late. It has now become very *religious*. It has begun to use the language of Scripture, and finds beautiful force in it. The very terms, the very phraseology employed in the New Testament, with great profusion and great ingenuity, to lead men away from Christianity, and enforce errors into their minds which shall destroy faith and ruin their souls. "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither;" you will frequently find folly using the language of sarcasm in order to tempt young men. to commit sin. Virtue, goodness, unsophisticated innocence is laughed at and termed "simplicity" by way of reproach. Thus the sensualist very frequently endeavours to break down virtuous principle in the young man's heart, by calling him "young," "simple," and so on; but "knoweth nothing," nothing that is "lovely and of good report," nothing that is worth knowing. "As for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." In this we see another beautiful contrast between wisdom and sensuality. Wisdom has to do only with that which will bear the light, bear thinking of, and looking full in the face without any loss of self-respect. Never you believe, my young friends, that there is good in anything which must be done behind the scenes and in secret; that there is sweetness and pleasantness in that which is forbidden. That is the idea which folly would give you; she wants to pour contempt upon what God and virtue has prescribed. She says that there is additional sweetness in that which God in His goodness

66

has forbidden. Oh, how different from the language in which wisdom invites men to come to the house which she hath built, and partake of the pleasures and delights which she hath prepared, in which they may indulge and not be ashamed of themselves afterwards, and afraid to look upon one another. Folly says "Stolen waters are sweet," sin is pleasant. It is I recorded of a French lady, about the time of the first revolution in that country, who had imbibed the heartless infidelity of the age, that one evening she had been heating herself in the giddy dance of the ball-room, when her companion gave her a glass of water, which she drank, and experiencing its refreshing sweetness, exclaimed, "How delicious! what a pity it is not sin!"—as if it would have been a greater luxury had it been something which God had forbidden.

Now, mark the contrast further. Wisdom says, after she has invited the simple, him that is void of understanding, to come to her, "For by me shall thy days be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be I increased." Now, the opposite of all this is the result of giving heed to folly. The wise man says, when he has listened to the seductions of pleasure, seeking to turn the young man from the right way, "But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell." A fine contrast that Listen to wisdom, and your life shall be long, your age honourable, and your futurity blessed; but give heed to folly, and you will experience the reverse I of all this.

Now, you remember we have had all these ideas brought before our minds in the previous chapter, which we have gone through; but as this first part of the book is intended for the young, Solomon repeats I incessantly what he desires them to learn. He knows that it is necessary to repeat, repeat, repeat, again and again, to give "line upon line, precept upon precept," in order to fix the truth upon the minds of the young,

67

till it shall be so engrafted into their hearts as to become a principle of action with them.

Well now, after looking at this contrast you may take the middle part of the chapter as being a kind of reflection. It is not easy to see its exact bearing or connexion as it stands, but you may look at it, and get some association of thought out of it, by a reference to the parable in the gospel. You will remember how the king had prepared a wedding for his son, and sent forth his servants to call those who were invited, but that, instead of obeying the invitation, they spitefully used and insulted the king's servants. Now, here you have the same idea. "He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth to himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee." The infidel, the scornful, the bad, throw contempt upon the solicitations of affection; to talk to such of things divine is like casting pearls before swine. "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." The thoughtful, those that are serious and in earnest, let the truth with the voice of love and affectionate solicitation be presented to them, and they will take hold of it, and it will take hold of them. The gospel, when it was first preached in a city, was generally taken up first by the best people in the place—the serious and devout. These people generally gave attention, first, to the new development of the law of God in Christ, as taught by the apostles. "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will yet be wiser." Find a man who is earnest in his desire after truth, and there will be a further development very soon; but the scorner, the wicked, is confirmed in his scepticisms and unbelief. And, says the wise man, I can see the reason for all this—I see the secret of all this, in looking at these two different classes of men. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and a knowledge of the holy is understanding." If a

68

young man has religious fear, and reverence for God and religion, these are the beginnings of knowledge, and anything that comes to him in the form of rebuke or admonition, he will receive and be the better for it.

I have now just one verse left; and with that one verse I take my leave of you for the present. To each young man I have to say, "My son, if thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." This is what wisdom says, If thou be wise, if thou attend to all I have set before thee, if thou wilt receive these instructions, if thou wilt partake of what I have provided, I will not seek anything personal unto myself; I shall be glad, but I shall be glad on your account—"if thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself." You shall have the fruits of your good and wise conduct; the blessed results shall be received into your own bosom. "But if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." You will not be able to lay the fault upon me. I shall not be accountable for a man's giving himself up to any form of temptation. Each man must bear the consequences of his own act: he gives himself up voluntarily to sin. There is no man or devil that can *force* a man to commit sin, and, therefore, the guilt is his own. "Wisdom is justified of all her children;" so you will not be able to bring any imputation against her. For "if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it;" the result of your wickedness shall be upon your own head.

May God give His blessing to these thoughts, for Christ's sake. Amen.

VI.

SOLOMON'S SEVEN AGES.

“The Proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death,” &c—PROV. x. 1–9.

I HAVE no doubt that many of you young men have personally verified the remark, which I made on a former occasion, as to the difference in style and composition between the first part of the Book of Proverbs, which terminates with the preceding chapter, and the second part, which we now begin. You have observed a greater continuity of thought running through the previous chapters, which form a sort of introduction to the other parts of the book, and consists of kindly and fraternal, almost maternal, addresses to youthful persons who are just entering into life, set forth with beautiful figures and analogies. Then, when we come to the second part, we have proverbs, bundles of sayings, each verse a separate thought, having no particular connexion with each other. We have contrived pretty frequently, in going through the previous part of the book, to sketch out a connected train of thought for your meditation. It will not be easy to do that, not often possible, in this second part of the book. It will hardly do, I expect, to go through it verse by verse, and look at every particular saying. To-night we will make the experiment, and will endeavour to put the thoughts contained in the verses we have now read into such an order that you may give them something like a regular and connected attention that may get a

connexion in your memory to which even the imagination may cling, for you know the memory is very frequently assisted by that faculty.

Now, the way I should advise you to look at the section I have just read, is this. In the first seven verses you make out a sort of connected successive parallel history of two human beings from the cradle to the grave. You all know Shakespeare's "Seven Ages;" now, here we have Solomon's seven ages, or something like it. However, look at it so; don't stick at putting a thing in any way that will make it stick to you; get hold of the thought in such a manner that it will get hold of you; keep it, and it will keep you. We will, then, if you please, look at these two men side by side, as we have them here. You find them at home; then there is going out; then there is getting on; then there is success; then there is change; then there is the end; and then there is the epitaph. Then, after you have studied the history thus presented, the wise man lays down the things that you are to meditate upon, viz., two great principles underlying the whole phenomena of the two lives, accounting for both, and everything connected with them. Now, you know it is for me just to put this matter before you; and in order to do this fairly, let us begin at the beginning.

"A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." I do not mean to say that the wise man, in writing this verse, did not have in his mind the idea of sons grown up, describing each according to his conduct; but still, for the sake of successional thought, we begin with the beginning, and consider the two young men as children at home. It is a great truth, that "the child is the father of the man;" and Solomon says elsewhere, that even "a child is known by his doings." Character begins to be indicated very early; even on the mother's knee, or on the nurse's lap, influences are made which deposit the seed of character and begin its first development;

71

and very little boys may sometimes indicate those tempers and dispositions which, upon the one side, shall make the father's heart "glad," and on the other, fill the mother with "heaviness." Oh, how little children know, how little young men know, and how little can they know, of the way in which their fathers' and their mothers' hearts cling about them! Not until people are parents themselves, not until they have children upon their own knee, can they understand the feelings with which they were looked down upon, and how their heads were wreathed with blessings and loving thoughts, by their mothers and their fathers. Just so it is impossible for them to know how very early, from their stubbornness, and their self-will, and their disobedience, they stung and pained the parental heart. There may be some present who would give the world to have their father and their mother back from the grave, that they might act so as to give them pleasure, and not pain, and would do anything to extract the sting which they know they once planted in their breasts.

I do not pretend to do more than give hints; so we will advance to the second stage. We have had these boys at home, and now we look at them put out. Read the fifth verse: "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame." You may either consider that they are lads at school, or that they are lads learning "the art and mystery" of any trade or profession which they are to follow as men. The great lesson which young people should learn from this verse is, the importance of taking time by the forelock, using advantages when they have them. "Summer" will not always continue; "harvest" and the winter will soon come. Youth is not for ever; and the lad that is wishing for school to end, if he is an idle and thoughtless lad, the time may come when he will wish that his schooling were only going to begin. And so with the young man who is put out—who is beginning life by

72

learning some particular business or profession, who has to go through discipline and acquire knowledge, whose hand is to become skilled, or whose head is to become profound. If he is one of those who neglect their opportunities, and is idle, thoughtless, careless, time will not stop for him; day after day, and year after year, are adding to his life, without skill being added to his hand, or knowledge to his intellect; and he will one day wake up, and find himself surrounded by men, while he is nothing but a great boy, and something worse than that, a great boy perverted by his idleness and his vice. It does not do to neglect advantages; seize upon them, use them, do everything in its season.

There are two things which young men should not do. They should neither procrastinate nor anticipate. I have sometimes said to students, when they have been going to college: "Now, do not anticipate; keep to the studies of the session; attend to the particular thing which you have to do at the present hour, and leave to the next the business of the next; do not neglect the duties and the studies of this particular session, by involving yourselves in the investigation of subjects which will all come in due order." That is very injurious, as well as procrastination. The great thing is, to do neither the one nor the other, but wisely to understand, that every day is to come with its burden; if you put each day's burden on your back, you will bear it with ease and vigour, but do not put two burdens upon it in one day.

The third stage is, Getting on. Now, we are to see how they succeed in that relation. The lads have gone through the mere preparatory stage, and are now men, in business for themselves, having their own responsibilities. Here is an infallible rule, says the wise man: "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." Some men have the misfortune to start in life rich: unfortunately for them, their fathers have made

73

them a fortune, and unless they have a vast deal more wisdom and strength of character than falls to the average of humanity, they are very unfortunately circumstanced. A man may start with all possible advantages; and if he "dealeth with a slack hand," whatever may have been the property with which he commenced, he will become poorer and poorer; while another, who hath nothing in his hand, so that he can take a fair hold of what he has to do, and does it like a workman, becometh "rich." There are two kinds of slackness of hand, which may be manifested by the young man beginning life. He may take hold of his duties with a slack hand; he may just do the thing, half asleep, as if he did not care whether he did it or not: but he will soon find that others will let him alone, and that his business will be slack enough. Another mode of "dealing with a slack hand" is, not keeping tight hold of the profits, spending money thoughtlessly and imprudently. The man who does not understand the value of either time or money, and "dealeth with a slack hand," will soon find himself becoming poorer and poorer; while "the hand of the diligent maketh rich." The man who works with vigour and with thought, whose whole soul and mind and heart work, as well as his hand—he understands the price at which his profits are obtained. That piece of money which he holds in his hand represents to him that ability, that thought, that anxiety, that calculation, that industry, that devotedness with which it was purchased; and what was the use of his cultivating all these things, if he throws the embodiment of them away?

Here is the difference, you see, in these two men. I remember a gentleman saying to me—"I started in life with very little. I got into a small way of business, and when my profits were about two or three hundred pounds, I thought I might marry. One evening I asked my minister, and a few respectable friends, to take a cup of tea and spend the evening

74

with us. At about five o'clock, when I was thinking of leaving business and going to meet these friends, an individual came in with a large order, to be packed up and sent off the same evening." Instead, therefore, of going to meet his friends, he had confidence in their good sense. They were not a company of triflers, or worldly butterflies, who were to be got together for an evening's entertainment; and he set to work, sent off his customer's parcel, and did not make his appearance till between nine and ten o'clock, before the first company which he had after his marriage. This is a man who has been distinguished through life for religious character and great munificence, has a large fortune, and is now a county magistrate. You may depend upon it, young men, that you never need fear the opinion of any of your friends who are worth having, if you disappoint them by doing something which comes in the way of duty, and is right and proper for you to do. The person I have mentioned enlarged his reputation, confirmed the habit of perseverance in his soul, got a character, could be depended upon, and no man could tell what might follow from that one act. He was a man who was "diligent," not "dealing with a slack hand!"

Now, then, the next stage is, Success. "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death." Two men may get rich—the one by wickedness, trickery, wrong—the other by industry, probity, diligence. The word "righteousness" may be taken in relation to God's view of the man's actions; but I think it signifies properly beneficence. "The treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but beneficence delivereth from death." The word has this sense in many parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. In one of the Psalms, for instance, where there is the description of a benevolent man: "Blessed is the man that considereth the poor,"—the man of beneficence; and then it is said, "His

75

righteousness endureth for ever,”—meaning, that his beneficence shall be remembered; just as the alms of Cornelius went up to God, and were a sort of memorial before Him. And you will find that the New Testament doctrine is just the same. That while as sinners mercy comes to us through Christ, and we are to be pardoned and justified through Him, yet the disposition and feelings in the heart, prompting to the performance of good works and the sacrifice of what you have, doing good and communicating—these are sacrifices with which God is well pleased. “The treasures of wickedness”—the property of the man who is covetous and selfish—let him have them, they will do him no good; they “profit nothing.” The man derives no benefit from those treasures which he has obtained badly or is using badly, because not using them at all, except for the sake of constant doubling and accumulation. They are not used as if they had a moral character; they do not present the man with any moral ideas; he does not fulfil respecting them any moral duty; he does not derive any religious or spiritual advantages from them. Riches may be the means of grace as well as anything else. I do not see why a rich man might not feel, and he ought to feel, that his large property is the raw material out of which he may work most religious benefit for himself. But “the treasures” of a man that is selfish “profit nothing.” Ay, but the beneficent—the man who looks at his wealth as a thing which is to be used for God—it “delivereth from death,” so to speak, because it becomes an evidence of the state of the man. As the apostle says: “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store a good foundation against the time to

76

come, that they may lay hold on eternal life;" and I think, if they do that, they will find that they are "delivered from death."

The next stage is, Change of condition. "The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked." In the alteration of circumstance, in misfortune, what a difference there is, and how that difference is felt in society, in Cheapside, in the Exchange, and everywhere else, between the fall of a man who has a thorough character, and the man who has not! What a different sentiment is experienced by every one who knows anything about the two cases! The fortune of the man of the highest principle and character, the greatest diligence and probity, may sometimes, though the probabilities are against it, according to all the laws that regulate God's world, be swept away; but, says the psalmist, "I have been young, and now am old," and I have gone through the world using my eyes and my understanding, but though I am an old man and have seen much of life, "I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread." Many troubles and afflictions and distresses may happen to him, but I have never seen him famished, neglected, contemned. There has been a feeling somewhere, and because there was respectability and virtue before the man's fall, there has been respect and sympathy after it. But as for the wicked man—the man of no character, he may have "flourished like a green bay tree," but the lightning has descended upon him, and he has fallen. I looked for him, and lo! he was not! God swept away his substance in judgment, while the righteous have been afflicted only in His providence. In the one case, the man felt that Providence provided a compensation—in the other case, the judgment of God came and blew upon both the property and the man. Every one present who knows anything of life, by experience and observa-

77

tion, may know the truth of this. What a difference is seen and felt in society, when God sends an affliction on a virtuous man, and when He blasts the substance of the wicked.

We now come to *The End*. "Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked." I think you must take "the wicked," in a passage like this, to mean those that are flagrantly so. There the men are—"the just" and "the wicked:" one, in passing through life, has done better and better—his character has been developed, and his reputation has been growing—while the other is supposed to have become worse and worse. And the difference between them is—looking at them as the wise man probably did, for the sake of illustration, as public persons, persons standing in the eye of society, to whom society looked, who were themselves related to society and society to them—that when the just man has grown old, the blessings of the people's hearts, like clouds around the evening sun, beautiful in all their gorgeousness, have come upon his head like a crown; and in the evening of life there he stood, crowned with the blessings of the people that loved him, because he loved them, and with justice and equity had served them. But the wicked old man receives "violence;" the same people, exasperated, unable to bear any longer, "cover his mouth," and put him out of the way. You remember Haman. It is an Eastern custom, that when the monarch gives the sign for a man to be put to death, his face is immediately covered with a shawl, and he is taken out; and that is a sign that he is to be put to death by condign punishment. The man who beneficently and justly serves his generation according to the will of God, will have the blessings of all that know him resting like a crown upon his hoary head; while the wicked, if not carried out to be put to death, will be excluded from society, even among us. And there is no spectacle upon earth so painful to contemplate, as that of a wicked old man.

78

He has no friends, none to look up to him with respect, and none to bless him. Such is the end. There is another proverb on this subject: "When the righteous die, the people mourn; but when the wicked perish, there is shouting." That is the difference which is indicated here—the crown and the halter.

Now for the Epitaph. "The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot." We sometimes see the first clause upon a tombstone: "The memory of the just is blessed." The name of the upright, holy, virtuous good man, oh, how fragrant it is! You sometimes meet persons in society, who, when they refer to some valuable and excellent man, of distinguished worth, can hardly speak of him without tears. There is a tenderness felt, in the recollection of his memory. How sweet that is to a son. What a blessing to a young man, to be the child of such a father, and to think, as he walks the streets, everybody that knew his father, when they think of and see him, will think of that virtue, and that excellence, and that reputation, which is now embalmed by the man having passed to an upper world. "The memory of the just is blessed," from generation to generation. Ay, it is better than a fortune to the children; it goes with them in such a manner that they can take it to their heart, and feel it to be a portion of themselves. "But the name of the wicked shall rot." The very name of him shall become putrid and offensive. "Better not name him—let him be forgotten; we can speak no good of him—so let us say nothing." A painful thing to end life thus! As I was strolling round a churchyard the other day, I observed the funeral of an old man, who, though very rich, had died not in the fragrance of virtue, but with a character tainted by vice. Separated from the woman legally his wife, and dying in the house of the woman who had seduced his affections from her, he was thus borne to the grave. The poor little children of shame weeping; having no one to take them to their

79

bosom, and fondle them, and deal with them as if they had been the offspring of virtue. No friend attending his grave with anything like a tear in the eye, or sentiment in the soul. No talking, with devout feeling, and bated breath, and elevation of mind, about the virtue of the dead. Why, they durst not; his life was all bad, repulsive, offensive. It was very painful, under those circumstances, to hear thanksgivings "for our dear brother departed this life," and the hope that he was gone to heaven. It was not for us to say that he had not gone; but under those circumstances it was painful to hear such words. Ah! what will you do in the *end*? This is a question for the young to have often upon their hearts. It is all very well going on, doing this, that, and the other; but what will you do in the *end*? What a painful thing, to go down, in spite of all advantages of fortune, position, and circumstances, covered with shame, to the grave!

Now, this is the way in which you young men may go through this portion of Scripture, and look at these successive aspects of history. And now I have only to say, in conclusion, that the two next verses, if you are wise, will let you into the great secret, by showing you the principles which underlie the whole of the phenomena of the fortunes, the life and the death of these two men. "The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall." "The wise in heart," "the fool in lip," it might be literally rendered, very strikingly and beautifully. The young man who starts in life with the disposition which a young man ought to have, will not only literally "receive commandments," be willing to listen to command, and obey under authority, which is the only way ever to learn to command well; but, in a more general sense, the man who is "wise in heart" will be willing to take any suggestion, to listen to the experience and learn of those who know better, and will not be above being taught. He will have his own judgment, but he will be very glad to have the benefit of the experience of

80

those who have travelled the way before him; and he will become wiser and wiser, by putting all these things together, with a docile, gentle disposition. "But a prating fool" will never hear anything but he will contradict it, and try to argue against it; and he will never listen to the suggestions of experience, for he says, "I know better." There is a heart wisdom, which will keep the ear and the eye open; and there is the folly of the lip, which makes a man "wiser than seven men that can render a reason," and ready to meet everybody and everything. What will be the end? Why, the end will be worst of all: he shall "fall."

"He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known." "He that walketh uprightly." The man whose character is like a parallel line to that which God lets down from heaven, demanding justice and judgment and truthfulness from every man in society, as the great law by which society is to be governed. God does not govern the world by hollowness, falsehood, crookedness. It is impossible to govern a nation, a school, a workhouse, or yourself—it is impossible to do business of any sort—upon principles that are false, or rather, upon no principles at all. Uprightness, that is the thing. "He that walketh uprightly," a habit of character; not a man that does one right thing to-day, and half a wrong thing to-morrow. Not a man who steps sometimes in the right, sometimes in the wrong path; the great rascal will do that, if he thinks he will succeed best by doing it. But this is not the case with "him that walketh uprightly;" he only knows one way of doing anything. It is never a question with him how it is to be done; he knows that everything must be done "uprightly." Now, "he that walketh" so is safe. He is safe from a great deal of temptation; he cannot be tempted by things which will tempt another man, whose principles are not fixed, whose virtue is not firm. He may be placed in circumstances where a great advantage may be obtained by a little lie; but this

81

would be no temptation to the man that is truly and thoroughly upright. "A lie! gain anything by a lie? I will not touch it, although it be infinitesimally small." Neither can he be tempted by other persons. Let a young man be known in a house of business for uprightness of character, and supposing three or four young men were forming a plan to defraud their employer: if it were said by one of the company who had perhaps just come into the concern, and did not know the young man, "Do you think he would join us?" the others would start in a moment; they would think it a perfect absurdity to present anything like temptation to a man whose character had been so tried and established. And of course he is secure from all inward agitation and fear. What a dreadful thing for a man to have a secret upon his soul—a man who has done some great wrong, or who has been in the habit of doing little things which have not been upright—things big enough, if discovered, to be taken up and talked about and remembered! And if he is living day by day with this consciousness upon his soul of the want of uprightness, he is compelled to put on appearances, and to act a part among his family and friends—afraid to see a stranger come in, or open a letter written in a strange hand. If a letter came to him which he thought had not a name to it, his whole soul would shudder. A dreadful thing this! But the man "that walketh uprightly" is conscious that nothing can come out. How calmly and quietly he lies down! His sleep is like the sleep of a child. He is safe from the possibility of anything coming out against him. A man may go on for a long time, acting in a manner that is not upright. His whole character may be mistaken. He may be looked at with wonder. Much confidence may be placed in him, and great respect and honour conferred upon him. But if the whole thing be false, if the man has no pillars to support him, which agree in character with those which support the universe, the whole superstructure will fall,

82

and the truth come out. This cannot be the case with "him that walketh uprightly." He may sometimes be the subject of misrepresentation, or a lie. But there are men be upright, so thoroughly known and confided in for their character, that you might tell a dozen lies about them, and nobody would believe you. Such a character cannot be got in a day—but it can be got. And even if some are led to believe a lie respecting them, and the cloud of misrepresentation hangs over them for a time, depend upon it that the Scripture says truly, when it says, that "God will bring forth their righteousness like the light, and their integrity like the sun at noonday."

"He that walketh uprightly walketh surely." And so at the end, when he has gone through the different stages which we have been considering, he will be secure from terror, and agitation, and distress; for you must always understand the virtue described by Solomon as springing from religious faith, and connected with religious principle. And therefore we say, that the Christian man, who through life has habitually acted according to those religious principles, will not, when he comes to his last hour, feel agitated by the terror and surprise which another Christian will experience who has not been so scrupulous and conscientious, but who has upon his heart things which, however little they may have seemed as he went through life, will become a great burden to him at the last. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Young men! in order that your life may end well, begin it well! Build upon principle; let integrity, truth, uprightness towards God, be the basis of your actions; and he that is truly upright towards God, cannot be deceitful towards men.

"To thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

83

But, to be true to yourself, you must be true to God; you must understand your own nature and your relationship to Him. Be upright thus, and you will pass through the world happily, and your end will be such as we have already described—your “memory” will be “blessed.” But if the young man begins wrong, if he hastens to be rich, and wishes to accomplish his object by deceit or fraud, he may go on for a while; but remember, “he that perverteth his way,” departing from the upright, shall “be known;” he will be long suspected, but he shall most likely “be known” one day, even here—and if not, there is a day coming, when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known, and when every man shall have praise or blame from God, according to what each has been.

Now, it is no easy matter to make out of these separate proverbs anything like a connected train of thought, but I have done the best I could for you. Of course some allowance must be made for little things, but if you will look at the matter in the way I have put it, I think you will get some benefit from it; and I trust that with God's blessing you may get much. Amen.

VII.

FOOLISH IN LIP.

“He that winketh with his eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall. The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked,” &c.

—PROV. X. 10–32.

IN our last lecture we entered upon this second part of the Book of Proverbs, when I referred to the different style and composition of this part in comparison with the previous part through which we had gone, and the difficulty that we should find in going through this portion in consequence of the want of connexion between the different parts of the chapters; each verse being distinct in itself, and rendering it impossible, therefore, to present any continuous or connected train of thought. We took up at our last lecture the first nine verses of this chapter, and contrived to make them tell us a regular and continuous tale; and we told you that in the first seven verses we had, as it were, the seven stages in the history of two men going parallel with each other; beginning as children at home, and then, their going out, and their getting on, and their success, and their change, and their death, and their epitaph. And then, I told you that in these two verses which I have now read, we had two principles indicated which underlie the two characters and which account for the different phenomena of the two lives. We had heart-wisdom, and lip-folly—the man that is wise in heart, and the man that is foolish in lip. Now, we have to go on with the chapter; and in looking down the verses that remain, it seems as if

85

we might take these two principles, and that the different verses might be brought to cluster around them. Uprightness of heart, directing the feet and guiding the hand in everything that relates to practical life.

We must be content to take the verses that we have to deal with just as they lie. I cannot put them into any form or give them anything like a regular continuity of thought. They consist of three small bundles of truth with respect to the tongue; beginning with the largest, and going to one a little less, and then going to another less still. We will take these little bundles of truths with respect to the tongue, and we will look at them all and see what we can make of them.

The instruction, then, contained in this chapter, we shall find in three separate sets of verses. We begin with the first set which commences at the tenth verse—"He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall." Now, both these characters are bad. "He that winketh with the eye" is intended, I think, to represent a crafty, designing, bad man; a man who can have his signs and modes of communication with others, who are in confederacy with him, and who communicate together, and have their mutual understanding for some bad purpose. Or it will stand, in ordinary life, for an individual not so bad as that, but yet bad. I should take it to indicate the individual that hints dislike, that deals in insinuation, that throws out his surmises, does not speak openly, but in hints, who often does a great deal more harm, because he does not strictly define what he would convey or express. He has left the thing open to the imagination, and the imagination of the hearer has something upon which it works and upon which it exaggerates; and thus a great injury may be done by that man who merely winketh with his eye. "A prating fool," is a man of emptiness—a babbling, boasting, foolish, vapid, ignorant fellow. While the man who winketh with his eye hurts others,

86

the prating fool hurts himself. The man that hints surmises causeth sorrow—a great deal very frequently is caused by such habits of utterance. “But the prating fool shall fall;” he will be found out to be nothing, and nothing worth, and will then be deserted by everybody.

“The mouth of the righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.” Now, here there is a contrast of character: we have two men with two different internal lives—the righteous man, and the wicked. The righteous man with his inward life of pure thought, of holy purpose, of thorough principle, of religious faith—in the Christian sense a regenerated, sanctified man, who has received that spirit of which Christ says, “It shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” And this fountain of water that is pure and holy when he receiveth it into his heart, flows forth at his lips—it cometh forth, as a fountain of spiritual life, in words not meant to injure, or to corrupt, or to mislead. But the utterances of this man that floweth forth from his lips by the use of the excellent faculty of speech, tend to guide the young, strengthen the weak, to co-operate in all good purposes; to teach men how to live; how to make the best of this life, and to be prepared for the life that is to come. It will be a well of life. “But violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.” His mouth is just like the great black flue of some furnace, out of which issues, from that dark, black heart of his, oaths, blasphemies, and utterances, so pernicious and poisonous, that they would fearfully injure and corrupt those who came under the influences of that bad soul.

“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.” Though the tongue or the lip does not occur in this proverb, we still continue to take it as associated with the faculty to which we now refer; because it is principally by the tongue that these different charac-

87

ters are made manifest. "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins." Where there is malignity in the heart, that bad spirit takes delight in seeing misunderstandings, and in fomenting them—misunderstandings between brethren and friends may be going to die—let alone, they will go out of themselves. But the malignant man with his bad soul won't let them die; he will stir them up. He will blow the coals. He will direct some word into the ear of one or other of the parties, which will be like throwing some inflammable matter into a fire. If the fire was just going out, the inflammable matter would make it blaze up. Bad passions that might have been excited between friends, some misunderstanding that had existed is just about to expire—the great devil himself within them is getting drowsy, is going to fall asleep. But the malignant man rouses him tip, makes the passions of the bad nature act again. He foments the strife by operating upon their vanity, jealousy, or self-esteem; taking men according to their weaknesses, endeavouring to operate upon these, and get them into a state of feeling that will not allow the strife to die. This is generally done by the tongue. Another man of a loving spirit sees, perhaps, some great feud in embryo, something that will be a fire if it is suffered to have the influence of the atmosphere upon it, but which, like a fire, will go out if it is kept from the air, and he tries to smother it, cover it over and conceal it, that the thing may die. That is the way that "love covereth all sins." It will cover over much—it will hide it from its own sight and determine that the evil thing shall not disturb friendship, nor destroy love. It will endeavour to cover over and forget what might injure the charities of life, and interfere between friend and friend, or family and family. This is the passage which the apostle quotes in the New Testament, and is rendered "charity covereth a multitude of sins." It does not mean that almsgiving will cover

88

men's sins, that there is so much merit in almsgiving, that it will cover sins from God or shield men from punishment.

“In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.” I take that to represent the different effects which grow up around the path of the eminently good and wise man, and the contrary. “He that hath understanding,”—you should always remember, that, in this book, by “understanding” is not meant a mere intellectual quality. But it signifies right thoughts in the reason and in the memory, associated with high principles, and the fear of God, and with the religious life. The man who has understanding in the highest sense—truth in the reason, knowledge in the memory, and the fear of God in the heart, will exhibit a holy and divine life, and in his lips wisdom will be found. From his lip will go forth utterances distinguished for their truth and their goodness, and people will gather in front of him and do him homage. They will reverence what is in the man, and look up to him with respect and affection, feeling that they stand before a man of gravity, wisdom, and goodness, whose words will tend greatly to their benefit. “But a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.” That is to say, in the long run, folly and wickedness will relate to the man, though they are not true in relation to his own feelings. I rather think the wise man meant here, that the individual had grounds for his displeasure, that he had reason to be offended, and to hate the wrongness which was in the man, and yet he should conceal that, and utter himself as if he thought and felt differently; and as if the man was different to him from what he is. Flattering lips sometimes are employed from a *desire not to offend*, or because the flatterer wants to *use* the man whom in heart he hates. Sometimes, just from a want of moral courage, individuals very frequently see what is wrong, they feel it, they are offended, and

89

yet they want the courage or the honesty to utter what they feel, and thus injury is often done. The other man is different, he takes up an evil report against a man just from mere hearsay, and without any evidence that the man is guilty, goes about and talks of it. "He that hideth hatred with flattering lips, and he that uttereth a slander," each of them, says the wise man, "is a fool." One of the worthies, of Scripture says with grave and devout feeling that he had not learned to give flattering words to men. Depend upon it flattery is a greater evil than people imagine: it may have a most injurious effect upon character—it is false, hollow, detestable. The slanderer, too, knows not what mischief he does. He takes up a report and repeats it very trippingly from the tongue, without thinking of the injury he may thus be doing to reputation and character. But I would have you remember that it takes two to propagate a slander—it needs one to listen, as well as one to speak; if you won't lend your ear, the slanderer won't give you his tongue. As with respect to other matters, the receiver is as bad as the thief, so with respect to slander, the hearer is as bad as the utterer. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin." People that *will* talk, will often find themselves betrayed into what is sinful, imprudent, and injurious to themselves and others. Persons that *will* talk, will frequently be tempted to exaggerate; tempted to put things in a way that is not true, in order to throw out the bright colours, to dazzle, to produce an impression—tempted to run on from subject to subject, till they get quite away from the right and the true, and, perhaps, from the pure, and there will not want sin there. "But he that refraineth his lips is wise." As the Germans say, "Speech is Silvern; Silence is Goldern." Many have repented of speaking; very few of holding their tongue. The word spoken is very often like the word written, it is gone, you cannot recall it, the word is said and it will be remembered. Still there are

90

dangers with respect to all maxims of prudence, of carrying them to excess. And I should say, therefore, that a cheerful buoyancy of speech should not be judged harshly; "a man should not be made an offender for a word," and too great a restraint of the lip, over-much caution, will kill all confidence, and put to flight everything like friendship. Whenever we mixed with society, and conversed with any one, we should have an unpleasant kind of suspicion everlastingly hovering over us, that we should say something that would be turned against us. Now, these things become thoroughly contemptible; the foolish man will be smitten, beaten to death, by the contempt of those who have come to see through his hollowness and worthlessness. "Wise men lay up knowledge; but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction." Speech is, in the intercourse of life, what bank-notes are in commerce. Bank-notes are the written representatives of real wealth; so speech is the outward representative of the substantial and solid riches in the soul. Some notes are forgeries; they profess to be bank-notes, but are not; and there is a great deal of speech that is just like such notes. The wise man understands this, and he says, it is as important to accumulate as to give out. I must get, I must accumulate, I must have real substantial wealth in my heart and in my head, or I cannot go on for ever dealing' out the words that are the representations of what are within. If I go on giving out without taking in, the consequence is, I shall be giving out false words, which will appear to represent what is not there. The wise man lays up understanding for two objects with respect to the commerce of life—emergency and opportunity. He lays up the lessons, and observations, and maxims, which he has gathered in his intercourse with society, and endeavours to understand all knowledge, that if an emergency or a difficulty cometh, he may have in his mind the results which he has obtained from the observation and experience of himself and others, and

91

will thus be in a position to meet the emergency. Or he layeth up so, that, if an opportunity cometh, a door openeth, and tools come to his hand, he may know that which will enable him to take hold of the tools and show that he can do the work. But the fool never accumulates, never layeth up, never addeth to the little portion with which he set out at the first. He goes on everlastingly—month after month, and year after year—sending forth his notes, although he has made no addition to his wealth, and thus, of necessity, he will often be a boaster—appearing to be what he is not. Now, let such a man who has got nothing within him, be placed in an emergency, and he is at his wits' end. He does not know what to do, he is useless, helpless. Let an opportunity come for him to advance in life, his friends imagine that he ought now to be in such and such a position, in consideration of his age and opportunity; but, if they put the tools into his hands they fall helplessly from him, he cannot use them, and by and by people begin to understand that he is only a forged note, and -nothing remains for him but destruction.

“The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth.” A fine contrast this. The tongue of the just may be rude and inelegant. The just man may have much of intrinsic value in his inward life, but his utterance may be feeble and his words few, yet how valuable they are; every one of them drop from him like a piece of silver. The words of the man of solid worth—the just, the upright, the pure, the holy, the good, how valuable they are. The man is altogether to be admired and loved. Why, that which is his portrait, the representation only of himself, is valuable; whereas, with respect to the wicked, his very heart, that which is substantially the man, is not worth raking up. The shadow of the portrait of the just man reflected there upon the wall is far more worthy of the affections of those who knew him than the very reality of the wicked. “The

92

tongue of the just is as choice silver: but the heart of the wicked is little worth,"—not worth touching or picking up.

"The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom." The righteous has real, substantial excellence in his soul, and in the circle in which he moves he exercises a fine, healthful, beneficial influence, so that his lips, as it were, feed and nourish the inward life of those upon whom his words fall. He has that within him which will go out beneficially, and be the sustenance of many others. But the fool! Why, he has not even self-support, and of course, as to feeding or benefiting others—why, it is out of the question. There is nothing going out of his lips that will strengthen the good principles of others—all that he could give you is chaff; and you cannot live upon that. By and by it will appear to his associates that he can do them no good, and they will get away from him, and he will be left alone. And as he won't listen and learn, as he won't receive from others what would support and benefit him, and as he has nothing in himself, by and by he shall die and be nothing, and all for want of wisdom.

"The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out" On this we need hardly make a remark. It is very similar to what we have already had. The mouth of the just is pregnant, fruitful; wisdom springeth forth from it: but the froward tongue that uttereth its evil insinuations, that taketh up its scandalous reports, setting on fire the whole circle in which it moveth, why, in the long run it will become to be found out, and the man will be as if his tongue were cut out. There were many vain and unruly persons in the days of the apostles, of whom Paul says, "Their mouths must be stopped;" they so abused this great faculty which distinguishes man, that the apostle says we must do with them what will be a virtual cutting out of the tongue; their mouths must be "stopped," for their

93

words are merely froward, vain. Or, like another representation where the apostle says, that "the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God; but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." "The froward tongue shall be cut out."

"The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable." A golden proverb this. The wisdom of goodness, that's it; and the folly of wickedness. Mind, I don't mean that it is a wise thing to be good, or a foolish thing to be wicked. But what I mean is this, it is wise to personify goodness and acceptance, and so goodness is a wise thing, and wickedness is a foolish thing. Thus "the lips of the righteous know what is acceptable." That is to say, a man who is thoroughly good, righteous, and upright—who may not be very intellectual, or very learned, nor distinguished for any great capacities, but who, because of his goodness, because of the Tightness of his heart, because he does no wrong to anybody, and is wise to do everything that is kind, good, beautiful, becoming,—he will be taught, as if by divine instinct, to say always what is right, speak what is courteous, kind, acceptable. He does not think about it; he does not try to do it; it is the wisdom that there is in goodness which prompts him to do as he does; so that the man who has a good heart, has a wise heart, which tells him what is becoming, right, and acceptable. "But the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness." If a man's heart is bad, he may have great capacities, great intellect, and much learning, and much information; but every now and then it will be let out that he is a fool, because the heart being wicked, his character is really hollow, and is not, therefore, moved by holy instincts from within to desire to do right, and harm nobody. But he will just go on talking away in his froward manner without feeling or enlightened understanding. He

94

may be very clever, and say a great many smart things, but he will be everlastingly going across the feelings and sensibilities of others, blundering out things that will give offence, and sinking into the hearts of men, will be remembered and felt against him from that day forward. He may not wish or intend to hurt people, but because he has not the instinct of goodness, the wisdom of goodness, he knows not what is acceptable, and will always be blundering out those things that will give offence.

Now, you know I told you it would be very difficult when we got into the second part of the book,—and I feel it to be increasingly so,—to say that which can interest you and keep up your attention upon these separate pieces of truth. I have done the best I could, by keeping to one topic, and by picking out of this chapter all the verses which bore on that one thing. And now I have just a word or two to say in conclusion. I would recommend you young men to go through the New Testament—which you can easily do with the help of a concordance—and find out all the different passages which bear upon the government and regulation of speech. I think you may do that if you will try, and it will be of great use in directing you in your business and in your intercourse with society. Try to remember some of the things which I have endeavoured to express and to illustrate from this book, and then when you come to the New Testament begin with James, as the writings of James assimilate the nearest to the writings of the Old Testament. He talks like an old Hebrew prophet—with the Christian element in him, of course. You will see how he talks about the tongue. His idea of it is, that when he finds a man who can thoroughly govern it, he considers it such a proof of self-government, that he says the man is perfect, and can do anything. Then you may go to Paul and pick out the different passages in the Epistles to Timothy, and the other epistles, in which you will find Paul often

95

inculcates propriety, purity, and gravity of speech, such as becometh Christians. He tells you to have the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that it may go forth in spirited speech. Then, after you have been to the servants, go to the Master himself, and you will hear Him saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that for every idle word which men speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." You will also read that solemn statement, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." At the day of judgment you will have to pass for what you really are, not for what you may seem to be on earth; not by outward phenomena, but by the inward life: "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he," for as a man thinketh in his heart so he will speak, and by your words it will be ascertained what your heart and thoughts are; and by thy words shalt thou be justified or condemned. May God command His blessing.

VIII.

MONEY AND CHARACTER.

“He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth,” &c—PROV. x. 17–32.

I NEED not refer to the circumstance, which I have mentioned to you more than once, of the peculiar character of this second part of the Book of Proverbs, through which we are now going. We have already spoken from this chapter twice, and we have endeavoured to give something like regularity and consecutiveness to our observations. In the first discourse from this chapter, some of you will remember we took the first nine verses, and found in the first seven verses a kind of successive parallel representation of two men of different character, commencing at home, going into the world, succeeding, dying, and so on. And in the other two verses we found a principle which underlay the whole phenomena in both characters. Then, in the second discourse from this chapter, we confined ourselves entirely to those proverbs and sayings, which bore upon the government of the tongue. You will remember that our last discourse was entirely on that subject; we gave it a unity by connecting it with all the proverbs which are in this chapter that bear upon the faculty of speech. Having done that, I once thought of not attempting anything more with this chapter; leaving those proverbs entirely which we had not taken up, as we should be almost sure to find some of the ideas in the chapters succeeding. But it struck me that, perhaps, it might be as well for us to

97

clear the ground as we go—to go through the proverbs as they lie before us. There are not many sayings remaining in the latter part of this chapter which we have not had before, therefore not requiring our notice to-night, which will rather suit me, for I preached at seven o'clock this morning, and then I preached in the regular and full service here in the forenoon, and therefore I don't want to do more than have a conversation with you. Now, the way we can classify the few proverbs that remain, is this. There are three proverbs in the latter part of this chapter which have no connexion between themselves or with the others; now, we shall just say a word or two about these, in the first place, and in the second place, you will find a small cluster of sayings about money; and then, you will find another small cluster about conduct and character, especially with respect to their results. Now, this is what we have to look at to-night.

In the first place, then, we have three proverbs quite independent of each other. The first is the seventeenth verse, "He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth." The idea contained in this verse we very frequently meet with in the saying of this wise man—and very naturally. In those days, you know, when books were not very numerous, wise men were looked up to with great reverence, as being the depositories of wisdom. These men had had the advantage of great experience, and their instructions, their counsels, and their reproofs to the young were regarded with great attention. All this was very natural and proper. Every generation, a great mass of human beings come into the world: into a world and into a life of which they know nothing. A great mass of men and women are born into a life and are going to pass through it without a single idea of the sort of world into which they have come, and they have to be taught correct ideas by those who have been in the world before them,

98

and have had experience and observation. The newcomers into the world must be taught what sort of a world this is. That it is not a world governed by no laws, but by *fixed* laws, and they are to act in harmony with them. They have to learn that there is a certain way in which they ought to walk, and certain limits which they are not to transgress. Those who have had experience in life, and understand all these things, are to take them by the hand, give them just ideas of life, and lead them into that path in which they ought to go. And, of course, those persons, if they find their pupils stepping over the barriers and walking in the wrong path, will reprove them and try to bring them back, and the most natural thing is to say, that those who regard the instruction—the instruction always being supposed to be right, being that of holy men assisted by divine wisdom and the exercise of their own observation—will be in the way of life: and he that will not receive reproof—will not receive instruction—will err, will pass away from the path of life, and presently he will find himself among the congregation of the dead.

The second independent and separate proverb is contained in the twenty-third verse: "It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom." Perhaps you may give to this proverb two shades of significancy. I think you may consider it in the first place as bearing upon something that belongs to the minor morals of life: the senseless levity of some is contrasted with the dignity and gravity of others. There are many persons of such levity of mind, that they will constantly be doing some mischief, just for the fun of it, without any thought of the effects and results of it. They will say a word, or do a thing, or they will construct a contrivance, out of the mere love of mischief, and not with any serious desire to do harm, but merely that they may enjoy the surprise or the pain which *may be* occasioned by their acts,—not pain of much

99

moment, not very deep, but a sort of superficial pain that may be produced by the lover of mischief. But wisdom will not act thus, because it is not dignified and manly; knowing that persons who can act in such a way have no depth of character. Or you may take it in a more serious sense than that. You may take it as meaning wickedness, what is impious and sinful in the highest sense of the term.

Now, he must be a fool who can make a laugh at duty, religion, and faith. He who can commit sin, who can do that which is wrong and turn it into laughter, he is a fool indeed. But with the wise man, the man of an understanding heart, there are those perceptions., those convictions of duty which keep him from making a mock of sin, or making sport of anything that is wise and good.

The other independent proverb is the twenty-sixth verse: "As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him." A very weighty and important saying that, for you young men to write upon your souls with respect to your daily business. Of course, in the state of society to which this proverb refers, a messenger was of far more importance than a messenger may be with us. There was no other mode by which important communications could be sent. Very great importance, therefore, attached to the quickness, zeal, and fidelity with which the messenger should fulfil his duty, and convey the important communication. But the sluggard, when he undertook to do this work and yet went about it as if he was just ready to be called off by any trifle upon the right hand or upon the left, not going on straight forward and doing the work, abused the confidence and disappointed the hopes of those who employed him; and the wise man says, "As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him." As no man would like to put his head into smoke and make his eyes smart and water, so people will take care not to employ a sluggard

100

the second time. Hence you see the importance of principle: it lies at the foundation of confidence in business, honourable reputation, and success in life. You young men should never forget that energy, integrity, devotedness, everything that is meant by character, is essential to your success in life. I have taught you this lesson before, and I repeat it again, that you will never succeed in life unless you get a character for activity, vigour, and promptitude. There is nothing more distressing to men, that are really men, than having to do with people that are always in the way, preventing other people doing what they ought to do themselves: "they are as vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes." A man who is told to write a letter instantly to save the post, and begins to spend three or four minutes in mending his pen, or cannot write without everything being in precise order before him, every line straight, cannot do the thing off-hand, is not very likely to succeed in life to any extent.

I once knew a young man that was commencing life as a clerk. One day his employer said to him, Now, to-morrow that cargo of cotton must be got out, and weighed, and we must have a regular account of it." He was a young man of energy. This was the first time he had been entrusted to superintend the execution of this work. He made his arrangements overnight, spoke to the men about their carts and horses, and resolving to begin very early in the morning, he instructed all the labourers to be there at half past four o'clock. So they set to work and the thing was done, and about ten or eleven o'clock in the day, his master comes in, and seeing him sitting in the counting-house, looks very black, supposing that his commands had not been executed. "I thought," said the master, "you were requested to get out that cargo of cotton this morning." "It is all done," said the young man, "and here is the account of it." He never looked behind him from that moment—never! His

101

character was fixed; confidence was established. He was found to be the man to do the thing with promptness. He was not like vinegar to the teeth, or smoke to the eyes—no! He very soon came to be one that could not be spared. He was as necessary to the firm as any one of the partners. You may be sure he went on in sympathy and love with God and man. He was a religious man, and went through a life of great benevolence, and at his death was able to leave his children an ample fortune. He was not smoke to the eyes, or vinegar to the teeth, but just the contrary.

Now, we come, in the next place, to take the first little cluster of sayings, which we have here, about riches,—money. You will find this cluster contained in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and twenty-second verses. Just look at each of these, if you please. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty. The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked is sin. The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.” Look at the first of these verses. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty.” There is nothing wrong, you know, in being rich, considered simply in itself. Neither is their virtue in absolute poverty. “Money,” says the wise man, “is a defence.” “Wisdom,” he says, “is a defence, and it giveth life to them that have it;” but so is money a defence, too, and has its uses, and is a very good thing in its place. The great thing is the state of the heart in relation to wealth, and the manner of its application. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city.” Now, this must be understood to express the confidence with which the rich man can repose upon the consciousness of his possessions. We know that society is frequently willing to take a rich man at what he estimates himself to be. How often will society estimate a man according to his riches, so that the wealth of a rich man is like a strong city—it is to him a defence. Why, a rich man can

102

take liberties, and do things which a poor man cannot do; society would not bear it from him, it bears it from the rich. Money! what weight it will sometimes give to a man's opinion! It will sometimes give eloquence to that which is not very like it! A wonderful power there is in wealth! Sometimes there is a great deal that is very wrong about all this, but, you should remember that the fact is, wealth, wherever it is, does represent energy, skill, talent, somewhere. Somebody must have had these good qualities and powers, or there would have been no wealth. The man frequently comes to possess wealth, who does not deserve to have it; but, if he has wealth, society will give him credit for much that he has not. His wealth is a strong city. But "the destruction of the poor is their poverty." Now, mind it does not mean this, that any man is poor, who, at his handicraft, or his daily labour, or by any other means, is able to earn an income adequate to his wants. In the sense here meant, such a man is not poor. But, absolute, daily, grinding, poverty is the destruction of the poor. When it destroys energy, roots up confidence and self-trust, it places a man in such a position that he never can get a chance. Whatever there may be in him, he has not the instrument by which he can get a standing point. He becomes thoroughly disheartened, he falls back, falls down, and is crushed by the sufferings he has to endure. He loses his self-respect, vice and virtue, right and wrong are alike to him, so that he can live—he becomes quite reckless, and the result is "the destruction of the poor is their poverty."

"My poverty, but not my will consents!"

We have had cases, you know, brought before us in the public prints, of the biting, pinching, degrading sufferings to which some are reduced; some even of the tender sex. Many poor down-trodden needlewomen have lost their character through poverty, having, in the recklessness of their despair, plunged into a vicious

course for bread. Better to die, you say—better to die, than be dishonoured! Oh yes, certainly; but let me tell you who speak thus, that those who have a place and a position in society, those who are in circumstances of respectability, and are living with the comforts of life about them, they are the persons who would rather die than submit to dishonour. If poverty had crushed and trodden down these individuals, even they, probably, might find it difficult to die, if by their dishonour they could get a morsel of bread. “The destruction of the poor is their poverty.”

“The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked is sin.” This may be taken in two shades of meaning. It may refer, in the first place, to two persons alike in their circumstances, having the same income—two mechanics, two tradesmen, or two professional men. Then it would be the income, the earnings of the righteous are employed for life; but, those of the wicked, for death; that the one understands what he is to do with that which he produces by his labour, whether of back or brain, and, as a righteous and wise man acting according to the dictates of virtue and the law of God, he employs what he earns, or what he makes, in a manner that corresponds with, and promotes the great end and purposes of life, godly, virtuous life. But the wicked, the depraved, takes the same thing and employs it for mere sensuality, misery, and sin; and then the wise man tells you these two things will happen, life to the one, and destruction to the other. But there is another aspect in which it may be viewed. It may be intended to make a contrast between two sorts of income, and the effect of the source of that upon character and habit. The labour of the righteous, the earnings of virtue, tend to life, and the earnings of the wicked to sin. He that does not earn by labour and toil what he has coming in, does not understand or feel the value of it, like the other man. There is a difference between looking at something in your hand, which represents so much of

104

your own toil, your own skill, your own labour, which you have earned; and the very same thing when it only represents the skill, toil, and earnings of your father. The moral effect is very different. Why, you don't understand the value of money in the one case, as you do in the other. It does not represent to you the great idea in the one case, that it does in the other. Now, the earnings of the righteous, that for which he labours, and which he produces, he knows how to value and apply to the great purposes of life; but the revenues of the wicked are deceitful. There is danger of that which comes easily being spent without thought, or for some foolish purpose, and thus it tendeth to sin.

“The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.” Sometimes we have, “The hand of the diligent maketh rich;” but, then, you have a statement in the law of Moses like this, “I gave thee power to get wealth,” so that we have the instrumentality, the hand of the diligent, and also the source of physical strength and skill—“I gave thee power to get wealth.” If a man works in accordance with the great principles and laws of the Divine government, employs his skill and labour in harmony with the laws of the universe, with the blessing of God upon his efforts, the produce, the result, will be riches. “The blessing of the Lord maketh rich.” Riches may be got in different ways—by luck, by speculation, by diligence, by labour, by skill I don't say that it is wrong to get riches in all the ways in which they may be got easily; but I think all ways of getting wealth easily are very suspicious, because I don't believe it is God's law that we should get it without labour. Mind, I don't mean physical labour only, there may be a great deal of mental labour. A person in business or in a profession, may have a vast deal of mental labour, and he is very fairly entitled to what he may thus produce, as it represents the intellectual power and skill that was employed about it. But luck, chance, speculation, God blows upon; because wealth

105

thus obtained has not been fairly and honestly acquired. I don't mean to say that it is wrong to get wealth by all kinds of speculation, when man and man are fairly placed side by side with each other in society, and each acts according to the laws under which God has placed us. The best success is that which is the result of the blessing of God upon our labour, diligence, and skill, to which He addeth no sorrow. Now, with respect to your riches, if any of you are to be rich, God will have something to do with it. If you get rich by wrong, by robbery, by fraud, or by any other inequitable means, God will have something to do with it—He will blow upon it, and wither it with His curse! On the other hand, if you get rich by diligence, by labour, by skill, God will bless it, and bless you. He will bless you in your work, and will bless you in the result, and He will add no sorrow with it. But remember, He will bring sorrow with every shilling that is got by iniquity and wrong. Well, these are a few of the sayings of the wise man about money; let us now look, for a few moments, upon the other little cluster of sayings on conduct and character, which we have in this chapter.

We shall not say much about this last cluster, because we have had most of the ideas which it contains, in some form or other already. "The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted." Here are two different things, you see; the righteous and the wicked are contrasted together; you have in this verse, apprehension on the one hand, and hope on the other. A wicked man is always full of fears and apprehensions. Sin is not a tranquil thing. Young men, remember that, *sin is not a tranquil thing!* Sinners are always jealous of one another, they are always in fear that one or another may tell of their deeds. The mind of the wicked is "like the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." There is no friendship between the wicked; no thorough confidence: they, can-

106

not trust one another. Even if the sinner has sinned alone, when no eye has seen him, he thinks no one is conscious of his sin, nobody knows what sin he has been guilty of. Why, man, you know, if nobody else knows; you know about yourself! That is quite enough! Ah, remember there never can be only one that knows! There is yourself, and—yourself! you are double; there is your better and your worser self. Your better self has a consciousness of your worser self, and conscience will speak and often fill you with fright, fear, and apprehension: very generally, with respect to great and enormous sinners, fear has long delayed, but it *will* come!—mind that.

But the righteous hath hope. He is animated by desire, he believes and trusts in God, and anticipates a blessing as the result; and as God is true to His own laws and promises, the hope and desire of the righteous shall be granted. “As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.” The wicked may prosper for a season, and to the outward eye there may be every appearance of stability; but because there is no reality; in a moment all that he has gotten may be scattered as by a whirlwind. But the righteous hath an everlasting foundation. The idea intended to be conveyed to us is this—if anything is to be built for perpetuity, it must be built according to a fixed and settled principle, it must be fixed upon the foundation of truth. No building can stand long that is not erected in perfect harmony with the laws of the universe. If you begin to build on a wrong principle, the higher you make the structure the more likely will it be to fall. But if it is built on right principles, it will stand. “The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.” This idea we have had frequently in different forms: that godly fear lengtheneth life, is favourable to health, reputation, honour, and quietness of mind; while the

107

vices of the wicked shorten life, destroy reputation, health, honour, quietness of mind, and so on.

“The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.” Here you have two things contrasted with each other, but not like what we had before. We had a contrast between hope upon the part of the righteous, and apprehension or fear upon the part of the wicked; but here we have hope in both parties, and we have their hopes contrasted with respect to the result. The hope of the righteous shall terminate in gladness, because he hopes in accordance with the laws, government, and promises of God: but the expectation of the wicked, because it is false and presumptuous, shall be disappointed, shall perish. “The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction *shall be* to the workers of iniquity.” Leave out the two little words in italics, which were put in by the translators, and you have a very forcible expression—“The way of the Lord is strength to the upright, but destruction to the workers of iniquity.” The way of God’s dealings with men, God’s conduct in His providence and in His discipline, the way in which He draweth nigh to men and trieth their characters. To the upright, to the man of substantial principle, his way is strength, he has that within him which can bear to be tested, he has that within him which can bear the process of the fire. He is like the gold and the silver that is tried in the furnace, the process of trial makes him more pure and holy, brings out his goodness, strengthening and developing the power of his principles. But the dealings of God with the wicked, the base, have a very different effect. They have no principle within, nothing at all that will bear testing. When the test is applied it will quickly appear that they are worthless. It will be destruction to them; there is no substance within them that can resist the heat; the flames will consume them like

108

so much dry rubbish, which is only fit for destruction.

There are now only two things to be said, in conclusion, as the result of our meditations upon this chapter. In the first place, I wish you young men to carry away with you the impression that a pure conscience, a devoted exercise of your principles and energies, with respect to life and duty, will always be a blessing to you, and cause you to be respected and honoured. The other impression that I would leave upon your minds—when you take a view of the matter as we have developed it from these wise and sagacious sayings—is, that the universe is governed by law, and that all things come according to fixed and settled principles. Now, just look at that; it is far more terrible to think that there is certain retribution for sin, by the working out of fixed laws, than to contemplate the Divine judgment falling upon a man in some sudden and awful manner. If God dealt with sinners in this manner, by extraordinary judgments, you might lay the flattering unction to your soul,—“Why, perhaps I may escape! perhaps it won’t come! perhaps, as it does not fall on all, it will not descend on me!” Ah! but if, instead of that, God punishes the wicked by a certain law, then there can be no question that certain penalties will follow a certain course of conduct. Misery and destruction will follow the violation of the laws of truth and righteousness, just as certain as that the world revolves upon its axis. Remember, young men, that we do live under such a system of moral government; by a law of God’s universe, punishment will follow sin: “The way of the Lord is strength to the upright, but destruction to the workers of iniquity.”

Well, this is the way in which these things shape themselves to me. We do live under this law of which I have been speaking: but, blessed be God, there is another law; a merciful provision has been

109

made through Christ for man's redemption, rendered necessary because of this law of God's government. But I have not time to explain this now, I have done that many a time, and I now urge upon you these thoughts and suggestions connected with your conduct in the business of life, and with respect to duty and to God. I leave them with yourselves and to the blessing of God. Amen.

IX.

MORAL AND SOCIAL LAWS.

“A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches. The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh, &c.”—PROV. xi 16–31.

WE have in this Book of Proverbs God’s idea of the moral and social laws under which He has placed us; laws suited to our nature, and by which society is to be governed and kept together. In this book we have the result of a wise man’s profound thinking on these laws, assisted, as I think, by Divine influence; but even if that were not the case, we have at least the result of the wise man’s own thoughts, the conclusions to which he had come after having looked into the substance of things, and deeply considered and pondered the nature of man and society, and the laws belonging thereto.

“A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retaineth riches.” A man will think twice before he lays hands upon riches that are in the possession of a strong man. He that would go into the house of a strong man to spoil his goods must first consider whether he can bind the strong man; if he can, then he may spoil his goods, but not else. A *man* standeth, and commandeth respect and veneration by his strength, but a *woman* by her goodness. Sweetness, purity, goodness, are qualities far greater and sublimer than mere accomplishments, either of mind or person. Thorough goodness, virtue, purity, these should be the distinguishing qualities of woman. All

III

this graciousness of character is much better for her than bodily strength, better than anything; for it is this which draws from the heart that respect and veneration which giveth honour. The goodness of a woman is her strength.

“The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.” The generous, the benignant disposition, the unselfish, the man that liveth in the element of benevolence, that moveth and hath his being in it, why, it is health and flesh to him, and marrow to his bones. In the cultivation of these generous and unselfish virtues, there is health and strength to a man’s own soul. The merciful man doeth good to his own soul, not merely because of the actual increase of benefit which he receives by acting thus; but the sentiment of love and generosity in the heart of man is so congenial with his nature, that it is to him who has it an element of health, because he is free from a great number of the perturbations and passions which disturb other minds. While the man that is irascible, overbearing, selfish, not only removes himself from the love and sympathy of others, and does not, therefore, get good from them, but there is something inherently poisonous in the dispositions themselves, which troubles himself and everybody about him.

“The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.” Now there is a good deal of sameness in the maxims and proverbs of this chapter. I would have you notice that the proverb which I have now read is the indication of a general law, which is illustrated in a variety of particulars, in several of the proverbs that follow. The general law to which I refer is this—the inevitableness of certain consequences, certain results, flowing from certain causes, that as a man soweth so shall he reap. “The wicked worketh a deceitful work.” I think the meaning of this is that wickedness, sin, driveth a man on by false promises, by false

112

and hollow pretences, and thus raiseth expectations which can never be realised; he has been resting upon the promises of one that intended to deceive. He listoneth to sin, believeth and embraceth her, and while he does so she smileth in his face and promises great things, but all the while she is cutting his throat or robbing him! It is all of a piece, all deceit together; it is a deceitful work that the wicked worketh. It is like sowing chaff Sin filleth a man's hand with chaff, and tries to make him sow that, telling him it is better than bread-corn—far better, if he will sow that he shall have a crop of something far better than corn. He believes, he sows the chaff; he goes on working, spending his strength for nought, labouring in vain, expecting that which will never come; sowing, but never reaping that which he was promised and long anticipated, but quite the contrary. "But to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward." He does right who keepeth to that. Sow good seed and you shall have a crop. That is the great law of the Lord of the universe. Set good seed and the dews of heaven shall come down upon it, the sun shall warm and foster it, and presently it will spring up and you shall have an abundant harvest—"a sure reward." "Be not deceived, God is not mocked." You may be deceived; sin will tell you many lies and you may believe them, and sow chaff instead of wheat, but nature will not be deceived, her laws cannot be mocked,—“whatever a man soweth that shall he also reap.” The field may be prepared, the earth may open her bosom, and you may cast in chaff, but she won't take it for wheat and bear corn! Oh no! You cannot deceive her so. God's laws will not be mocked, though you may. Mind that! But if you live in harmony with them, they will not deceive your expectations: sow righteousness, cast in genuine seed, and you shall have a sure reward. Keep in harmony with the laws of nature, and they shall all work for your good.

113

“As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death. They that are of a froward heart are abomination, to the Lord: but such as are upright in their ways are his delight. Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.” Now these you may take altogether. By a very little thought you can easily see the illustration of them by yourselves, and how they are but other sides and aspects of the general law to which we have already referred, in commenting upon the eighteenth verse; we have the same thought there, and have had it again and again. It is then a settled point, that “righteousness tendeth to life;” that is, to have the fear of God before your eyes—for I have explained to you that the morality of this book is founded upon, and inculcates first of all, the necessity of a religious life, a divine fear, divine faith and love, and “other great and godlike virtues. Well, it has been settled, proved again and again, says the wise man, that “righteousness tendeth to life;” it “hath the promise of the life that now is,” it giveth health to the soul, it giveth enjoyment to life, it giveth reputation, it giveth very frequently the good things of life: and leadeth often to station, riches, and honour. It is thus that righteousness tendeth to life here, and life everlasting, for “the righteous hath hope in his death.” Now, be ye sure, says the wise man, it is not more true that righteousness tendeth to life, than that “he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death;” this is as true as the other. Observe here, this is not so much another law as it is the other side of the same law. Law has two sides: you look upon one side and you see it written, “righteousness tendeth to life;” you look upon the other and you read, “he that pursueth wickedness pursueth it to his own death.” “All that hate me,” saith wisdom, “love death.” The man that pursueth wickedness, is like a man rushing towards a precipice; he may not see it, but it is there, and if he goes on he

114

must fall and be dashed to pieces. The wise man in this book is laying down laws and maxims, which if followed will prevent the catastrophe. He says if a man is running after that which is evil, with his back towards life, and his face towards destruction, he will fall over the precipice, if he does not stop, as surely as there is a God in heaven or a man on earth! That is the law, and it is certain to take effect; it is a fixed law, there is no evading it. There is one thought that should never be forgotten by us, that we not only have God's laws in operation, in society and the world about us, but we have God in the laws. This great world of ours, this physical universe, and this moral universe, or human society, they are not like curiously constructed machines which a mechanic may make and set upon a table and then walk away and leave them to work of themselves. God has not constructed the world and impressed His laws upon matter, constructed man and impressed His laws upon his mind, and then gone away and left it to work itself out. God is in the laws, working the laws, superintending the laws, in all His wisdom and power; hence, says the wise man, "they that are of a froward heart are abomination to the Lord," for God is near, in the law, in man, about him and all his ways, marking his actions and looking at his heart, and rewarding and punishing by the agency of His laws—laws which must fulfil their course because there is a Divine hand upon them and a Divine essence in them.

"They that are of a froward heart, therefore, are abomination to the Lord: but such as are upright in their ways are his delight." There are two kinds of frowardness of heart, perverseness and hypocrisy. If we take it in the sense of hypocrisy, as a man pretending to be in the way of righteousness when his heart is not there—such a man is outwardly *toward* but in soul *froward*—the one being just the opposite of the other. The man who sets his face towards life and walks in the way of life, he is an upright man in whom

115

the Lord delighteth; but if his body is apparently walking in the way of life while his heart is not there, he is from it, he is froward in heart, and therefore an abomination in the sight of the Lord. You find here the same idea contained in the words of the Lord Jesus when He said, "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom." God says I must in everything have earnestness—reality: the laws that I have impressed upon nature require it; sow chaff as much as you like, but it will not grow. I must have sincerity in everything, in man as well as nature: they that are froward in heart are abomination to me. Hypocrisy is a thing that God loathes, and that every man who is a man loathes also, when he finds out the hollowness and hypocrisy. Ah, but such as are upright in their ways, toward in their profession, toward in heart, the whole soul and the whole man one, walking in the right way, why, the eye of God rests upon him with complacency. God delighteth in him. Hence, says the wise man, it follows from all this, that "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." Since it is so, since there is this law, no sagacity, no secrecy, no union, no combination of men, can possibly succeed in any opposition to it—against the omniscience and power of Him that made the law and whose hand guideth it. Though hand join in hand, though they swear never to divulge, that they will keep everything secret, it will be all of no use, it shall come abroad, or if not it shall grow and grow within him. Though a man should endeavour to forget, and for a long season may forget, it will come to mind some day. "Be sure your sin will find you out" You may commit sin on the other side of the world, and you may come to this, and you may think you have left it there, you may go and mix with the crowd and be lost even to yourself, and have forgotten it for years. Ah, but it will crawl after you; it will search you out; in the midst of the crowd it will scent you, and find you out

116

and pour its poison into your bosom, and torture your very soul. There will be a time come to every sinner when conscience will awake. Sin will find every man out—either by contrition, that shall break the heart by amending it, or by remorse, that shall break the heart without softening or bettering it. “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.” Not only shall the righteous be God’s care, and so be preserved and kept in circumstances in which others suffer, but even for the sake of the father blessings shall very often come upon the children. “When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah He remembered Abraham, and for his sake sent forth Lot from the midst of the overthrow: the nephew got deliverance because God had a blessed recollection of his relative—thus it is the seed of the righteous are often delivered.

“As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a fair woman that is without discretion.” A great truth, though put with somewhat of roughness to suit our tastes; but if vulgar, it is nevertheless appropriate. The “fair woman” is, of course, a woman who is distinguished by personal beauty, and you may add to that, if you will, irradiations of wit combined with all the accomplishments of a refined education, and all that can make a woman personally attractive. “A fair woman without discretion,” means, I think, a woman of immoral principles, and impure habits; not merely that she shall be lacking in what we mean by prudence—though I will admit that it may be illustrated so, the beautiful woman that is indiscreet, foolish with her tongue, and in her conduct. She may not trench positively on virtue and violate that, but yet she may so act, as to make her conduct ill accord with her personal beauty. But the proverb is more forcible if you take it in the other sense—a woman, eminent for beauty of person, who is sunk down into sensuality; “like a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout.” Oh, monstrous association! A fair body without a

117

fair soul! A body beautiful, but a soul loathsome, black, ugly, and offensive, in the sight of God, and of all that is good and pure! Why, what an offensive and absurd thing it would seem—and I may venture upon the illustration with this text lying before me—if you were to see swine decorated with golden ornaments rummaging in their lush, and wallowing in the mire! So it is, says the wise man, when that which God meant to be beautiful, attractive, and pure, becomes associated with sensuality, that which is debasing and bad. This is a lesson for women. Ah, but men have a lesson here too. The comparison that there is in this proverb may apply to men of genius: to men whom God has endowed with all that light, beauty, and genius, by which some of God's creatures are distinguished. When a man of genius, a man of rare parts, is a man of grossness and immorality, it is "like a jewel of gold in a swine's snout." It was thus with poor Burns, it was thus with Byron, it was thus with many such men of rare genius, wonderful arts, and powers, and yet who in their life, in their habits, were most degraded and sensual. It was Byron who described Burns to be—

"A mixture of dirt and deity;"

"a jewel of gold in a swine's snout." We have, too, a striking illustration of this proverb in Lord Bacon, who had one of the most wonderful minds that God ever made: and yet Bacon, with mental attributes and capabilities almost like those of a god, stooped to the meanest and most sordid of vices, so that his course was a mingled career of glory and shame—"a jewel of gold in a swine's snout."

"The desire of the righteous is only good: but the expectation of the wicked is wrath." We take this to mean that the purposes and desires of the righteous, the really excellent character, is always associated with that which is benignant: but the wicked man's purposes and desires are just the contrary. "There is

118

that scattereth, and yet increaseth: and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." You may take these two together. They contain a very obvious truth, which may apply to a man's habits in conducting business in the world, or to the generous and benevolent spirit. There is a withholding even in your business that is not wise; and there is a scattering that is not waste, a liberality, a generousness in the manner of conducting business and of doing things, which will not injure, but benefit. It will not be a scattering to which you are forced and compelled; but a generous voluntary acting which shall be the scattering of seed that will become fruit. I suppose that the ignorant savage who had been taught the value of bread-corn, when he had seen it ground into flour and made into food, but did not know the mode of its cultivation and growth, would think the man very foolish or insane who should take and scatter it upon the face of the ground: he would not understand that it was a scattering but not a waste. I say there is a frame of mind, there is a spirit and feeling that can possess a man, and by which he shall be actuated to do things liberally, which shall not be waste to him, but shall be a positive benefit by producing sentiments in the minds of men that shall be cherished by them and become very favourable to him in the market; and these good opinions shall so cling about him and all his concerns, that people will delight to serve and deal with him. "And there is a withholding more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." Ah, in your daily business transactions that is quite possible. Many a man has lost his all because he would not go to the expense of an insurance. Perhaps a man is robbed because he will not be at the necessary expense of securing, guarding, and watching his property. All this is like a man losing his ship for the want of a small modicum of tar. Men with eyes in their heads, and brains be-

119

hind them, understand these matters. "Withholding more than is meet"—getting, gathering, grasping, but never scattering: such conduct as this will bear seed, and the seed fruit, but of a different sort to the other—"it tendeth to poverty." Ah, and when he becomes poor, there is nobody to pity and say, "God bless you." The man never came close to the hearts of men, and he cannot get their hearts now. His poverty does not call forth sympathy and generous affection, because of his former selfishness and meanness. Of course, this proverb will also refer to the giving of your substance to support the cause of God in the earth. "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord," and he that scattereth in the way of honouring God with his substance, if he will give to God a portion of that which God gave him in the form of profit, he will assuredly find that he is none the poorer for what he has done. If it is done cheerfully and sincerely, God will make his measure to run over into his own bosom, for that which we scattered in the form of a blessing to others. So you see it is very natural that "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." This is the law. But I must not dwell upon it.

"He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him; but blessings shall be upon the head of him that selleth it." I am not going to object to the maxim of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest; for it is no doubt a right maxim, it is what should be the general law; but all laws have their exceptions, and there are times when maxims and laws must not be applied too stringently; yet there is a danger of pushing maxims and principles of political economy too far, even so as to lead men to withhold corn in time of scarcity. If, when God's judgments may be abroad in society, for the sake of raising the price in the market, a man will keep back that which would modify or lower the price, the people shall curse him. Why should man add his judgments to that of

120

Providence, add his curse to that of God's: to do what is in his power to add another drop in the bitterness of the cup that God in His inscrutable justice may have put into the hand of society? In such a time of scarcity or famine it is highly sinful to push, and push, and push, even recognised maxims of trade, as if it were right to make the greatest possible profit always, whatever may be the peculiar circumstances of the time or whoever may suffer. Now, you have no right to act thus. There may be circumstances arise when you must not act upon general commercial maxims. In times of scarcity if you have corn you should have this feeling, "I will take my share of suffering with society in the judgments of an all-wise Providence; I will not keep back the corn, the staff of life, that I have, in order to raise the price, but will let it go for the benefit of all." Depend upon it, if you only make a small profit under such circumstances, it will do you more real good than a large one. "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessings shall be upon the head of him that selleth it." Would any right-minded man allow his fellow-creatures to perish because he would not violate some maxim of trade? "Man shall not live by bread alone." You are not made and sent into this world merely to get profit! It is all very well to get it at proper seasons, but you are not made for that only. God did not give you an immortal spirit merely to do a pushing trade, that you might just increase and increase and get rich, caring for nothing but a large profit, and building a fine house to live in, that you may sit down and enjoy it.

Build your home with money so gotten, and it will be built with untempered mortar! The tears and sufferings that you have caused will be in the lime. It will not stick. It will not hold together. The curse of the people shall be upon you. The Lord will blow upon it, and the curse of the people will eat into it, and it will crumble and fall. If it does not fall over your own head, most likely your heir will set it

121

on fire, and it will burn and burn until it be consumed, and the winds of heaven will scatter the ruins like the dust of the earth. It is a fearful thing by hardness and severity to bring down upon yourself the curses of the people!

“He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.” We have had these two characters before—the peace-maker, the benignant loving soul, that is ever seeking rather to heal breaches, and cement society together, than do an injury; and the other as a mischief-maker, the irascible man who delighteth in fomenting quarrels and seeing things go wrong. Now, says the wise man, the one will procure favour, while the other will bring mischief upon himself. “He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch.” Now, you understand, this does not mean that it is wrong to be rich. I don’t believe in any principle of levelingism, or socialism. I believe that variations in rank and station and circumstances is quite agreeable to the law by which God means society to be governed. Were the whole race to be placed on a level to-night, the whole world be made equal, every man at this moment to have just the same amount of property, why, it would be different to-morrow; there would even in that short space of time be a great variety of conditions; some would have lost all, and some would have accumulated in the first twenty-four hours. Communism is a pure piece of nonsense; there cannot be such a thing as equality among men. It is not wrong, then, to be rich, in itself. Religion does not require that a rich man should become poor, and that when he sees a poor man he should give him half his property. There would neither be reason, good sense, nor philosophy in this. The Book does not say, “He that does not *give away* his riches shall fail;” but “He that *trusteth in* his riches.” If a man comes to such a point as to say, Well, I have realised so much, there is nothing that can turn up to injure me now, I

122

will therefore lie down in entire security upon what I have gotten. If he should feel thus and should forget his dependence upon God, why, then God may blow upon his wealth, and make him feel that he is as dependent upon God as the poorest. If he presumes upon his riches, and think that they will shield him in all his actions; that because he is wealthy, he may be rude and morose, that he may do things which others may not do—and, indeed, society will pass over much in a man who has wealth that it would not tolerate in a poor man—but he may do these things once too often, and find that he who trusteth in his riches is a fool. But the righteous, whether be he rich or poor—for it does not say a poor man shall flourish, for there is no more virtue in mere poverty than there is wrongness in mere riches—shall flourish as a branch. If he has faith that uniteth him to God, if he has within him the divine life, if he has that righteousness which cometh forth as a perpetual spring about his daily path, “his leaf shall not wither; but he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.”

“He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart.” Now I daresay many of you have seen that exemplified again and again. I am sure I have. It may be applied to worldly matters, to the conduct of persons in relation to the things of this life. I have known fathers, and I have known sons who have had to take the place of their fathers, to be a perpetual trouble to everybody dependent upon them or connected with them; and the consequence has been that they have “inherited the wind.” They have neglected their business, have not attended to their proper duties, having become selfish and self-indulgent, and everything has, of course, run to rack and ruin, for the want of vigorous attention, and a ready, skilful hand. Oh, how have I known wives and children troubled, because the man who ought to have managed the business

123

which was to have kept them in respectability and comfort, has become self-indulgent and negligent, and at last utter ruin has befallen them! "The fool shall be servant to the wise of heart;" most painfully have I seen this again and again. Have you never known a man who began life with every possible advantage, with his father's business, influence, and name, so that he had just nothing to do but to do well? Thousands that looked at him would give anything for his advantages. He has nothing to do but to do well, but he does everything just the contrary: he has no thought, and neglects every advantage; and what is the result? why, he gradually loses all his possessions; while the shrewd, thoughtful, and skilful man in his employ rises, and at last you find the master takes the place of the servant and the servant that of the master. And this is all a natural result, for it is God's law that the man who can use the tools shall have them. After all, character, wisdom, intelligence, and skill—that which makes the man—these are the things to start in life with. They are far better than all your external circumstances. It is far better for a man to work out that which he has within him; for he will find both pleasure and advantage in it. "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise." The righteousness of a good man is like a tree bearing fruit, and that fruit like the fruit gathered from the tree of life. The influence of the good man is strength and life to those about him; while the fruit of the wicked is poisonous, pestiferous, baneful. It may look pretty well, but it will be like ashes in the mouth. "He that winneth souls is wise." Souls are to be won, and it is far better to win and direct them than to mislead and repel them, and "he that turneth many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever."

We now come to the last proverb in the chapter; and in this we have the winding up of the general law. "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the

124

earth: much more the wicked and the sinner." I believe this is the only proverb which commences with an exclamation, and I think the "Behold!" is intended to teach you that something is about to be introduced to your notice worthy of special attention. Behold! look! consider well! "the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner." I think it means that God's laws are such that the righteous man doing wrong should suffer for that wrong. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked:" whatsoever a man sows, that he shall reap: he that soweth to the flesh shall reap corruption. So I think it means here, even "the righteous have their recompense in the earth." If instead of sowing bread-corn they set a handful of chaff, when the harvest comes there will be a bare patch. Even if a righteous man sows chaff the earth is not to be deceived, it will not take it for bread corn, because a good man scattered it. And if the righteous are recompensed so, if they shall be taught to feel that it is a bitter thing to sin against God, ah, it will be much more so with the wicked and the sinner—much more so with the man who sows nothing but chaff, which shall yield nothing but bitter disappointment. As the apostle Peter says, in the spirit of this passage, but in other words, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

God grant that every one of you, especially you young men, may have the fear of God in your souls, which is the beginning of wisdom; that you may live a deep religious life, that you may be characterised by a spirit of devotion and religious faith, and that by it you may judge everything in your business, in all your worldly matters, and so regulate your life that it may be golden in the sight of God, and beautiful in the sight of man!—Amen and Amen.

X.

PRACTICAL GOODNESS.

“Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish,” &c.—PROV. xii. 1-11.

HAVING gone through the previous portions of this book we have arrived at the chapter before us. It affords no outline of thought. The proverbs which it contains are just separate pieces of truth; therefore all we can do is just to begin at the beginning and take the proverbs as they lie before us—say a word or two upon each, and pass on.

The form of proverb which we have in this chapter, and generally in this portion of the book, is a sort of double representation, giving us two sides of a thought, or one thought and its opposite. Such a thing is so—but there is the opposite; so that you will find out of the twenty-eight proverbs in this chapter twenty-five have got a “but” in them, indicating a sort of parallelism—a twofold idea—which, indeed, is very much the same idea under another form. “Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish.” This is very much like a simple truism, as many of these proverbs are, and their very force lie in that fact that they are true, obviously and plainly so, and therefore to be met and acted upon.

You must always remember that the knowledge and the wisdom which this book recommends is a practical and devout thing, having for its foundation the fear of God; and then obedience to God will come out as the result. “Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge.”

126

Of course, if a man loves the end, he will love that which leads to the end. If he loves knowledge, he will love instruction as the means to attain it; if he loves the end, he will love the way to the end. "But he that hateth reproof is brutish." Reproof is instruction tinder another form. There is not merely didactic teaching, or putting into the mind a right idea, but admonition on account of wrong-doing, reproof to error and ungodliness. This is instruction with its unpleasant face. But not the less necessary and salutary. And he that does not like it, not only says that he does not love knowledge—that he is not looking upward towards the godlike—that he has no divine thought in his mind—that he is not seeking to live a divine life; but he proves himself to have got far below that—he is "brutish;" so that he believes in nothing, as it were, but just in his animal nature, and lives only to gratify his lusts, despising that which should be the characteristic of his manhood—a panting after that knowledge and holiness which shall elevate him to a position of dignity, and bring him into favour with his Maker. The language of Scripture to man is: "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle." There are some people, some young men especially, who can hardly be managed in any other way than by just having the rein kept tight upon them; they continually require to be checked in, kept down, and subdued by the hand of authority and power, instead of lovingly yielding themselves to that which is set before them in the instructions of wisdom that calleth them to a virtuous and manly life.

"A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn." The Bible never permits us to lose sight of our immediate connexion with God. The world and human society is not a mere machine. It is a great thing to get the idea of law, and that law as working out its results; but it is a greater thing to get before the mind the

127

idea of the personal superintendence of the Lawgiver—that God not only has made this structure, this world, and this great machine of human society, but that He works it, that His hand is upon it, that what *it* does is *His* doing. It is well for you young men to keep that in view. It makes life very solemn—ah! but it makes it also very great; makes man great; makes human action great, society, everything. So you see that as there is not only this working out of the thing, but the superintendence of an Almighty Mind, “A good man shall obtain favour of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn.” In other words, “Virtue will be its own reward:” but vice and wickedness will bring their own condemnation or punishment. We can put it thus abstractedly, and it is a very serious matter to reflect that law is working out certain results. But when you get the idea of the Divine Personality being brought into operation, it then becomes a far greater matter, which comes with greater solemnity to the heart. It is well for you to carry that thought with you day by day, and to feel that everything you do is done under the great Taskmaster’s eye, and that He will reward fidelity and condemn unfaithfulness. “The good man”—the benevolent man most likely is intended—“obtaineth favour of the Lord!” he acts according to his character; he does not think about reward, he does not look for it; ah, but he gets it. The good man does not think about the results to himself and his action? towards others; he does the thing out of those impulses, those divine and holy instincts, which inhabit that religious nature of his. And God has His eyes upon the good, the benevolent man, and the result is, the favour of God comes upon him and overshadows him. But the man of wicked devices, the man who is thoroughly wicked, is condemned: he tried to produce results beneficial to himself, but his devices being wicked, he brought himself into disgrace and under the condemnation of God.

128

“A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.” A man may get on by wickedness for a while wonderfully. There may be cases in which wicked men seem established, fixed: things may go well with them; but in general the triumph of the wicked is short. In a general way it is found that the fruit of falsehood, wicked devices, plans that are not based upon the real and true, are not in harmony with the great fixed laws of God’s moral universe, will not do in the long run, and that men are not established by wickedness. But even if they do succeed very well, they never quite feel that they are established, they never have a certainty of conviction that all is right, they never have within themselves a solid rest. They cannot have. When a wicked man may appear to be established, he is far more so in the estimation of others than in his own, because wickedness is a thing of great perturbation, it is always in fear, it has no faith in its results—no wicked man, therefore, can feel established. “But the root of the righteous shall not be moved;” he is established securely. The righteous in other parts of Scripture are compared to a tree; a thing that has life in it. “Wickedness is trying to plant and establish, by a sort of mechanism, a dead thing, and cannot do it; but the righteous like a tree takes root, and it is established by its own inherent life. Though a righteous man should suffer, be misunderstood, persecuted, stripped of his leaves, and sometimes have his boughs broken, yet as there is life in him, he shall not be moved: when the storm has passed over he shall bud and flourish again; “his righteousness shall come forth as the light, and his integrity like the sun that shineth at noonday.”

“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.” The conjugal relation is the most intimate and important, the fountain of all other relations, and that which has great influence both upon our happi-

129

ness and our virtue. Forming this relation is the most important point in life, for on it the most momentous results are suspended. It has often struck me in looking abroad and observing things, that the blunders which people commit, and the difficulties they throw in their own path by blindly following their impulses and passions is one of the greatest proofs that man somehow or other has been terribly dislocated, that the world has got a terrible jar. We see this most strikingly, if we go no further than this one thing, upon which so much happiness or misery depends. We are called upon continually to witness the fact that a great many people are running counter to those very principles and influence which if followed would secure a happy and virtuous life. In this proverb the woman is represented as affecting the man both in his happiness and reputation, his social comfort and his respectability and honour in the world. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." The woman of intelligence, purity, good sense, one who is a real helpmeet, who has sympathy with him in his views and aims, who unites with him for their accomplishment, is watchful over his interests, and careful over his substance, and over all the arrangements of his family: why, she makes his face to shine—crowns him, as it were, in society, by all the circumstances and arrangements of his social life and by the peace that rests upon his brow, and thus he is at peace in his own breast and honoured in society. "But she that maketh ashamed!" Oh, it is a terrible thing when a man is ashamed, when a man has reason to be ashamed—ashamed of himself. It is a terrible thing when a man has to reveal to himself that he has made a mistake, when his own conscience is thoroughly aware of it. It is a terrible thing when a man has got into such a state of mind that he is afraid when in company to hear or give an opinion. At home he expects nothing that can excite his interest or respect. If he tries to alter it he is thwarted and repulsed, and thus

130

there being nothing inviting in his own home, he goes about society with a sore in his heart, with a seared conscience. He falls like one who has a disease in his flesh and in his marrow! There are such things! "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones." Why, then, take care, and don't let that which is the greatest act of life, be a thing done without thought, and afterwards have to find an apology for your failings, and have bitterly to regret following the impulses of your passions.

"The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit." If a man be truly a righteous, good, holy, sanctified man, a man with a divine soul in him, put any subject before him requesting his advice, and you may depend upon it that his suggestions will be in the main right. His thoughts are right because his heart is right. But the wicked, just because of that very wickedness and wrongness, which is the essence of the man's inward life, will, most likely, not be able to take a right view of the subject presented to him. His notions will be evasive and crooked. With respect to any practical matter, an end to be pursued, the views of the two men will be widely different. So true is it that if a man's heart be right and true, then as if by an infallible instinct his thoughts, desires, aims, purposes, and plans in life, will be right also; and the contrary is equally true likewise, when a man's heart is wicked all his desires and aims will be wrong.

"The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them." We have had that idea before, that the wicked confederate together for base and cruel purposes; but the upright would rather speak that which would deliver a man than that which would lead him into danger. "The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand." This I think is figurative. The same idea is frequently

131

dwelt upon in this book, and put in various forms and ways—that wickedness does not last. A man may build a great fabric, but if it is based upon wickedness it will be overthrown. You see his house, it is a splendid structure; but in a few years you may ask for him or his house, but they are not—they are altogether swept away. “But the house of the righteous shall stand.” House here means family, as it does very generally in Scripture. The family, the seed, of the righteous are blessed, generation after generation, they shall stand securely; they are known and honoured for their own virtues, and the goodness of their fathers.

“A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.” Wisdom here may be taken in a practical sense: and it means that practical, moral, upright wisdom, will find its own echo in the feeling and in the estimation of others, and shall be commended according to it. “But he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.” You may understand this as referring to the wicked, the criminal. Or you may take it in reference to intelligence, to the acquisition of knowledge—that which fills a man’s mind with just and useful thoughts, and which a man may use in his intercourse with society. Something which is not absolutely essential and necessary for him just to get on in life, but that which beautifies life and gives breadth of character, showing the man to have manhood in him. That he has intermeddled with all knowledge and has become really and thoroughly intelligent, so that he is able to touch and beautify any subject that comes up in his intercourse with society, giving knowledge and pleasure to those with whom he associates in the social circle and in the world. Why, such a man is loved and estimated according to that which is in him, that which he is; while another man,—let him, if you will, have the advantage of birth, rank, and wealth, if he is an ignorant and per-

132

verse fool, why, he will come to be despised. In spite of the disposition, which you frequently see in society, to estimate a man for the stamp that is upon him, there are a great many things, on the other hand, that make you see that society can really look at a man in himself, and will estimate him according to what they see in him. Now this is right! Let us have faith in man! Have faith in reality! And have faith in society as estimating reality! Shams, outside appearances, appendages to men's names, hollow titles, and the like, may do for a while, but not in the long run; and after all society will generally estimate and honour the real and the true. Be you real! Bear real fruit. Divine wisdom and the fear of God. Be intelligent, truthful, upright, wise, and devout, and you will be honoured both by God and man!

“He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.” Now, you must remember that the word despised here is not used in the same sense as in the previous verse. The man who is perverse in heart is to be despised by the good, by the man whose opinions are supposed to be worth something; but I apprehend that what is here meant is, that the man is despised by those whose opinions will not count for much. I think the meaning is, that in society there will be some people who will despise what they call “vulgarity;” who will look with contempt upon the shopkeeper, the man in trade; they will look down upon all that, as if they felt themselves to be made of finer clay. Now, this man whom they despise, and who is perfectly satisfied to be just what God has made him, and perhaps has the wisdom, which the other has not, which makes him feel and understand that it is not *where* a man is, but *what* he is, that is the great question, and that a shopkeeper may become a very great being in the sight of God as well as any one else, if he becomes a devout and spiritual man. And so with this idea, he goes on, working away, putting his hand to his duties

133

with all his might, is always busy, and thus he gets the comforts of life about him, with a servant into the bargain—he has got the conveniences as well as the necessaries of life. But there may be some who will look down upon him with scorn and contempt. Yet, says the wise man, in the estimation of wisdom, if he has the substantial advantages of life about him, he is better than the man that honoureth himself, and wanteth bread. The man that thinks so highly of himself and of his delicate white hand, that he will not put it to any rough work, but will just put it forth once a quarter to take his income, or his salary for doing little or nothing; he may despise a man for being in trade, and deem him vulgar, but in spite of his rank, his position, or his gentility, if it is all a mere splendid poverty—as it very often is—the man in trade is better off than he, and can afford to be despised. In the midst of all the pride he may be wanting bread—or what amounts to that—inability to sustain his position. Why, there is no comparison between the two circumstances—the one is infinitely happier than the other.

“A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” The man of goodness and benevolence looks with a tender loving heart upon everything; knowing that the great God looks tenderly and lovingly upon all. Such a man will feel that though the animals are placed under him, that he can have property in them and exercise power over them, yet he will feel that he is to deal tenderly with them. He will understand that the inferior animals were not put in the hand of man to be abused, to be tyrannised over and trampled upon. The righteous man, therefore, not only regardeth the life of man and the feelings of man; but he also regardeth the susceptibility to pain of those lower creatures that are placed within his power. “But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” Men that are inherently bad will be cruel in that which they mean

134

for tenderness. You have a striking instance of that in Pilate. "I find no fault in this man, I will therefore" what? "Chastise Him and let Him go." There was his tender mercy. Found no fault: acquitted of crime; nothing wrong; and yet just because he had the power, he said that "I will chastise Him:" He shall be lashed: I will subject Him to that, although He is innocent, "and let Him go." You will find many instances similar to that in the common business of life.

"He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding." We need not go further than this proverb to-night. Now, just carry with you as the last thought that I shall suggest—the importance of keeping in contact with the real, with that which is substantial and positive, and not be led away by mere whim and talk. "He that tilleth his land," or he that attendeth to his trade, keeping steadily to the place where Providence has placed him, just putting his hand to his work, saying, God has called me to this, and I will do it; I have got this field, this farm, or this trade, and I will keep to it, and, by God's blessing, I will do what is my mission in the world, and so he shall be satisfied with bread. "But he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding." The man that leaves his work, supposing that he is not called to it—and I don't suppose that everybody is called to it—leaves his field, his farm, or his trade, and engaging in talk, goes about making speeches and is going to set the whole nation to rights, instruct everybody and reform us all, why such a man "is void of understanding." I don't mean to say it is always wrong for a man to step out of his trade to become a teacher and an instructor of the people. Some men feel that they have a divine mission, which obliges them to talk, and they really put their hand to their work which God has given them to do. If persons have a call—as God sometimes sends men into the

135

world in order that there may be through them the advent of *some* great thought, as the beginning of a great work,—let them go forth and speak: do their work; fulfil their mission. But let a man be very sure before he leaves the privacy of the family, or business, that he has a call to be a teacher, or he may soon find out to his own cost, and the ruin of his family, that he has made a mistake.

But we will not go further to-night. “We have just laid this matter before you. You will find that there is a great deal of practical wisdom in this chapter; meditate upon it; and never forget, if you please, what I want especially to press upon your minds, that there must underlie all the various virtues, and their modes of action, in this external character—the fear of God, and religious faith; the heart being sanctified by devotion, and the spirit purified by deep communion with God. May God grant His blessing, for Christ’s sake.

XI.

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise,” &c.—PROV. xii. 15–28.

THE portion which comes before us in regular order to-night, is the latter part of the twelfth chapter,—from the fifteenth verse to the end; and like some of the portions which we have recently had, it will admit of something like a classification. It may help attention, and memory, to say that these fourteen proverbs may admit of a sort of division into three unequal parts. There are nine that bear on the exercise of speech, having relation to the instructions of others, in either wisdom or folly, and in relation to certain characters by whom the utterance of the tongue is either attended to or rejected. There are two that bear upon a particular quality of character, with its opposite. And there are three which generally, and comprehensively, refer to the influence and result of principle, or the want of it, upon the whole being and life of man. Now, I will take up these sentences in this order. The first nine proverbs lie very much together, though not quite.

We begin with the fifteenth verse—“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.” Now, this you see refers to the exercise of speech, as it may be the means of giving to one man the benefit of the experience and observation of another; and that one man may advise and caution another; and it tells us how some people receive that. It is quite possible for a person to be right in having

137

a strong confidence in the rectitude of his own judgment. Indeed, a man will never do anything great, or be anything great, who has not that. All men of strength, and of decision, have great confidence in themselves—confidence in the pertinence of their views—the accuracy of their opinion—the Tightness of the end they aim at, and of all the means by which it is to be attained. But, then, a really great man—a thoroughly strong-minded man, who has a right to have that confidence in himself, is also conscious that he has arrived at a correct idea. Arrived at it by thought, and understands the principle upon which he decides that it is right. He has confidence, not only in the result, but in the chain of thought. The process of reasoning which has led him to that conclusion. Such a man will be quite willing to hear what another has to say, though he will not promise to obey it—to be absolutely guided by it. But he will take it as so much material for thought. And you observe what the proverb says: that “the way of a fool is right in his own eyes: *but he that HEARKENETH unto counsel is wise.*” It does not say that he must necessarily follow it. The wise man *hearkeneth* to counsel, and will take opinions into consideration, that may seem to have some wisdom in them. And a wise, strong, sagacious man will sometimes find that his own thought may be mended and modified by the suggestion or opinion of another very inferior to himself. He is, therefore, very willing to hearken. But the fool!—the man who has not thought out the thing, but has fixed his mind upon it from mere whim or caprice—he can give you no reason for it, because he has no reason for his conduct, yet he adheres to it from sheer obstinacy, and not from manly decision. And such a man is “wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.” It is a very great and serious thing, this giving and taking of advice. It is a very delicate matter to give advice, and a very serious thing to ask it; and it is a great thing for people to be serious when they do ask

138

it. People often ask *advice* when they want *approbation*. They come to ask counsel when they have taken an irrevocable step. Their courage begins to fail; they are losing confidence in what they have done, and they don't want to be guided, but they want to be fortified. Now, if you go to ask advice, go soon enough. If you ask advice, remember that no one can advise unless he has the case fairly and fully, every atom, before him. Deal with your friend in asking counsel as every wise man deals with his lawyer in submitting his case. The lawyer must know all the worst parts, and the weak points; he must have the thing entirely before him, or he cannot judge of it. And the really wise and thoughtful man will be very careful how he consents to act contrary to his own judgment in any practical matter that concerns himself, however unanimous his friends may be in advising. If—now mark what I say—if *his friends don't succeed in changing his judgment!* If his friends by their counsel succeed in changing the wise man's judgment, he can then look at the matter exactly as if their suggestions had originated in his own mind, because he is going to do a thing which concerns himself, according to all the views and convictions of his own intellect. A wise man ought always to act thus, because he can take by far the best view of his own position and his own concerns. But if such a man, in a great practical matter that concerns himself, while standing in the best position to see every particular thing associated with it, consents to act contrary to his own judgment and conviction, in homage to the opinions of friends, depend upon it that nine times out of ten he will do wrong. But, mind I am talking of the *wise* man, not the *fool*; the wise in his own conceit, the wise in his own eyes, he will never hearken to counsel at all!

“A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.” You may take that in two senses: you may consider, first, that it has relation to an insult, or an attempted insult. from another. If the

139

thing is not so glaring and so serious that it must be observed, why, the wise man won't observe it. He will cover and conceal what he might have perceived and felt what was intended to be done, he will not let others know what he has felt. And especially will he hide it from the individual who intended the insult, while he will take care that his enemy shall not have the opportunity for a repetition of his malicious conduct. The wise man, we say, won't see the insult; but the fool will flare up in a moment, and let everybody see that he has been insulted, and will often do it in such a way as to get no sympathy, and perhaps will excite derision and laughter. Now, I tell you that in passing through the world, this is a great and valuable lesson, though it is sometimes difficult to learn. But in passing through this life, depend upon it, the wise man will be sometimes *deaf*, he will be often *blind*, and will be far oftener *dumb*. Take the proverb in another sense—"A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame." That is to say, it is a shame to a man to give way to wrath; it is a shame to be easily wrought upon and excited into anger. One of the characteristics of divine wisdom and love is described by the apostle as, that she is not soon angry. Anger, flaming up at the least provocation, indicates the want of manly control,—that there is a deficiency of moral power. It is, therefore, a shame to a man to be soon angry, and the prudent man restrains and represses his rising wrath. He has mastery over himself, and he refrains from exposing his weakness, and conceals his emotions. But a fool's anger is presently known—manifestly known; having no self-respect, he gives way to that which makes others not respect him either.

"He that speaketh truth showeth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit." This may be applied to the serious business of life, with respect to giving testimony or evidence in particular cases. He that speaks the truth helps the case, and promotes the

140

ends of justice and equity; but he that is false in his testimony, of course deceives the judges and all concerned, and leads to that which is false and inequitable in determination. It may be applied to the general conversation of a man, to that which regulates his talk in the habitual intercourse of life, and by looking at it in this way it will have a very suggestive meaning. "He that speaketh truth showeth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit." The scrupulously exact in his statements always wishes to say just neither more nor less than that which is really true. He showeth forth the presence of an inward regal power of rectitude—that there is loyalty to truth within him. But the false witness, who does not do that, manifests that there is either a wish to deceive or a carelessness about it. Now, it is a great thing to acquire the habit of calm, grave, manly serious regulation of your common and daily talk. There are people who get into such a loose habit of talk, that you never depend upon their description or their statement. Their words never weigh more than half what they seem to be worth. They come to be very well known and understood, and you hear it often said of people, "You know that's his way; well, you know, you must take a good deal from that—it was uttered by him." A man is a poor thing when he has brought himself to that: it's a poor account when a man has come to that! So that they who know him only take his words at half their apparent value; and they that don't know him are sure to be deceived.

"There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health." This may apply both to what is said about a man, and to what is said to a man. There are people who love calumny and detraction. They never have a good word for anybody, and if they have nothing of a defamatory nature to utter, why, then, their look, or the significant manner of their silence, will insinuate something that will be more piercing and poisonous than

141

words. The backbiter!—it is a strong figure—a man getting behind another, and coiling about him with the disposition of a serpent, biting and gnawing behind, out of sight,—utters words that pierce and wound. There are those who speak like a piercing sword. David understood that, and he laments it in his own experience; he speaks of one from whom he had suffered and says—“His words are smoother than oil; but inwardly they are drawn swords;” words that will stick to a man. An individual will utter words sometimes, calm, gentle words, which, as to their substance or as to their manner, cannot be taken hold of and answered, for they admit of no reply; and they may be so constructed as to pierce the soul. Why, a word will strike the heart like a blow of the hand upon the body. The inner man is tender and susceptible, and can be injured by a word as the body may be by an action. “But the tongue of the wise is health.” The wise, here signifies the good—the tongue of the wise, the good, is health. The words that wound endeavour to injure reputation, and the good will interfere and seek to heal the reputation of the absent, and his words will have a healthful influence upon the listener. Ah, such words are wonderfully comforting; when poured into the crushed and bruised soul, they act like a healing balm, or a molifying oil.

“The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.” For the most part this will be found to be agreeable to facts seen and experienced in social life. That the lip of truth, the true statement, the true man; the testimony which is sincere and according to fact, though for a time it may happen that it is not admitted, that there may be hesitation, yet the probabilities are—and all facts agree with these probabilities—that the true statement will be established; this is generally the case; and once established, it is done. There are no degrees in truth. When a thing is true, it is true. The true lip, the true testimony being admitted is

142

established, and established for ever; “but a lying tongue is but for a moment.” It may appear to succeed: the man may have gained his point; the falsehood is received, but it is only for a moment. By and by something happens to excite doubt. A little doubt arises in one mind, it expands, and gathers, and becomes suspicion. Other circumstances concur, other minds are moved. A fresh investigation is determined on. Then the circumstances under which this investigation takes place will be found to operate unfavourably for the liar, both in relation to himself and others. The circumstances which have led to the renewed investigation opens the eye and the ear of persons, to see and hear things which they did not see, and which they would not listen to before; and the liar being put into this unexpected position, after a season of triumph, he is completely enchained and confined, and is convicted of his falsehoods. In order to get on at all, the liar must have an almost superhuman memory. It is very difficult for falsehood to harmonise and be consistent. The thing will be seen, and confusion will crown the deceiver. The misrepresented fact, the false entry in the book, it will all come out: “The lying tongue is but for a moment.” This, I say, is in general the case; and even when a man succeeds in a falsehood it is really a defeat. It is a devastating of his inward life. Though a man outwardly triumphs, and is outwardly looked at as a true man, there is one being in the world that knows he is not—and that’s himself. And in spite of all his triumphs he has within a corroding paining conscience.

“Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy.” We need not dwell upon this, but we can just look at it in this sense. That those who imagine evilly will plan and seek to accomplish the ruin of others, will harbour in their heart that which will deceive. It will deceive themselves. They will be deceived whether they succeed or not. He that planteth mischief, either succeeds

143

or he does not. When he does not succeed, he then finds that he has been deceived in the confidence which he placed in the instrumentality, his means and plans having failed. When he does succeed, he will find, by a bitter experience, that he has been deceived in the object, having gained remorse rather than satisfaction. "But to the counsellors of peace is joy." They would apply themselves to promote harmony, goodness, love—all that is of good report—between man and man, who shall live for that, and plan for that, and counsel for that; why, there is joy for them whether they succeed or not. If they do succeed, they have joy in the accomplishment; and if they don't, why, they have joy in the consciousness of what they sought to do, or what they counselled to be done, and wished to accomplish. "If Israel be not gathered," said God to the prophet—after He had told him to go forth and gather Israel—"thou shalt be honourable, because thou hast delivered thy message and done thy work faithfully."

We pass over the next verse, and come to the twenty-second—"Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight." I wish just in passing to fix your minds upon what I have pointed out to you before—the great force with which God's personality comes out in connexion with these proverbs, teaching us that there is not only a law, a system of law, but that there is also a lawgiver, a law administrator, a mind, a personality. It is not only that the thing shall work out so and so, but that there is one seeing that it shall so work out) that there is one whose mind is affected appropriately, according to the individual character on which it looks. There is wonderful force in this. "Lying lips are abomination to the Lord." God is a God of truth. He is light itself, in whom there is no darkness at all. He "dwelleth in light." Truth is the basis upon which everything is placed by Him, and truth is the result by which He acteth. He does

144

nothing by falsehood. He does everything by that which is true, by that which is real. He is Himself truth, all that He does is true, and all that He says is true. Lying lips, therefore, are an abomination to Him. Ah, my dear friends, there is a world in which it is not possible to deceive, even for a moment. There is a world in which no being would dare to lie, even if it were possible for the thought to rise in the heart. A world of purity, a world of reality, a world of perfect truth, a world of perfect mutual knowledge, where every one seeth as he is seen, and knoweth as he is known, where spirits dwell in the presence of the God of truth, and, as it were, penetrate and look through each other, just as we in this world look on the surface of each other's countenances. To deceive in this heavenly world is as impossible as, from the then perfection of our natures, such a wish will be impossible to enter the mind. We are taught in this book everything is excluded, shut out from that world that "loveth or maketh a lie." "A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness." You may take that in two senses. Understanding "foolishness" here as sin, a prudent man, who knoweth of sin and wrong-doing in another, is not forward to speak of it. He concealeth and keepeth back his knowledge. He will consider time, circumstances, and propriety. But the fool! if he has got a piece of information, out it comes, without regard to propriety or anything else. A man of this sort very often goes about just like a firebrand, and does an immense amount of mischief.

Now, the text may be explained in that sense, or this—the wise man, the prudent man, in company, and in his intercourse with society, will often conceal what he knows, any piece of information of which he is possessed, will often be silent, when he might speak, from a dislike of being ostentatious: even as the psalmist, he will sometimes "keep his tongue even from good." But the fool, who knows nothing, and

145

has nothing to say, will proclaim, by his perpetual rattle, his babbling folly, the emptiness of his head and heart. He goes on talk, talk, talking, and like what is said in another proverb, proclaiming not only his foolishness and emptiness, but saying to every one that he is a fool. Now, pass over the next verse, and come to the twenty-fifth, which is the last of this first series. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad." You all know how very strong figurative terms are: and many of them have got into our language, and into all languages. We cannot speak of mind, or of mental emotion, without using figurative phrases. Words involving figures of speech. Images taken from the external to illustrate the internal. Thus we speak of a load upon the spirits. In the same manner poets often speak of the light heart, as though it had wings. Of the eye being lighted up, and of the countenance brightening. All figures, but beautifully indicative of the spiritual thoughts—phraseology taken from material properties strongly to set forth mental emotion. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop"—just like a man with a great burden upon his shoulder—"but a good word maketh it light" There are some people who give way to depression, on whose spirit a heavy sadness constantly rests, and they sometimes want to have their self-respect restored, and till you have done that you can do nothing with them: till you have got such a man restored to himself, you can do nothing with him. It may be right to send him to God, it may be right to seek to get him restored to God. But you can do nothing with him till you have got him restored to himself. And with a good, kind, loving word, you may often restore a man to himself and to society—"a good word maketh the heart light."

I remember a case, that I know to be a fact, which I will relate. It will tend to show you what a wonderful power there may be in a kind word. A brother

146

minister, a friend of mine, was very feverish and restless one night after a hard Sabbath, and he could not sleep. On the Monday morning, he rose up early, about five o'clock, and dressed, thinking he would just walk out, as he could get no rest. As he was passing along a little way from the town, he saw a poor woman whom he recognised, and when they met, he said to her, "Good morning, Betty," and passed on—that was all, just a kind, neighbourly, loving word. A month or two afterwards a woman came to that minister, and said she wished to converse with him about her soul, and that she desired to be received into communion with the church; that she trusted she had yielded her heart to God, and given herself over to live and die in His service, and, said she, "You were the cause. Do you remember meeting me one morning soon after five o'clock?" "Yes." "Well, I was then going to the river, with a determination to drown myself. I had been for some time in a state of deep depression, my spirit was completely crushed and broken. I thought nobody cared for me, that I had not a single soul, in the world who had a thought about me. And as I passed you, do you remember that you said, 'Good morning, Betty?' and you said it in such a tone of sympathy. There was such a neighbourly recognition in it—that I said to myself, 'Why, he does not look down upon me—he does not pass me by without a good word and a good wish; there must be something in life worth living for, after all.' Well, sir, I gave up my purpose, and I turned round and went home. The next Sabbath I went to your chapel, and regularly ever since I have sat under the preaching of the gospel from your lips. I trust, from that moment you spoke to me, there has been a change in my whole character, and that I am now willing to live for God." Now, I know that is a fact. So much, then, for this first class of texts: the other two will be very easily disposed of.

I said that there were two proverbs which bore upon

147

a particular quality of character, and its opposites. These you will find in the twenty-fourth and the twenty-seventh verses:—"The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute." "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious." It is not necessary to dwell upon this; we have had something like it before. "The hand of the diligent maketh rich;" I think we have had that. And we have also had—which comes pretty much to the same thing as this first proverb—"The fool shall be servant to the wise in heart." "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute." This will apply, not to nations, but individuals—the just, the persevering, the industrious, will be sure to get on—to rise and rule. And many a one that began life where this man is likely to end it, will have to end life where he began it. The foolish and slothful man will have to give tribute to the other, who is intelligent and persevering—the wise in heart, and the diligent in life. "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting." The slothful man will sometimes rouse himself to cast off his sloth, and, for a time, will do something; but don't follow it up—will make a great spasmodic effort, but not keeping at it with a steady purpose, never reap the benefit of the exertion. The idea is very strongly put in this passage. We are not to suppose that this man is hunting for mere sport, and therefore caring nothing about the game, but that he is hunting in earnest. And yet, though he goes through the fatigue and gains his object, by taking the thing sought, he does not follow it up, but just lies down, and forgets the very thing which was his end, aim, and purpose, (or ought to have been,) and thus loses all the advantages which would have resulted from his first effort. "But the substance of a diligent man is precious;" he knows how to value it, after having diligently laboured for it. His substance represents to him so much time, so much

148

energy, so much skill; and he will take care not to waste it, by not taking advantage of the results.

One of the most vivid illustrations of the former part of this proverb occurred, in a certain line, in the conduct of Sheridan. I mention the fact, because it so forcibly illustrates the proverb. Sheridan was just one of those men who work by fits and starts, that do nothing perseveringly. At one time there was a certain calumny rife against him, it was the common talk of the public, and he very severely felt the injury which it was inflicting upon him. Under the circumstances, he spoke to the editor of a certain publication, in which he wished to have the opportunity of defence. The editor acceded to his request, and recommended him, in the first instance, to set forth clearly and strongly the statements that were made against himself; and then come with a crushing and demolishing answer. "Do you sit down first," said the editor, "and write me an article defaming yourself, and embodying in it all that you want to reply to; and then, immediately after that is published, I will admit your full, complete, and defiant reply." "That's it," said Sheridan; and he sat down, and wrote his first letter, and that was published; but he never wrote the second—never! That is an illustration of Solomon's idea. A man may be roused to great activity to do a certain thing, but not following it up, it is of little or no benefit to him. He secures the animal, but does not dress it, and therefore does not derive that sustenance from it for which he professed to seek it.

The last three proverbs, which may be put together, comprise a general and comprehensive statement of the effect of high principle, or the want of it, upon the whole life and being of a man. These three proverbs are the twenty-first, the twenty-sixth, and the twenty-eighth verses. "There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief." "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them." "In the

149

way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death." We have had ideas like these more than once already in the course of these expositions, and therefore it is not necessary to dwell upon the proverbs before us. "The path of uprightness is the path of safety." "Who shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;" more excellent in himself, in his social relation, in his influence upon society, in the sight of God, and in all the sterling qualities that enter into character, and in that "righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death." That righteousness which I have again and again told you has its origin in religious principle, in the fear of God, and in a spiritual life, through God's mercy. The morality, the virtue of this book always being understood, and not merely secular virtue, but religious devotion to God, which is holiness; and in that righteousness, that path of purity, sanctity, goodness, faith, there is life. And a man, if he has that in him, has a deeper life than those that have it not—a spiritual, true, divine life, and a life that is but a prophecy, an anticipation of a higher and a nobler yet to come. "He that drinketh of this water shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "In the pathway thereof there is no death." There is no death to him; but there is death to his enemies, death to temptation, death to sin, death to evil, death to all that is out of harmony with him, and out of harmony with God. But to himself there is no death; no death to his hopes, his character, his reputation, his joy. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." "The path of the just, like the morning sun, shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Death itself is not death to him; it is but a pause, a momentary cessation; a doorway, a path which leads to higher and diviner joys. All other paths in which men may walk will terminate here, but the path of the

150

righteous is the way of life, the way everlasting, leading to God, and will make the traveller in it godlike for ever.

Young men, this is a path which may God grant that you choose, and be found following to the end. Give your hearts and your souls to God, and with all earnestness and sincerity walk according to all the great and manifold virtues of the book, and they will embellish and beautify your public and social character. But let this virtue be the offspring of religious faith—faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the blessed promises of a forgiving and sanctifying God. Amen.

XII.

GOOD AND EVIL.

“A wise son heareth his father’s instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke. A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence,” &c.—PROV. xiii. 1–7, 8.

LET me say, for the benefit of any strangers who may be present, that during the whole of this year I have been, on the evenings of the second and fourth Sundays of the month, just having a familiar talk with young men upon the Book of Proverbs, expounding to them the book as it comes in order, and presenting before them those views and thoughts on the science and proper regulations of life which this Book of Proverbs is adapted to suggest. To-night is the time for proceeding with our regular work. I shall just take a few verses, as many as time may permit, out of this chapter, and make two or three remarks upon each, having especial reference to young men; for I regard this Book of Proverbs as being particularly a young man’s book.

“A wise son heareth his father’s instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke.” We have frequently had sayings of this sort. The whole book, you know, is a kind of address from a father to his son—or age giving the benefit of its experience and observation to youth. That is the idea of the book. But when is it that young men who are new to life, and necessarily ignorant, are willing to take the benefit of the experience and observation of those who have gone before? The constitution of things, you know, in this world of ours, is so, that new beings sent into it, and finding

152

themselves here, are ignorant, and so are to be taught by those who have been here before them. They come into a mysterious and wondrous life without knowledge, and they are to be tended and trained by those who have got knowledge before them. The constitution of the child's mind is such that at first it looks up with perfect reverence and entire trust to the parental teaching. To a little child the mother and the father are an oracle, and it has the most entire dependence upon their wisdom and authority. It believes, and so it learns. After a time the wondrous and mysterious state in which it finds itself begins to take order and be understood. By and by, you know, the young have to be put under various tutors and teachers, who communicate that knowledge which cannot be given by the parent. The child must be placed under others for many things, the learning of a business or a profession, and such like. But with respect to practical life—the real science of living, if he has a wise, virtuous, and sagacious father, that father's teaching will always be something for him to venerate and love. And however he may have to go to other teachers—to this school or that college, to this tutor or to that professor, he can best learn from his father, if he is wise and virtuous, the great practical lessons of life;—he is his tutor in this matter, and if he is a wise son he will listen to that parental instruction. Just when a young man is rising up into the life of manhood, the most blessed thing that can happen to him is for the father to become his friend. But just then it too frequently happens that young men become conceited and self-willed, and imagine that they know things rather better than their fathers. They lose reverence, and they lose confidence; they don't give friendship, and they don't have it. They think, perhaps, that their fathers are quite "slow;" behind the age; not having thorough sympathy with them. Perhaps they complain of instruction as "lecturing" and "a bore," and they *turn away* their ears from the suggestions of that

153

wisdom, experience, and knowledge, which if they would listen to might put into their hands a clue to that which would lead them safely through life. Now mind, I don't want to say to you young men that the fault is always with you. The father whose instructions are to be listened to, must, of course, be able to give them; and he should be willing and careful to give them rightly and well. The father should become the friend. He should remember that there is a time when the authority of the parent is to be softened, and to cease, or to cease to be seen and pointedly felt, and that he is to mellow down into the friend of his son. The father must be wise, observant, sagacious, have something to say, and so say it that it shall at once appear to be wise and good. Such a father has a right to be heard because of what there is in him, and also because of the way in which he can bring it out. Blessed is the young man that has such a teacher; and it will be a happy thing for him if he will show his wisdom by giving ear to the instruction of that parent! But, on the other hand, nothing will be so sure a sign of want of wisdom and of certain ruin to a young man as to be one able to be described as a scorner that heareth not rebuke; one that despises parental authority and turneth away from parental wisdom, will not listen to reproof or rebuke, or receive guidance, though he may have great need of all.

“A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence.” This proverb may be taken and illustrated in two ways, according to the principle we have already laid down in reference to some other proverbs and sayings that have come under our notice. “The fruit of the mouth” may be understood as the bringing forth of that which is in a man; as we read in other scriptures, “the good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringing forth good things.” As the man is, he thinketh, and as he thinketh he speaketh. And the habitual conversation, the habitual outward mani-

154

festation of the inward life of a man by his speech and behaviour, is fruit, it is the product, the result, the outward manifestation of that inward growth of principle and wisdom which resideth in the soul. Ah, whether it be wise or foolish speech, it is not only *fruit* but *seed*. That which you young men speak in your conversation not only shows the depth and nature of your inward life, but it affects others. That which is fruit in relation to the source whence it cometh, is seed in relation to the mind on whom it falls and the seed may be good or bad, and it will take root in the heart on which it falls.

Now, of course, you must consider, in looking at the proverb, that the men are contrasted as to what they are, and what they do—"a man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth." He shall do this in two ways. The habitual manifestation outwardly of what he is shall bear fruit in its results, immediately to himself, as to reputation, influence, position, standing and success in life; and as seed entering into the hearts of others which shall become fruitful, and he will taste of it probably many a time as he passes through life. The wise and good man will often have instances coming before him in which he will find that words which he had uttered, sentiments "which he had brought forth, that rested upon and entered the hearts of others, have germinated and borne fruit. They will tell him, and he will rejoice in, the results of the blessed and happy influence that he has exerted upon others. Many a sagacious, wise, and good man has had individuals come to him and told him of some casual observation or remark which had been made perhaps twenty years ago, that was taken to heart, and became seed that produced fruit. The individual would say, perhaps, "I owe almost everything in life to those remarks, to that seed which dropped from your lips into my soul." And then to this is placed in contrast, the transgressor, the selfish, the mean, and the bad. "But the soul of the transgressors shall

155

eat violence.” The man without wisdom and without virtue will exert an evil influence, he will sow bad seed, which shall do him an injury even in the sowing, and then in after years many of the evil and baneful results shall come back upon himself, and thus he will be made to eat violence as a necessary result of his bad words and actions.

“He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.” Sentiments of this sort we have had already, and one of the difficulties in the exposition of a book like this, is the frequent recurrence of the same thoughts, though they may come with a difference. In this proverb, the wise man suggests the necessity of that self-government, which it is well for you all to cultivate, self-government with respect to keeping a watch over the tongue, a guard on the lips. “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.” The uttered word cannot be recalled; and many a man has suffered for some speech uttered when he was off his guard. Or if he was one who never had a guard on, a mere talking fool, like the man mentioned in the latter part of the verse, opening wide his lips, letting out constantly all he knows, and thus putting himself quite into the power of other people. How poor a thing is a man who has not a thorough calm, manly control and government of his tongue; and you know, the apostle thought so highly of the man who had this self-government, that he said such a man was a “perfect man,” and able to “bridle the whole body.” Very often a man has made his life, or a very great portion of it, thoroughly wretched by the unguardedness or impropriety of his speech. There are some men who would rather forfeit the friendship of a man than lose the pleasure of saying a smart thing about him when they have an opportunity. Ah, and such words burn into the heart and will be remembered, perhaps even to his destruction who uttered them. Many a time, too, when an indi-

156

vidual has been looking at a man, just to make up his mind whether he will employ him or have dealings with him, has heard some word and noticed the manner of his talk, hearkened to his mode of utterance, and it has been quite enough for him. He could determine instantly. He could not trust him. Very frequently the manner in which a man talks will indicate whether he is to be confided in and trusted. His speech will determine whether he sustains that character which is necessary to beget confidence in others, and for personal success. There are, indeed, men of great learning, men of principle and character, who give way to foolish, vapid, empty talk, and are perpetually degrading themselves and injuring their reputation. This want of a manly control of the tongue acts upon the whole character, like the dead fly in the ointment of the apothecary. "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour." Now, remember that, you may have much about you that is excellent, but if there be this one thing, it will be a perpetual source of calamity to yourselves and others. "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction."

"The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat" There is all the difference between wishing, and working. Some people are very diligent at first, but soon give up. It is a poor thing for a man, especially for a young man, to look abroad or to look upwards and to think of this thing and the other thing, this accomplishment and that achievement, and then to wish and desire, but do nothing else. It is but a poor thing to spend life in a sort of dream or reverie and wishing. There is very little to be got by wishing. Another man, whatever he may wish, he has no time to spend in indulgence, but he puts forth his hand to the work. He learns how the thing is to be done,

157

selects his instruments, takes hold of them, and does the work, and finds it true that "the soul of the diligent shall be made fat," while the soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing, for God has not attached anything to mere desire. In order to secure your wishes you must work. The soul of the diligent shall be satisfied; and that satisfaction shall not result merely from the end, the actual accomplishment, but in the effort itself which is used for its attainment. In fact, with respect to a great many things, the satisfaction of the soul is rather in the passage, in the pathway, in doing the thing, rather than simply in the accomplishment. That is the law under which we live, and applies to everything, to the boy at school, and to the youth at college; to all you medical students in your studies, and to others of you in your shops and warehouses. Now I would have every one of you remember that it is no use merely wishing, but that the best way to accomplish your desires is to work, and depend on nobody but yourselves for it. Self-help is the best sort of help; and if you will go on labouring diligently and continuously, you will get more and more accomplished for everything that lies before you. Every duty that lies at your hand waiting to be done, do it, and you will find that there is not only satisfaction in that, and in the thought that you are helping yourself, but you will find out that others regard you as essential to help them. Let this be the maxim of your life, that the soul of the diligent only shall be satisfied, and do anything that you have to do with all your soul, and you will gradually come to see that you are as essential and necessary as a wheel of the machine. A young man should study to be that; but when he has attained that position, he should not let it be seen that he knows it, yet he should *be* it for all that. The man who is fit for the world will consent to act in accordance with the laws which he finds surrounding him on all sides. That in order to *have* you must work, is a law whose voice is

158

uttered to men continually. Every day and every hour God in His providence is saying strongly, "pay the price for the thing, and have it, for it is not by desiring, not by mere wishing, but it is by the hand of diligence that the soul is to be satisfied." To start us off He has given us a great deal in a direct manner, but afterwards we find that providence sells everything, and if we would have it we must buy it, and it is a blessed thing to be so placed, that a price is exacted, and a great blessing is always awarded to the soul that pays it.

"A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame." I should like you to observe the very striking and beautiful contrast that there is in this proverb. To a righteous man lying is loathsome, but a wicked man is loathsome to himself. It is very striking to observe that. The pure, the upright, and God-fearing man—the sanctified and holy man, who through the sanctifying power of the Spirit, and the sprinkled blood of Jesus, has been made a partaker of the divine nature—through the divine instinct, and impulse of his new nature, he hates lying, whether in word or in act. The thing to him is loathsome. But the wicked man is himself a living liar, a hypocritical pretender, uttering untruth or doing untruth; and to God and all good men—to God who knows him, and to all good men when he is known by them—he is a loathsome object. Here, then, is something to be desired and coveted by you. To start in life praying earnestly for God to give you all true and needful uprightness, that you may be an incarnate truth, that all your life may be true, and that you may hate all untruth, and never come to be that hollow hypocrite, that untrue thing, that living lie which every wicked man necessarily is, and loathsome to God and man.

"Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner." Now, I should like you to observe the contrast here. It is

159

not comparison: it is not that one is better than the other. It is not that one is stronger than the other; it is not that the one can defend and preserve where the other cannot; but is a direct *contrast* between them—the object of the one is to keep, and of the other to destroy. Righteousness preserves, defends, and surrounds a man, and in everything will be a protection; but wickedness not only does not defend, does not protect, but will positively weaken and destroy. The one would be life, strength, and protection to a man; but the other, whatever it may profess, whatever it may promise in order to seduce men to sin,—its intention would be to overcome and destroy them. That is the very striking way in which the thing is brought before our minds. Here we see the contrast between those who take part with God or the devil, with the flesh or the spirit, with light or with darkness, with good or with evil, with divine and religious fear, or with profane unbelief. Righteousness will preserve; wickedness will destroy.

“There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.” I think this proverb is intended powerfully to expose the conduct of certain persons in the world—as the scripture saith, “Every man walketh in a vain show;” but some men very emphatically do so. There are men that are rich who pretend to be poor, and who act meanly according to that pretence; and there are men that are poor, put on appearances and make professions directly the contrary. Now, I think, that by the statement of the fact here you are to consider that the wise man not only states the fact, as a piece of information, but means to condemn it, and both are to be condemned. I don’t see that a rich man has a right, as a part of society, to make himself out to be poor, and to act according to that profession. I don’t think it is fair social justice; it is not true social and political morality; and you all know that the other is not fair and just. Now, if all rich men in the world

160

were to pretend to be poor, and to live accordingly, what a complete violation there would be of all that is intended to give action and vivacity to society. Riches and property bring duties, and duties responsibilities; and I think it is just as much the duty of the rich man to spend, as it is the duty of the poor man to work and get his bread by labour. I don't see that we can ever have anything like communism—that there ever can be a literal division of property. I don't see that society can ever come to settle down into villages, or small towns, or parallelograms, or anything of that sort, and have all things in common. The only really practical communism that I can think of is, that every one shall feel that the portion of property which is his, is held by him in trust, and that it is to be employed for the benefit of all. If one rich man have a right to make himself appear poor, and to regulate the scale of expenditure according to that profession of poverty, another rich man would have a right to do it, and all rich men would have a right to do it. And I should like to know, if all the men who have the property of the world in their hands were just to act as if they had none, what would become of those who have to labour to get a portion of their property; and which they have a right to. The rich have a right to employ the poor, and are bound to do so because they can afford it; and that is the only communism, I am afraid, which the world will ever see. As I said before, I don't myself see, according to the present constitution of things, that there can be an equality among men in the matter of property—share and share alike; but if we can't do this, we can all share with one another in a just and equitable manner.

With respect to the other class—"There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing." Such a man may for a long time be a practical liar and a thief, imposing upon people, and exacting that confidence which he does not deserve, but by and by his hollowness is seen through, and he foils. The true rule is for every

man to appear what he is, and be regarded by society as a true man, and estimated at what he is really worth.

I shall not advance except barely to notice the next proverb, "The ransom of a man's life are his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke." I suppose that the meaning of this proverb is, that in some states of society, and in some countries, as you know, it has been very dangerous to be rich, or to have the reputation of being rich. You know that in our own land, at one time, the Jew was habitually persecuted and oppressed by those in authority, and "the ransom of his life was his riches." The state of society is such in some ages and places that a man because he is rich or has the reputation of having riches is brought by the hand of power, under some pretence or no pretence, into such a position, that he can only ransom his life by his wealth. The state or the tyrant will have his wealth or take his life, therefore he will gain the ransom. But the poor remain unmolested. There is some advantage in poverty after all. It frequently happened in some countries and under such states of society, when the rich man could only secure his life by forfeiting his wealth, that the poor man having nothing to be deprived of was left in peace and safety—suffering no "rebuke." I suppose that this is the idea in the proverb.

Let me, in conclusion, just lead you to reflect upon the fact, that all conditions of society, all positions in which individuals can be placed, may be looked at in two aspects. There is a great system of compensation pervading all things. Talent and wealth, and reputation and popularity in the state, or in literature, or in anything else, have their conditions; and many shrewd and wise lookers-on often bless themselves that they are not oppressed with the conditions of great men's positions. Not only have wealth, station, rank, genius, reputation, and the like, their duties and their responsibility, but they have certain severe conditions to ful-

162

fil if they are to keep their standing, which other men know nothing of, and which completely compensates them for the loss of those things which at the distance may seem very desirable, and which the multitude ignorantly admire.

I must not detain you any longer, but just let me say that the principle of which we have been speaking in reference to worldly matters, will apply to spiritual things, as well as things that are temporal "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Knock, and it shall be opened unto you; seek, and ye shall find. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. The path to life is marked out by the word and Spirit of God, and you are invited, nay, urged, to walk therein. But mark, you are not to get to heaven by wishing! you cannot lay hold upon eternity by any indolent desire. God acts uniformly in all things upon settled law, and the law is pressed upon you at all sides. In temporal matters you must work to acquire, and this law applies in spiritual matters also. Why, the patriarchs, and they who through faith and patience and wrestling are now inheriting the promises, did not arrive in glory without effort; but by patience and continuation in well-doing they have reached a state of glory, honour, and immortality. Remember, that the gospel of mercy is now presented to you as a precious gift from God, but you are not to receive it without effort. You must pray earnestly and constantly for the grace and strength of Christ, and for the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, in order that you may become a true and persevering disciple, and be enabled to lay hold upon eternal life.

May God grant His blessing for the Lord's sake.

XIII.

THE FOOL'S BIBLE.

“The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. Only by pride cometh contention: but with tho well-advised is wisdom. Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase,” &c.—PROV. xiii. 9–16.

“THE light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.” Light, you know, is a figure. It is employed very frequently to set forth knowledge, joy, prosperity, happiness, and character; it does not, of course, mean the same thing in every place. We need not take it in any very extensive sense in such a case as this, but as applying to the character of a righteous man, his habitual state of mind and feeling. Everything about him is light. His character is upright and luminous. And in this light he shall rejoice, for it shall continue, it shall be permanent; it shall be a thing in which he shall have the happy consciousness that it will never fail him. “But the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.” The path of the just is as the morning light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The really virtuous and righteous man will generally have a character. And the best way to have a reputation is to deserve it. The best way if you would be thought a good man, is just to be in reality everything that you would be thought. Falsehood, pretension, mere hollowness and outside, won't do in the long run. You cannot live by a lie. You cannot go on long so; for depend upon it that in time every one of you will come

164

to have just what you deserve. The righteous man, the man who is really, internally, what he proposes to be, will generally be understood and taken at his proper worth. He will sometimes be under a cloud: he will be misrepresented and misunderstood, but all the time he will have an internal consciousness of his own rectitude, and in time will be understood by others; and his goodness will place him in a worthy position in the midst of society who has been benefited by him. "But the lamp of the wicked shall be put out;" the little reputation that he had acquired will gradually be diminished, and at last come to an end. You go and seek him but cannot find him, he is gone, his lamp is gone out; perhaps he is not only lost to society, but perhaps he is dead. Now, see the difference between the good and bad—"the righteous hath hope in his death;" but "the wicked is driven away in his wickedness," his lamp is put out!

"Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well-advised is wisdom." It does not mean to say that contention, private misunderstandings, private feuds and animosities, and social disturbances, are always produced by pride—and that nothing but pride will produce any one of these. But it means to say, that very generally pride is at the bottom of most of the contentions between man and man, and between families and neighbourhoods. Misunderstandings have arisen from pride somewhere. The apostle, you know, tells us we are not to "think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think." But to be proud in any way is to do this. Men are not told that they ought not to think well of themselves if they are worthy of it; but they are told not to think too highly, more highly than they ought. But even this implies that they may think—I do not say highly, but properly—of themselves. You have a right, of course, to think truth about yourself, as about other people or other things. There is a proper self-respect, a proper self-estimation, which is not only not wrong but necessary

165

to success in life, and will have a great deal to do in preserving the character virtuous. But the proud man will always be expecting more from others than they will be willing to give, and more than he ought to expect. He will be always standing on his rights, but will never be willing to give to others what he claims from them. He will be apt to take offence at everything, and will not make apologies or take excuses, and all his demands upon them about him will be the most unreasonable; and thus with this excessive self-estimation you may be sure contentions will come. "But with the well-advised is wisdom;" the man who can wisely advise himself, the man who can consider wisely and rightly, will not be easy to take offence. Why, there are some things that are better not seen: many things that are better not remembered; and the well-advised man knowing this, will remember that other people have hearts and feelings as well as himself, and so he will be careful to look at a thing which may have given offence; and thus such a man will show his wisdom, and will often not only prevent strifes and contentions, but also not unfrequently very readily end them.

"Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase." These words are capable of being put in another form, but I prefer taking them as they stand. It may be understood to mean that you may have substance which has been rightly gotten, without any taint in it at all. But that unless this substance is looked after; if it is not carefully thought about, if it is just let alone, the man will find that most mysteriously it seems to get less and less, until it comes to nothing. Whereas another man who has far less, but who makes a point of seeing after it himself, by his own personal superintendence, by his own care and skill, will not only keep what he has got, but will often greatly increase it. But we may look at the words in another sense. "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but

166

he that gathereth by labour shall increase." Now, "vanity" sometimes means sin, and probably means that here: sin in the form of injustice or fraud—wealth gotten thus shall be diminished. Or, if you like, vanity may be taken in another sense, not quite so strong as to mean fraud or injustice—but gotten without giving a fair equivalent for it. A great many people don't seem to understand that money is to be bought. They understand that money will bring money and will bring many things; now, it is equally true that there must be something to bring the money. Now, observe, you will generally find that the same law will mostly hold in relation to the purchasers on the one side or the other. If you buy a thing too cheap, don't give money enough for it, you will generally find that you do not value it at its proper worth. You will not regard the intrinsic value of the thing, but that which you gave for it. You will say, "Oh, never mind, it only cost me so and so." Now, that is not the right way to deal with property. It is a universal law, from which there are but few exceptions, that if you give but little for a thing, it is worth but little to you. And if you give nothing, it is generally worth nothing. But even if the thing has the full worth in itself, if you get it for little or nothing, it will not be estimated by you at its proper worth, and not very much above what you gave for it. Now, it is the very same with respect to buying money—for you can buy money too cheap, by vanity, if not by fraud or injustice. If money be not fairly earned, if full value be not given for it, the same number of sovereigns which you got cheaply will not represent that which the same amount would secure by labour, or which they would to another man who had fairly earned them, and thus they would be more valuable to the one than to the other. The man who has earned it, how differently he views it from the one who has got it without labour! How differently he watches over it! How differently he estimates it! Depend upon it, this is a great law.

167

As to wealth that is got by injustice, by fraud; why, you know very often, where the fraud has been so palpable and gross as to be taken notice of by the law, the offender has lost both wealth and liberty together. But if a man has acquired great substance by little peculations continually made, or by oppression to tradespeople, or those in his employ, not giving fair wages, or by overreaching, why, he may perhaps get on for a while, or perhaps through life, and leave his wealth to his heirs, but it will not make itself permanent. A curse seems to come along with it, and in the main it does nobody any good to whom it comes—that is very often the case. You may depend upon it that this is a law which very frequently operates in the cases of persons who make a great deal of money by vanity, who are paid most inordinately every night for merely ministering to amusement. Receiving as much, perhaps, for one night's amusement as would keep a family for a year. These persons, as a general rule, never make themselves wealthy. Some do, but many do not—what they realise in this way they spend thoughtlessly—earned by vanity, it is spent in folly. I am not saying that there is not a great deal of talent, power, and labour expended in the production of this amusement, but I say that which is received is not fully earned, and the consequence is generally bad. So it will be found that a great many writers for mere amusement—the men who write “light literature”—if they are not earnest men who have a purpose in their productions beyond mere amusement—however much they may get by the production of their genius, they will not keep it. There are some exceptions perhaps to this; but, depend upon it, it is far better for a young man to go forth into the world, and to look out for the work that God has given him to do, and to say, “Well, now I will live in the world and in society, and be regulated by all the great general laws by which society is governed, and not by the exceptions to these laws.” Better not get a fortune than have it come by chance, or by making a wonder-

168

ful "hit." It were better that nobody takes a fancy to you and takes you into business if you don't deserve it. It is better not to leave anything to luck or to mere chance. There are, certainly, sometimes wonderful concurrences of circumstances to favour men in their designs, and to help them on. But your wisdom is to act as if there were no such things. Don't expect them: don't look for them. You cannot live upon the expectations, and these happy chances may never come to you—live by the law, and then you can take advantage of the chance, or accident, or luck, as it may come. But remember the manly and right way is to set to work in accordance with the great laws of the universe, seeking and expecting the blessing of God upon all that you do. There is a chapter of accidents, I admit, but that's not the whole book, and no man ought to make the chapter stand for the whole book. The chapter of accidents is the Bible of the fool.

"Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life." This, you know, is one of those proverbs which has come into our familiar every-day language. There is often a great many of these proverbs, when you come to read through the book, that are perfectly new—you don't recollect them; but this one, being so true an expression of human feelings, has become as familiar as a household word. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." Learn from it, then, two things—learn not to indulge expectations without good foundation. Don't lean upon hopes, the fulfilment of which depend upon other people. Be very sure that your expectations from others are rational and well-founded; for if you do otherwise you will often have to experience a sickness of heart, and it may be a sickness even unto death. Another thing for you to learn is—to be careful how you give others reason to indulge expectations and hopes from you. If you promise much, you will often be unable to perform; you will be for a long season exciting hopes, which, after a sad and disappointing

169

expectation, are never to be realised; or if ever the help promised do arrive, it may be a day too late. It very often has been so in the affairs of life. "But when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life." When it is a proper desire and cometh according to expectation, it is like a tree of life, whose branches give shade, and whose fruit gives sustenance to the soul. Ah, my dear young men, there is also a hope which belongs to another and an eternal life. The Scriptures represent Jesus Christ as our hope: it is also said, "we are saved by hope:" God is a God of hope: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefined, and that fadeth not away." "A hope full of glory:" "a hope that shall not make ashamed:" "a hope that purifies the heart:" "he that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as Christ is pure:" "the hope of the hypocrite shall be taken away:" "the righteous hath hope in his death." Remember that the hopes which the gospel calls forth will never be disappointed, and they will surpass all anticipation—they will never make the heart sick: but the realisation will be such as "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

"Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded." You have had that idea in other forms again and again, and therefore we will not dwell upon it. The "word," and the "commandment," in this text, of course means the revealed will of God—duty; all that men were made for. He that despiseth that—treats it with contempt, and ridicule, and scoffs at it—"shall be destroyed." It cannot be otherwise; such will be the certain result of the working out of a natural law. "But he that feareth the commandment

170

shall be rewarded." He will not merely get the reward at last, like a boy at school who gets the prize; but he shall get the reward for his obedience, in the blessedness that shall result from the obedience, itself.

"The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." That is the law which is laid down by the wise, serious, and judicious man, as he teaches, counsels, and advises; explaining the word and will of God—revealing the young man to himself, and giving him the result of the observation and experience of the aged; setting before him the truth of the Bible: marking out for him by his instruction and by his teaching the path he should go. Such teaching as this is a fountain of life to a man, if it is properly appreciated and followed—he "shall depart from the snares of death;" from temptation, from sin, from the machinations, traps, and gins by which the devil would lay hold upon our souls and lead them into a terrible bondage. Ah, there is a vast deal of teaching that is quite the opposite of that of which I have just been speaking. We hear a great deal in the present day about the press being the great teacher. We often hear about "the priesthood of letters;" "the ministry of literature;" "the press the grand teacher;" "the press superseding the pulpit," and so on. I wish we who occupy the pulpit could perform our work better; I wish we could make the pulpit what it ought to be; I wish we could make it the great source of light, and impulse, and influence, and power: and whenever it is a power at all, it is a power for good; its utterances, however blundering, and however theologically absurd—as many of its utterances are—they have always an influence on the side of goodness: they have all a tendency towards purity and sanctity, and the elevation of the race. The pulpit, I admit, is not the mighty power that it was once, when it was the grand source of instruction—when the men who occupied the pulpit were almost the only depositories of knowledge; when there were no books, no literature.

171

Of course, at that age the pulpit could exert a far mightier power than it can do in the present, when we are flooded with the productions of the press; when its voice is comparatively silenced with the everlasting hubbub of the diffusion of all sorts of books, large and small, which occupy the mind of the people. I admit all this, and acknowledge that "the priesthood of letters" exerts a wonderful power. I don't wish to speak disrespectfully of books; for I am a maker of books myself, I belong to the "priesthood" of which so much boast is made. But I do wish that we could say the same by the press as we have said by the pulpit, that it is always on the side of virtue and goodness. I wish I could say that all our authors and teachers by the press, and all the books that you young men read, were all on the right side. It would be a blessed thing if they all warned you to escape the snares of death! Much of that literature which one cannot pronounce to be grossly and palpably bad, is nevertheless very far from being "the law of the wise," and "a fountain of life," but contains within itself "the snares of death;" so that instead of being a teacher of wisdom and a friend of virtue, it is the very evil itself from which "the law of the wise" would warn you to flee: while the press is a great power, it is not always exerted on the side of goodness, and is therefore very often lamentably pernicious in its effects.

"Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard." That may be taken in its obvious sense, as applying to virtue, goodness, and religion; and then it will mean that the good man, on account of his goodness, will obtain favour from God and man. "But the way of transgressors is hard;" sin will be sure to And him out, and then he must suffer the punishment due to his offences. This text may admit of a different application; it may refer to the minor morals of life; it would then mean that a man "of good understanding" would conciliate favour; while

172

the “transgressor,” the foolish, selfish, rash man, would repel men, and excite their hostility. Now, there is a great truth in this. There are many rude men, whose manners and tone are habitually harsh, yet who get on in spite of that, but not because of it, but they are continually producing in the mind a feeling of aversion; they are continually saying that which irritates and annoys, and which is felt longer perhaps than they imagine. If they are told of giving offence, they are surprised; they did not mean to give offence. They did not think of it; no, truly, but they did not study *not* to give offence. It is not enough for a man’s manners to be such, and then turn round and say, I did not for a moment think of doing that; for we should say to him, But you did not think the contrary. You ought so to regulate your speech and manner as to be sure *not* to give offence. Seek to conciliate favour. Do you believe that courtesy is a Christian virtue? the Scriptures teach Christians to “be courteous:” “let each esteem others better than himself:” “look not every man upon his own things, but every man also upon the things of others.” The man of a good understanding will take care to avoid everything that would grate on the feelings and sensibilities of others—he will regard the minor morals of society as well as the greater, and will so act as to conciliate favour; while the other man will always be doing and saying that which is offence, and will thus bring down upon himself the dislike and aversion of those with whom he is associated.

“Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly.” I think the meaning of this is that every prudent man acts with consideration and with judgment—knows what he is about; but the fool by his rashness, thoughtlessness, and presumption, just lays open his folly. A prudent man acteth, in all weighty affairs especially, with knowledge and *consideration*: he actually understands what he is about, and he will not talk about that which he has not con-

173

sidered and weighed. He will not give advice and counsel where he is not in possession of the facts. Neither will he enter into any business or enterprise of which he knows nothing. He will not be led away by people, to do that of which he is in utter ignorance—he is not to be caught so. But the fool will talk upon anything: he will give advice about everything and everybody. He will place himself under responsibilities, enter into engagements, perhaps enter into a business of which he knows nothing, and then wonders that he turns out unfortunate! And perhaps he has involved others in his “misfortune,” as he calls it! Why, the fact is, the man had been laying himself open to others all along—everybody saw what he was doing; and supposed what would be the end, although he did not; he was laying open his folly and revealing to every man what he was. Now, you know how true all this is. And you remember that the Great Master himself cautioned us from acting in such a manner, and told us to count the cost of everything that we undertook. All wise men will do so; while the fool will rush blindly on and lay open his folly to the gaze of all men

The Saviour applied His remarks to those who were about to make a religious profession. Before they undertook the obligations which a profession of religion would involve. He said to them, if you would follow me you must have certain qualifications. I want genuine, earnest men. I want men who can put their hands to the plough, and will not look back. I want men who will count the cost. Well, but you remember, young men, we can apply that another way. You will recollect that *sin* has its costs as well as *religion*. The devil exacts a price as well as God! But God exacts the price first, and the devil afterwards! God says I will have the price now! “If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me.” Pay the price now, and you shall have the enjoyment afterwards, and for ever. The devil says, I will give

¹⁷⁴

you everything now, take it and enjoy it—"rejoice, O young man, in thy youth;" take your fill of joy! Ah, but remember you will have to pay afterwards—the price will be exacted by and by, the self-denial and suffering will come afterwards. God requires that our whole moral and spiritual nature, and all our affections, should be yielded up to Him, and then He has promised us all those blessings for ever, for which God created and Christ redeemed us. But He will have no forced love. On the other hand, we may refuse to serve God; indulge in sin here; and be wholly deprived of all happiness hereafter. This is the difference between the service of God and the service of the devil.

May God grant His blessing to these few remarks.

XIV.

GOOD AND BAD PRINCIPLES.

“A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health. Poverty and shame shall he to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured. The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repaid. A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just. Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment. He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes. The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want.”—Prov. xiii. 17–25.

“A WICKED messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.” Well, now, this proverb was of great importance, and had a larger significance, at a time and among a people when writing was not so common as it is with us. Where much was to be done by spoken messages, and by individuals employed to convey information or to transact business by word of mouth, a wicked messenger could do much mischief. If a man has not a sound heart, nor a wise and cautious head, and especially if he has not uprightness, why, he will be liable to be tampered with: he may be bought; he has his price: his power and influence may be purchased; and he may thus be got to act upon the side of those by whom he is not sent. It may mean that the messenger who is dilatory and careless will exert a baneful and per-

176

nicious influence upon those who send him. "But the faithful messenger is health." He is a source of confidence and tranquillity to those who employ him. The man is known, his character and principles are understood, and those whom he represents feel themselves in perfect security: they know that they can confide in him. Whereas the wicked messenger, the unfaithful messenger, whatever his plausibility, there will always be things observable to induce suspicion, and very frequently things will come out to cause annoyance and irritations, and perhaps something worse. But the faithful messenger giveth health and confidence. That which is to be done will be accomplished with a strict regard to the interests of those who send him. He will be health both to them and to himself.

This may have many applications. It may apply to you young lads when you are sent upon an errand or message. Such lads may apply this proverb to themselves. They should remember that their time is not their own, and therefore is not to be wasted and employed according to their own fancy. There should be promptness and quickness in the fulfilment of any duty intrusted to them. They should be health to themselves and also to those who begin to put confidence in them, and whose minds will be strengthened towards them in proportion as they see the confidence is deserved. It is thus that young men are brought into respectable firms of business: they have been noticed, because of their uprightness men have put confidence in them. Society lives by faith. Men may talk about faith as they please. They may smile at the religious man when he speaks of faith; but all business is transacted by faith. Confidence in those that we employ; we put faith in them; repose confidence in those who represent us. What faith is there in just taking a piece of paper which you have written your secret thoughts upon, and folded up, and dropping it into the hands of strangers to be delivered to

177

the person to whom it is addressed. It has to go from hand to hand, and we have faith it will go all right. We are all, I say, living by faith. Hence the importance of you young men understanding that there are those who will in a special manner have to put faith in you. Seek, then, to show yourselves worthy of it.

Of course it is very easy to see how this applies to those who represent different nations; those who are the representatives of sovereigns and governments in distant countries. What an illustration we had of this very recently, when complaint was made of the Pope of Rome in reference to his conduct towards England, in establishing a Catholic hierarchy—why, said he, I showed the plan to Lord Minto—he was informed of my intentions and he made no objection. Now although Lord Minto, when he went to Rome, was not fully and really the representative of this country, yet he was constructively so. Hence you see the importance of those who are employed by the sovereign of a nation being faithful representatives, and jealous of the interests that are committed to them. According to Lord Beaumont—a Roman Catholic peer—a deed has been done which will divide and injure us; and it will be very difficult for Catholic gentlemen to reconcile conflicting claims: sometimes it will be difficult for them to decide whether to obey the sovereign of their country or the sovereign of their souls. Well, now, in all this you will see that it is very unwise to appoint men as ambassadors to other governments who do not truly represent the country, for it is cruel to put men in such positions that there may be these conflicting claims; for we know that human nature is weak; and the highest Authority has taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

“Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.” You have had this substantially before. You know that the young come into a world of which

178

they know nothing, and have therefore to learn much from others: they are to be taught: they are to be told things. Young men must receive a great deal on authority; they must look to those who are wiser than themselves, and thus be instructed in that which they ought to do, and be told when they do wrong either through ignorance or culpability. "He that refuseth instruction," won't be taught, mocks at instructions, won't be reprov'd; why, he will very soon come to be weighed and measured by society, and be reduced to his proper level. This will apply to a boy at school, or to a young man in business with another. If he will not learn, will not be instructed, his ignorance and inability will soon be seen, and in the long run will be read and understood. When he is weighed he will be found wanting, and society cannot afford to be trifled with. If you cannot do the thing that is required somebody else must, there are many waiting to be employed, and thus he that refuseth reproof and instruction shall come to poverty and shame, but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.

"The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil." There is a sense, you know, in which every sort of desire being gratified brings satisfaction. When desire meets with its object, the result is sweetness and gratification. But the proverb is not to be understood so. You must consider that there is a contrast between one part of the proverb and the other part,—there is a contrast between the characters represented. You must consider therefore that the "desire" here spoken of means the hunger of the soul, the appetites of the inner man. Humanity has a deep-seated hunger which knows no rest, and can only be permanently satisfied when it has found its proper object in the way of goodness and the fear of God, uprightness, self-acquaintance, all that makes a man upright and religious. This desire, this deep longing which there is in *humanity* for the rest of its whole nature being accom-

179

plished, is very sweet and satisfying, though it may have been arrived at by a very painful process. But the wicked, the fool, although as a human being he has a deep longing after something satisfying to his nature, yet he will not adopt those means which can bring him what he desires. It is an abomination for him to depart from sin, and hence he is tied and bound by the chain of his sins: he has entered into the slavery of his senses. He refuses that which would bring him into harmony with God, and so he is never satisfied. The fulfilment of his desires very often bring anything but sweetness and joy to his soul; and if he will not break from his sins, he must take the consequences.

“He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.” There are two ways in which a man’s associates, especially a young man’s associations are of importance to him. In the first place, a man’s habitual associates influence himself—operate upon his opinions and thoughts, and bring him into a likeness with them. In the second place, society judges of a man by his associates. Show me the habitual companion of such a one, and I will tell you what he is. Society is a very common-sense thing. Sagacious, long-headed, long-sighted men, looking through and through you, will judge of you by your associates. “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.” The fact is, if he does not, the wise will not long have him for a companion: they will not hear him, and it will be difficult for him to hear them. It is a most painful thing for a man without knowledge, without intelligence, without information, to be perpetually mingling with persons who are possessed of these qualifications—intelligent, well-informed men, lovers of books, lovers of science, lovers of the highest knowledge, lovers of all those principles, and all those views, which form the man of thought, and whose conversation will be regulated by that which is within them. Why, if a man has nothing in him; if he cannot answer a question, if he

180

cannot take a share in the conversation, if he knows nothing about what these people are habitually conversing about, why, he will very soon be glad to get away, and keep out of their society. But if he keeps with them he must become like them; listening daily to wise words, he will become wiser and wiser. "But the companion of fools," the silly, the sensual, the empty headed, and empty hearted, will generally go together—he "will be destroyed." The companion of fools, sinners, will generally sink into such a state as not to have a shred of character left; nobody will put confidence in them; and thus their own vice shall destroy them. The course of the profligate is generally very short—they rarely live over forty years, "The sinner shall not live out half his days." The papers which are published every morning in this country, and in the great metropolis especially, contain, accounts that verify this proverb; and most of you know that instances are perpetually occurring which show that the companions of fools shall be destroyed. Their worldly prospects will be ruined, and their eternal happiness prevented.

"Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repaid." That is true in the most general sense. "Be sure your sin will find you out." But it is not in that sense, I think, the wise man meant it. I think it is meant to have a very distinct and philosophic sense in this way; that the evil which the sinner shall do to another, the particular wrong which he would inflict shall be felt by himself: as it is sometimes said: "He that diggeth a pit for his neighbour shall fall into it himself." Or, as the psalmist says: "His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." Or if that is not the case, if he so sets his nets and toils so as to secure his prey, if he triumphs, why, "the triumph of the wicked shall be short." There is a terrible vengeance following on what he has done. God has so ordered things that his sin will pursue him

181

perhaps for years: and at length something will occur, which however mysterious it may be to others, will be no mystery to the man himself. He will see clearly enough the connexion between what has occurred, and a particular deed of wickedness of which he was once guilty. "But while evil pursueth sinners, to the righteous good shall be repaid." The good which he has done to others, the beneficial influence which he has exerted, the benefit that he has conferred, shall be felt by himself, as the result of the natural laws by which God governs the world. Those who have been benefited by their unselfish actions and healthful words "shall rise up and call them blessed." We hear much often about ingratitude, the worthlessness of those who have received favours; yet there are many bright and blessed instances to the contrary; but, however men forget, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love, in that ye ministered to the saints, and do minister." We have many representations in the sacred Scriptures how works of benevolence, done by the righteous with a sincere and earnest love to God, ascend before the throne of God, and will be remembered on their behalf.

"A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." Of course, this must be taken with a limitation. It does not intend to express a universal fact, but to indicate a general law. It may perhaps be considered as expressing merely what was very generally thought at a certain period under the Jewish dispensation, that outward prosperity was a particular sign of individual virtue—an outward proof of the favour of God. But even with respect to the really good it was not always so. You remember that Asaph was much perplexed when he observed the prosperity of the wicked, and he made it the subject of devout and earnest inquiry, and when he went into the sanctuary of God he got light thrown upon

182

the subject by comparing the present with the future. But I take the proverb rather as referring to a general law independently of the Jewish or any other dispensation—namely, that truth and uprightness, and that which is in harmony with God's laws; and if we work *that*, the produce will be something that will wear. I think that it means that a man cannot do anything that shall be permanent by falsehood. The laws of God are against him; while the true and upright man being in harmony with God's laws, he will realise a competency—good character, and reputation, with their results—so that he shall even get an "inheritance" to leave to his children, and their children after them. He shall leave an inheritance, something worth having; something that has not a curse in it, none of the tears that have been wrung out by oppression. Many an inheritance that has been got by what is wrong has in it that which eats into it like a drop of human blood: the inheritance cannot be left in perpetuity to the family, for it has a curse in it. It is built with untempered mortar, and away from the perpendicular. There are certain laws and principles by which a house must be built: in its construction, the rule, the square, and the plummet must be used; or it will fall. Now the man who has got an inheritance by truthfulness, integrity, and the fear of God, has built it securely. It is built square, it is built up on just principles and with mortar that is not untempered. It will stand; it will be worth having: his sons may inherit without any fear of its falling. "But the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." This is sometimes literally so—the sinner dies and is succeeded by one of a very different character. But you will very often find it otherwise, very often that which is got by wrong is squandered in profligacy. But it thus comes back into society, and honest labour gets some of it back again.

"Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment."

183

That is to say, he that has a small estate, and is a wise man, knows that he can only make much of it by being very careful of its cultivation. So he that has a very small capital, to make it worth anything, must be exceedingly careful and very judicious how he employs it: he must see to it himself. If you want to have a thing *done* send your servant; but if you want to have a thing done *well*, send yourself. He that has a small estate can dig and dig, he can go over it again and again, for his space is not very large; and he will find it far more productive than a much larger estate upon which much less labour has been expended. So with capital, well and carefully employed, a little will be more productive in the long run, than a large sum used differently. "But there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." That is to say, a great deal, a much larger estate, a much more extensive possession managed by hirelings, and without spirit and judgment, will be diminished. There is a lesson in this which you have been taught again and again.

"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Now, you know there is no doubt that Solomon meant the literal rod, real physical punishment. It affords us a figure of speech, nevertheless, of Divine providence when referring to the rod in the hand of God; in the chastisements and afflictions of His children. The apostle used it as a figure. Towards the latter part of the Epistle to the Hebrews there is the most beautiful little discourse upon chastisement that you will find anywhere, even in the Bible. There is the idea of God as a father and the idea of the Christian as a child, and the father chastising the child, in the afflictions of providence. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye be without chastisement, then ye are bastards and not sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Furthermore we have had

184

fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live." All this is figurative, but illustrative of a great fact in the economy of providence, and God's conduct in relation to His Church. But here, in the Proverbs, the literal rod is meant. Of late years, you know, there has been a great deal said about education, and many speculations put forth on the subject. Some people would do nothing but reason with their children. Certainly they would never use the rod; oh no! everything should be done by kindness, by love. The child must be reasoned with, and taught to understand things! But these good people forget that there are some things that children cannot understand except by the very quick logical demonstration of the rod. Do things by love! Why, the rod is love. I don't mean to say the positive physical punishment is to be carried far into youth, but I do mean to say that there is an age when it is the only argument a child can understand. I don't think that great boys, lads, ought to be flogged at school. I don't think that men ought to be flogged, even in the army. I think there are ways even with them—although many of them are ignorant and brutal—but still they are men, and the infliction of physical punishment makes them vile in the eyes of their fellow-men. But I do mean to say, in spite of all that has been said, that there is a certain period when it is literally true, "He that spareth his rod spoileth his son." Mind, it is "*his* rod," the father's! Not merely the rod in the hand of everybody, just any one beating the child! No; it is the hand that belongs to the father's heart; and his hand will be regulated by love—it is instinct with love. It is not the hand of mere authority lifted with the impulse of passion. "His rod!" the father's own heart receives a lash with every stroke that comes from his hand, and is felt far more severely by him than it is by the child. But he loves his child, and

185

therefore he desires to make him hate evil; and he flogs him because he is not old enough to be reasoned with. Or, if you like, you can look at the proverb figuratively, and then it will mean that the child is to be watched and instructed and disciplined in order that it may hate evil and follow after that which is good.

“The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want” This, perhaps, might be rendered, “The righteous shall have to eat to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want;” it will then be a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous may at least expect to have food and raiment, all that his nature and necessities require; but the wicked may come to want even that. But if you take the proverb as it stands, you cannot fail to perceive that it contains a very great truth. The righteous man, the wise, the virtuous, eats merely for the satisfying of his nature. He eats to live, but does not live to eat. He does not eat merely for the sake of gratifying his appetite: eating is not the business of life with him. He eats because it is necessary in order that he may have strength for labour, and thus fulfil the great idea of his existence. But the wicked make an end of that which is only a means, and thus make riot and luxury the business of his life. Of these characters the apostle speaks very strongly—“Whose god is their belly, and who mind earthly things.” Why, then, says the wise man, the righteous who eats to live shall live. God will bless him, and he shall have that which will satisfy his soul; but the lover of riot and luxury, who liveth simply to gratify the animal and sensual body, it shall come to pass, because he spends his wealth in this way and lives beyond his means—he shall come to want. He has lit the candle at both ends, and therefore it will not last long. His career of sensual pleasure will leave him in misery and want. “The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul; but the belly of the wicked shall want.”

XV.

THE CLOSING APPEAL.

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.”—Ps. cxix. 9.

“A WAY” you must have. You may be utterly reckless, heedless, careless; you may just live by chance and circumstance and impulse; you may do that, if you like, and then you will have a “way,” and the way will be made for you without any effort, but *the way will be bad*. To “take heed” to the way—to bring attention, care, thought, reflection, to bear upon the principles and the habits which you are forming—all this is requisite for the “cleansing” of your way, and the preservation of it from evil. And the reason of the importance of this question to *young* men is this—that habits of some kind or other they *must* form, that, if they do not “take heed” to their way, they will form *bad* habits, and that bad habits when once formed, are almost impossible to break, that they will become tyrants. Hence the representation of the Bible, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? also” (that is, as soon) “may ye do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” It is a divine representation of the force of habit, its power over a man when it has got hold of him. Now habits will be formed by you; and if you do not “take heed” to your way, those habits will be bad: and it is of importance that you should “take heed,” because it is of so much importance that those habits be good, and goodness and holiness have all the benefit of

187

habits, instead of having to go against them. What a blessedness it is, that a good habit is almost as difficult to throw off as a bad habit! So that here is either a great blessing or a great curse; if you give the power of habit to that which is bad, you give the devil that advantage that he has you almost secure, and he may leave you, and go to somebody else; but if you take the advantage of habit to yourself, by seeking from the first to “cleanse your way” according to God’s word, and to have all your habits on the side of what is just, pure, lovely, and of good report, there will be a power communicated by those very habits, so that you will find it difficult to do evil, as in the other case you would have found it difficult to do good.

Therefore let young men begin at once the formation of good habits, by “taking heed” to them according to the spirit and principles of God’s word. Habits of industry; despise self-indulgence, destructive to the character, dissipating to your little property, squandering your money, bringing you under the power of the flesh, sloth, the love of pleasure, and so on. Habits of temperance, self-denial, moral dignity. Habits of reflection and of thought. Habits of reading; not your light reading, always at your novels and your poems, eternally at what is light and luxurious; not that; be a man, and read what will strengthen and brace the mind—on the evidences of Christianity, on science, on morals, on what will improve the intellect with respect to the works and ways of God, and what will enlighten you with respect to the meaning of Scripture; study and read that. Cultivate habits of economy; habits of self-respect—be determined to have your own approbation and esteem; cultivate such habits, that you may by looking at them be not contemptible in your own eyes. Cultivate habits of respect towards others—veneration towards age; have respect to your parents, love to them, and love to your sisters and brothers

188

Habits of respect for the intellect and the character of your companions. And so let society, by looking at your habits and employments, and those that deal with you in your business, or have connexion with you in your profession, be able to say, "Now we know where we have that man, we know that man is to be depended upon, because he has principles and habits; if you tell us the circumstances in which that man will be placed, we can divine what he will do, because he has fixed principles and habits!" Young men should seek this; and if they regulate their conduct according to God's word, such *will* be the habits and the character they form, and by these they will possess a moral power under God for the resistance of evil.

Again, all young men, but *very* young men in particular, are ignorant—ignorant of human nature, of society, of what we call *the world*; ay, of *themselves*. They are inexperienced. Many of them want moral courage. Now they are placed in circumstances, where by the associations of business and of companionship they are necessarily brought into contact with men, whose minds are steeped and coloured by the world and sin; they have to listen to the sophistries of the infidel, or his scorn and his contempt; they have to bear the seductions of individuals, who, being a little older and having the tact and experience which they have got by their commerce with the world, will possess a considerable power over them; they will not be able to say, *No*—to resist; they will listen to sin, and, though they know that they are doing wrongs they will go on just for shame, because they do not like to stand out against the insinuations and the observations of others. It is of importance, therefore, that young men should have something upon which they can firmly rest, something which shall be to them in the place of knowledge and experience, in the place of *all that* would be requisite for them to stand upon *their guard*, and in their own defence, against the

189

sophistries or the reasonings of those that may attack their faith, or attempt to seduce their virtue. And the only thing is the authority of the word of God; the only thing is resting upon the great fixed principles of the law of God, and being able to say,—“There! I cannot answer your argument, but I cannot disobey God.” Let a young man just say that, when he is attacked by sophistry and attacked by temptation—“I cannot answer your argument, but I cannot disobey God; I must ‘take heed’ to my path, and cleanse my way according to the divine word, and by and by I may be able to see through that very argument, which I cannot now.” A young man, because of his peculiar dangers and inexperience, requires to have this pressed *upon* his attention. And he need not be ashamed of resting there—resting upon the fixed and stable principles of the word of God, and ruling and regulating his conduct by them.

This matter is very important to young men, because if the subject of religion and the formation of character be neglected in youth, all the chances are against them. Very dissolute men die young; almost all very dissolute young men die as young men. Dissolute men *may* live, *some* may reach middle or old age, but with dark blots upon their reputation, their conscience, their habits, and generally they remain in principle just what they were. Young men that may be moral and virtuous but without religion—if they go on from youth to middle age without it, the chances are that they will die without it; the mental habits get fixed—habits of attending to the things of the world, of regulating life not according to God’s word but according to the laws of honour, the morality of society, the principles of secular intercourse, and so on. There may be much that is amiable and excellent about these men, they may “cleanse their way” up to a certain point, and with respect to certain things; but the “way” of the conduct and the “way” of the affections are not cleansed by the sanctifying power of the word of God.

190

They go on, and get their habits fixed; and especially if they are successful in life, and make their fortune as worldly, moral, virtuous, but godless men, as godless men they will most likely die. And therefore we want the affections of the young *now*. And they, if they are wise—they, if they really are in earnest about heaven and salvation—they will feel that it is for them *as young* to give their affections and hearts instantly and devotedly to God.

Oh, how important, then, is this question to you, my young friends! How important it is, that you should know how to “cleanse your way by taking heed thereto according to God’s word!” What can a young man do? *Do!* he has immense power for evil and for good. He can ruin his health; he can debase his intellect; he can murder his conscience, he can deaden and destroy it; he can deteriorate his moral taste and his moral feelings: he can fill his mind with gross and debasing imagery, and his mouth with impurity and lust; he can become sensual and disgusting in his habits; he can lose the confidence of society; he can lose his situation; he can be cast off upon the world, as a thing that cannot be trusted; he can become contemptible; he can break his father’s heart, he can make anguish come down like a dark cloud, and press upon the brow of his mother, and upon the countenances of his sisters. A young man can do all this—to act so that his very friends shall never wish to hear his name, and shall only secretly in their hearts follow him with their anxieties and their prayers.

What can a young man do? *Do!* he can “cleanse his way according to God’s word.” He can seek to understand the Scriptures; to love the Saviour; to love God’s word; to save his soul alive. He can flee to the fountain of reconciliation; he can become a holy man; he can be a virtuous citizen; he may be the pride of his family; he can take his younger brothers, and lead them forward in life; he can extend the influence of a Christian pastor; he can be his right-hand

191

in efforts to do good; he can take an interest in all the great movements of the day; he may die a happy man, with his children and his grand-children around his bed; and pass from the dissolution of the tabernacle upon earth, to an inheritance on high. He can do all that; a young man can do it all.

This matter is a very plain and practical one, and I have treated it very practically. It is not, How shall a young man speculate, how shall he indulge his thought and fancies, how shall he form schemes for himself? no, it is hot that, but—How shall he “cleanse his way,” practically regulate his life? And the answer is, not that he is to read the word of God, to be interested in it, to reflect upon it, to make it a source of intellectual pleasure, luxury, excitement—no, but that he is to “take heed to his way according to this word.” Let him begin to meditate upon this law as the rule of the divine government, and he will see the necessity of that mediatorial and restorative process, which is brought to light in the Lord Jesus—“the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness.” Let him thus go on from time to time, putting away everything that he feels to be wrong, trying to conquer every bad habit and to regulate his conduct by God’s word, and he will be led to-rejoice in the sanctifying Spirit, that shall carry on this work. It is no use your pretending to desire the pardon of sin and reconciliation by the blood of Christ, if you do not put away every evil thing, and seek to “cleanse your way according to God’s word.” The two things must advance together—the putting away everything practically wrong, and the seeking after that truth which is according to God’s word.