

ART. IV.--The Scope and Plan of the Book of Ecclesiastes.
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IN order to the proper understanding of any treatise, it is necessary to gain clear and correct ideas of its scope and plan. There is no book of the Old Testament to which this remark applies with greater force than Ecclesiastes, and none in which the neglect of it has been and must be attended with more serious injury to its exposition. Its proverbial dress creates a special need of taking comprehensive views of the writer's main design, and not being diverted from this by cleaving too anxiously to the tenor of each individual expression. The ill success of too many attempted expositions has shown, that if the clue thus furnished to all its intricacies and windings be not discovered or be lost sight of, the book becomes a labyrinth, within whose mazes the improvident adventurer is hopelessly entangled; and each verse becomes to him a new passage leading to fresh perplexity, however honestly and assiduously he may labour upon its interpretation. The general truths inculcated by proverbs of course admit either of being taken in their widest extent, or of receiving an indefinite number of particular applications. Which of these expresses the precise intent of the writer, in each individual case, can never be learned from the inspection of single sentences by themselves, but only from a discovery of the place which it holds in the discussion of his theme. And an erroneous view of this theme or of the method of its discussion, will necessarily involve attaching meanings to passages very different from those which they were intended to bear.

Another difficulty connected with that just spoken of, and of a like nature, arises from the absence of particles in every case to indicate the connection or the relation of dependence which the various sentences or paragraphs sustain to each other. This is partly due to the venerable simplicity of the Hebrew language, in which such particles do not abound, and with which it agrees better to suggest relations by the juxtaposition of related ideas, than formally and precisely to state them. It is also partly due to the proverbial style already referred to, which charac-

teristically delights to state truths in the general and the absolute, leaving their limitations and specific relations to be gathered from the connection in which they are adduced.

The inattentive and superficial reader might infer from the peculiarities now stated, and which would be among the first to attract his attention, that this book was composed of loose and detached sentences, without orderly consecution or intimate coherence. This mistaken view was in fact taken by Grotius, who supposed that Ecclesiastes contained no proper discussion of anyone theme, but a miscellaneous collection of the varying opinions of different sages upon topics connected with human happiness. He thus explained those contradictions or diversities of judgment which he imagined to be found in the book; and likewise escaped the necessity of regarding any sentiment as authoritative or inspired which he was disinclined to accept. It is but a slight modification of this opinion of Grotius to regard the book as a record of the various opinions maintained in a learned assembly or society presided over by Solomon. Another view, which rises above this conception of a chaos of discordant materials, and yet assumes the existence of conflicting sentiments in the book, endeavours to reconcile these into a common unity by the hypothesis of a dialogue between two voices, one that of an earnest but rash inquirer, the other his sage and experienced teacher, who endeavours to curb the hasty impatience and inconsiderate views of the former, and to inculcate upon him the lessons of sobriety and heavenly wisdom. But the harmony of the sentiments here maintained can be vindicated without the necessity of this theory, which finds no support from any intimations in the text itself. The same may be said of the opinion which supposes instead of different speakers, different states of mind in the same speaker; who begins the discussion in a tumult of doubt between conflicting views, and speaks now under the influence of one, now of another, as they respectively obtrude themselves upon him, until at the close of the whole he ultimately reaches clear and settled convictions.

Among those who admit a single theme consistently discussed, there is still a divergence as to what that theme is, arising principally from an undue predominance being given to

some one part of the book or class of passages in it, instead of each being held in its just subordination and relations. Some have paid too exclusive attention to what is said of the vanity of earthly pursuits. So Jerome, and after him the commentators of the middle ages, generally made of it an argument for the renunciation of the world and a life of monasticism. So in modern times Umbreit thought it to be a treatise on the chief good, which the author tinged with scepticism and gloom endeavours to show is unattainable. Others, looking solely at such passages as declare that it is good for a man: to eat and to drink and to enjoy life, have charged the author with Epicurean sentiments, as though worldly pleasure were in his esteem the highest form of good, and what men should chiefly strive after. This view, and that first stated are directly antagonistic and mutually destructive. The author cannot teach both that earthly pleasure is vanity and that it is the chief good. The book will be involved in endless complication and self-contradiction upon either of these views. The only way to harmonize it is to suffer one class of statements to modify and assist in explaining the other. To him whose heart is inordinately set on earthly things, and who fancies that by accumulating what ever affords gratification, he can fill and satisfy his' soul, every thing will prove vanity as regards this impracticable end which he is seeking; for his desires invariably outrun his acquisitions his feverish toil is incompatible with serene enjoyment; their continued possession in the future is uncertain and their loss" at death inevitable. Still, he who knows how to use the world, who contentedly and thankfully receives the good things which God gives him, and without immoderate desires partakes of them rationally and in obedience to the will of God, will find in them much real satisfaction. This life has a positive value; which should not be overlooked; and it is a lesson of no small consequence, how it may be rendered most peaceful and happy. The enjoyment of life, which this book commends, is as far as possible from a 'Wild and senseless revelry, which it denominates insane and profitless, ii. 1, 2; it is an enjoyment which is connected with doing good, iii. 12, and is indulged with a constant recollection of the judgment of God, xi. 9. Piety holds the key to the chamber of happiness. There is no entrance but by

her aid. He who would really extract from the world such enjoyment as it is capable of affording, can only do so by obedience to her injunctions. Otherwise, be a man's possessions what they may, they will end in vanity and emptiness. This is the aspect under which the happiness of men in the present life is here presented, and if this is Epicurean, the whole Bible is so too.

Others have given too exclusive prominence to such passages as i. 4-11, iii. 1-15, vii. 13, 14, ix. 11, in which the fixed and permanent order of things in the universe is insisted upon, and the regulation of everything is referred to the will of God; and they have hence drawn the conclusion that the book contains fatalistic sentiments, teaching the doctrine of an undeviating, inexorable fate, which leaves no room for human freedom, and allows no man to obtain profit from his labour. This fate it is vain to think of resisting; man must just submit and get whatever good his present circumstances put within his reach. But this is as much as the preceding a distortion of what is here taught. It is indeed asserted that man is not the uncontrolled arbiter of his own fortune; not, however, because he is a creature of fate, but because he is a subject of the Wise and righteous government of God. The doctrine is not that of fate, but of Providence: and this, too, is intimately connected with the theme here discussed. As we look upon the world, everything seems to be moving at random, or to be directed by man's free will.' Men act as they please, and the allotments distributed to each bear no manifest relation their respective characters. There is much that, superficially viewed, has the appearance of disordered confusion. But that this is the real state of the case is here emphatically denied. The assertion is made and the proof given, that instead of confusion the most perfect and beautiful order prevails. Whether men see his hand or not, God is guiding and directing all; and everything is, as respects HIS consummate plan, Just as It should be. He has dissociated sin and happiness; and no man can alter that arrangement so as to bring together what have been thus divinely separated. He who seeks for happiness in ways of worldliness and sin, seeks for what" by the very constitution of the universe, cannot be.

Too great prominence has again been sometimes given to such passages as iii. 17, v. 8, xi. 9, xii, 7, 14, and on the basis of these the future state and the coming judgment have been made the grand lesson here inculcated, as though it were the intention of the writer to turn the thoughts of his readers from, the seeming inequalities of this world to; the world to come, where all shall be rectified or explained. The error in this view is simply that of limiting the discussion within too narrow a range. The future judgment is explicitly asserted, and is one of the elements in the proper presentation of the subject. But this is not the sole view that is here' taken, nor the sole answer which is returned to the perplexing problem of human life. It is most unaccountable how some writers have been able so utterly to misconceive the teachings of this book as to deny to its author any confident persuasion of the immortality of the soul, or anything more than a hesitating admission of its possibility. In basing this opinion upon iii. 19-21 and ix. 4-6, they not, only interpret these passages incorrectly even altering, the text for this purpose, as will be seen hereafter, but bring them into irreconcilable conflict, with such passages as those referred to above; a difficulty from which Knobel endeavours to escape by a German critic's ready weapon, the denial of the genuineness of xii. 9~14.

Attention has sometimes been directed to too great an extent to we seemingly miscellaneous character of the proverbs, in such passages as iv. 5, 6, 9-13, v. 1-7, vii. 1-9, 21, 22, x. 1-xi. 6, and the conclusion has hence been drawn that the design of the book. is to give rules for the conduct of life, and to teach wisdom in general. This goes to the extreme of extending the theme too widely, as the preceding to that of unduly restricting it. Its aim becomes thus too vague and indefinite, and the main drift of the discussion is lost sight of. The writer does not spread his thoughts over the whole range of, human action or the proprieties of life; but he has one definite subject before him, to which a proper treatment of the book will show that all his remarks are directed, and that with a closeness of argument and a clearness of presentation worthy of the wise king of Israel.

The problem really discussed is the seeming inequalities of

divine providence. These are here reconciled with the justice of God, as they are in the book of Job reconciled with his mercy and goodness. In other words, while Job had especially to do with the sufferings of the pious, Ecclesiastes contemplates the same subject chiefly from the side of the prosperity of the wicked. The difficulty to be explained is thus stated by the writer, vii. 15, "There is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness." And viii. 14, "There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous." This apparent anomaly is shown not to be inconsistent with the righteousness of God's government. The position taken and established is, viii. 12, 13, "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him; but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." The solution which is furnished is twofold:--1. A proper estimate of men's fortunes and of their characters will show these inequalities to be much fewer than they appear to be. 2. There is a righteous government to rectify whatever inequalities may temporarily exist.

It is most interesting to observe the harmony of the grand lessons inculcated by Job and by Ecclesiastes. No two books could well be more unlike in their style and method of discussion. The problem upon which they are engaged is one of the most perplexing of human life. They approach it, too, from quarters the most diverse. And yet the principles which underlie their solutions are identical: The book of Job reconciles the sufferings of the pious by saying, (a) Their afflictions though a seeming evil are a real good. (b) The perfections of God are an ample security for the rectitude and goodness of his dispensations. Ecclesiastes says of the prosperity of the wicked, (a) It yields no real good, but vanity and vexation of spirit. (b) The justice of God secures that all is and shall be right under his holy government.

That the main design of this book has been correctly stated,

shall be shown hereafter in detail. Before proceeding to this, however, it may be readily established in a general way by the testimony of the author himself. This is in the first place given in a formal manner at the close of the book, xii. 13, 14, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man," i. e., the whole of his duty and destiny, his entire welfare, all that concerns him is centered here and depends on this single thing. "For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." In other words, man's true welfare is only to be secured by fearing God and obeying his will; for in spite of any present appearances to the contrary, every good deed, open or secret, shall be divinely rewarded, and every evil deed divinely punished. This is given by the author as the final result of the experience, observations, and reasonings recorded in his book. And this is precisely what has been already represented to be its aim.

A second mode in which the writer declares himself as to this point, is by certain forms of statement which recur again and again from the beginning to the close. We cannot be mistaken in deducing from these the topic which is ever in his thoughts, and to whose illustration his whole argument is directed. There are two series of these statements; one of which contains the negative, and the other the positive view of his subject. Their combination will give a just conception of his idea. The first consists of those in which it is repeatedly declared of all those accumulations and sources of gratification which men so eagerly covet, and after which they so unceasingly toil, that they are vanity and pursuit of wind, (Eng. ver., vexation of spirit,) They are no real good, but constantly disappoint their possessors of the satisfaction which they had hoped by this means to obtain. The second series consists of those, in which it is declared that there is nothing better for a man than to, eat and to drink, and to enjoy the fruit of his labour; and this is the gift of God to them that please him. That this is not an Epicurean sentiment, has been already seen. The eating and drinking which Solomon commends, is not the gratification of sensual appetite. To eat and to drink, by a common figure in all languages, denotes to partake of what may be either pleasurable or painful. Comp.

Ps. xxxiv. 8, xxxvi. 8; Heb. vi. 4, 5; Job xxi. 20; Matt. xx. 23. Here the connection determines it to refer to what is pleasurable. In ii. 24, iii. 13, v. 18, "to eat and to drink" is explained by the parallel phrase, "to enjoy good," and in iii. 22, "to rejoice," stands as its equivalent. In ii. 25, "Who can eat more than I" certainly does not mean who is a greater glutton, but who has more sources of gratification at his command? And in v.19, vi. 2, to eat riches, wealth, and honour, can only mean to enjoy them. The meaning of this class of passages then is, that enjoyment, pleasure, happiness is a greater good than all these vain acquisitions which are attended with so little satisfaction. And enjoyment is God's gift to them that are pleasing in his sight. We thus reach once more the theme before propounded. Outward prosperity may be in possession of the wicked; but this is empty and unsubstantial. It does not necessarily confer happiness. This is only for the good. The scope of the book being thus settled, we proceed to consider its plan. It is of course conceivable that the writer might discuss his theme without any orderly arrangement or methodical disposition of parts. He might merely give expression to his reflections upon it as they spontaneously occurred to him or were suggested by accidental association, without aiming to govern himself by any strict logical sequence. Some have maintained that this is the case with the book of Ecclesiastes. It is so with another book of Solomon's, the Proverbs. It is to some extent the case with other books of the Old Testament as well as with admired productions of uninspired genius. And it would cast no reflection upon the ability or excellence of this book to admit the same thing here.

Others have been of the opinion that the writer had a general plan in his mind, which he followed in the main, yet not so strictly but that he has indulged upon occasion in considerable digressions. Others have thought that there was a plan originally, but it has been obscured by negligent transcription and derangement of the text; and attempts have been made by transpositions and re-arrangement to restore it to its supposed original form and thus bring to light its proper plan; but the results have been as unsatisfactory as the procedure was unauthorized and the premises groundless. We must take the text

as we find it, which there is no reason to believe has been corrupted. The deficiency of arrangement which has been alleged, does not exist; and the alterations which have been proposed are not improvements. There is a clear and consistent plan in the book of Ecclesiastes, which needs no changes nor mutilations in order to its discovery; one in fact of the most strictly logical and methodical kind. Not only is the argument we conducted, conclusive and complete, but its various points are so admirably; disposed, its divisions so regular and its different parts so conformed in structure, as to give evidence, that the whole was carefully considered and well digested before it was put together. This differs' perhaps from; the prevailing opinion; but we are convinced; that , they who complain, of a want of method, *haerent in cortice*.

It would be tedious and confusing to enumerate in; all their details the various divisions proposed by different commentators. Very many of them, however diverse in their minor subdivisions, will be found to rest ultimately upon the same essential scheme, the division of the book into two parts or grand leading sections. These are sometimes made unequal by assigning four chapters to the first and eight to the second; at other times equal, so that each contains six, chapters; The principle assumed as the basis of the division is in either" case the same, that the first contains the theoretical and the second the practical portion of the subject; the first establishes the vanity of earthly things, and the second the duties and obligations which this involves, and how man should demean himself in this vain world. There is so far a foundation for these schemes, that the tone of the book does become more hortatory and practical as it approaches its close; but the line of separation between its doctrine and exhortation is not so sharply defined as to render such a division between them practicable, as is shown in fact by the divided sentiment of those who undertake it. Hitzig's division into three parts of four chapters each, appears to be a lame attempt to mediate between the views already recited.

The most satisfactory division is, in our judgment, that into four parts, which was proposed by Vaihinger in the, "*Studien und Kritiken*," for 1848, and has since been adopted by Keil and others. It is a modification of that of Ewald, (whom *Heilig-*

stedt follows,) which is itself an improvement upon that of J Koster, all of whom assume the same number of sections. "His scheme is the following, viz.

I. i. 2-ii. 26.

II. iii. 1-v. 20.

III. vi. 1-viii. 15.

IV. viii. 16-xii. 14.

It has a sanction of an external kind, inasmuch as it seems to be indicated by the writer himself, winding up each part by a formal statement of the conclusion of his argument, which in the first three is given in almost identical terms. This is the more worthy of note, as Solomon has indicated the divisions "of his Song in a precisely similar way by the recurrence of a refrain. Its full justification depends upon its being shown that it is coincident with the actual course of the discussion, and that every part, without forcing or the assumption of arbitrary senses, fits into the scheme thus presented. Vaihinger was prevented from exhibiting this in a satisfactory manner by his predilection for strophes of equal length, into which he fancied the whole to be in the most precise manner subdivided. This encumbered his view and rendered it too artificial; while his too zealous pursuit of a merely mechanical regularity led him to lose sight of the proper divisions of the thought and of that regular structure which actually does exist. Each section contains, in addition to a brief conclusion, three subdivisions, not counted off into precisely the same number of verses, but with entire freedom as to length, and arising out of the nature of the subject discussed. Of the four principal sections the first and second are preliminary, the third contains the main body of the argument, and the fourth is supplementary.

The first and second sections/are intended to pave the way for the discussion proper, by presenting facts and reasonings, upon which the considerations alleged for the settlement of the question at issue are then based. The first section, chaps. i. and ii., contains a preliminary argument from Solomon's own experience, designed to show that happiness is not in man's own power; that all his striving and toiling, though it may surround him with every source of gratification his heart can desire, is powerless to give that gratification itself. After

announcing, i. 1, the author, he proceeds to state his theme, i. 2, 3, the vanity of men's toil and acquisitions; they cannot yield the happiness so confidently expected from them. To the illustration of this theme he now proceeds. He first, i. 4-11, lays down the postulate essential to the validity of any general deductions from an individual experience of the uniformity of sequences in the world, where the same phenomena are constantly repeating themselves. The earth, with its established laws, abides through every shifting generation. The sun, the wind, the rivers in their constant motions, maintain their uniformity. The same is true, ver. 8, of every thing; one would never have done' telling, seeing, hearing the numberless examples of like purport. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be. There is nothing new. Things will happen in all time to come just as they have done in the past; though there is too little disposition to remember and profit by the lessons of experience.

Having thus established the universality and permanence of uniform sequences in the world, he proceeds to state his own experience with its results. The same results must, from the principle just laid down, follow. in every like case; whence he is warranted in drawing from these premises the universal conclusion at which he is aiming. His experience is given first in general, i. 12-18, and then with more detail, ii. 1-11. The general account of it is rendered more emphatic by its repetition in precisely the same form, vs.12-15, vs. 16-18. He describes first his favourable situation for trying a satisfactory experiment, ver. 12, ver. 16, he was a king, and superior to all former dwellers in Jerusalem; the experiment itself, vs. 13, 14 a, ver. 17 a, he tested everything, whether wise or foolish; the result, vs. 14 b, 15, vs.17 b, 18, it was all empty and unsatisfactory. There was in everything he attempted something crooked that could not be made straight, or deficient that could not be rendered complete. There was always something to render the unalloyed happiness that he sought, unattainable; and that something could not be got rid of, for it arose from a vice inherent in earthly things. He then goes on, ii. 1-11, to specify more particularly some of the methods in which he sought happiness but failed to find it; merriment, conviviality,

splendid buildings, fine grounds, retinues, wealth, music. In fine, he surrounded himself with everything his heart desired; and yet surveying it all while still in the secure possession of it, he found it emptiness and vanity. It did not yield him happiness.

In addition to the unsatisfactory nature of these things in themselves, the brevity of their possession, and the uncertainty of what shall become of that which has been accumulated with iso much pains and toil, are alleged, ii.12-23, as fresh reasons for disappointment and vexation. Solomon had tried his experiment under circumstances as favourable as any man could have, ver. 12, and yet he found that whatever might be the intrinsic superiority of wisdom over folly, it could not preserve from death, which would consign him to oblivion, vs. 13-17, and hand over all his acquisitions, so painfully accumulated, to no one knows whom, vs. 18-23. And yet, for such a good as this, so unsatisfactory, so fleeting, and so precarious, men will toil and make themselves miserable all their days.

The conclusion from this experience of his own is drawn, vs. 24-26. Translated as it is in the .common version, ver. 24 yields a good sense, and is conformed to iii. 12, 13, 22, v. 18, viii. 15. The meaning would be, that enjoyment or happiness is a better thing than all these unsatisfying accumulations which have been described, and which men toil so to obtain. The precise form of the conclusion in the original Hebrew is, however, slightly different. The word rendered "better," is not properly in the comparative degree. It should be read, "Good is not in man (i. .e. within his power or control) that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour." Man has not the ability in himself to extract enjoyment from his acquisitions. The ability to enjoy, which is quite distinct' from the possession of things to be enjoyed, is the gift of God. Solomon's experience is conclusive upon this point; for no man could go beyond what he did. As enjoyment is the gift of God, he assigns it only to the good; but to the wicked he gives the empty and vexatious toil of accumulating what shall afterwards be converted to the uses of the good.

This point thus proved from Solomon's personal experience is in the second section, chaps. iii.-v., proved again from current

facts of observation. He here passes from what he had himself done and felt to what he had seen. The structure of the argument is precisely the same as before. ..There is first a postulate essential to its validity, iii. 1-15, then the facts observed, iii. 16-iv. 16, then reasonings upon them, v. 1-17, and finally the conclusion, v. 18-20. The uniform sequences of the first postulate are in the second, to meet the exigencies of this new argument, traced to their source in the all-embracing and admirable plan of God. He has a scheme in which every event, and all the multifarious actions of men, with the time of their occurrence, are definitely arranged. This scheme is, ver. 11, a beautiful one, though from their prevailing worldliness men do not comprehend it. (So the English version. It is probable, however, that this verse ought to be translated, "He hath set eternity in their heart, because no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end;" i. e., He gives men an idea of the vastness and eternity of his plan from their very incapacity to comprehend the whole of it.) Human welfare consisting, ver. 12, in happiness and goodness is, ver. 13, constituted the gift of God by this, ver. 14, permanent' and unalterable plan, whose aim is to lead to piety, and which, v. 15, embraces within itself that uniformity of sequence before insisted on.

He next proceeds to allege various facts, of constant occurrence in the world, upon which his argument is to be constructed. The first is, ill. 16, unrighteousness in halls of justice. It is so grievous an anomaly, that tribunals which are looked to for the rectifying of abuses existing elsewhere, should themselves originate injustice from which there appears to be no appeal; and this seems to be so serious an exception to his grand doctrine, that justice rules in the world and happiness attends right-doing, that he pauses to give its explanation before adducing the other facts which he has to allege. His postulate ensures, ver. 17, that this seeming inequality shall be rectified by God's future judgment, though meanwhile its existence is temporarily permitted, vs. 18-21, to prove men and to exhibit to them their frailty; for, however they may tyrannize over each other, death shall level them with the brutes. And yet how few consider their immortal nature, in which their real eminency lies? The

conclusion previously drawn is valid, therefore, even in this case, ver. 22, happiness, which requires no crime in order to its attainment, is better than the gains of the unjust judge, which he can no longer enjoy (בְּרֵאשִׁית) after death.

We are certainly not disposed to yield to those who would alter the text of iii. 21, so as to change its assertion of man's immortality into an expression of doubt, "Who knoweth whether the spirit of man goeth upward, etc.," for the mere sake of making the writer contradict himself, and express a sentiment unworthy of his inspiration.

The remaining facts alleged are, iv. 1-3, oppressions so grievous as to make life a burden; vs. 4-6, the envy attendant upon success, which is an argument not for idleness but for moderation; vs. 7-12, the selfish toil of the solitary, unmindful of the advantages to be derived from society; vs. 13-16, the temporary nature of the most brilliant rewards of wisdom, illustrated by the case of one who raised himself by wise conduct from poverty to a throne, and yet who, after all, formed one in the endless procession of mankind unremembered and unpraised.

In proceeding to reason upon the facts now stated, he first, v. 1-7, utters a caution against being seduced to irreligion, to a neglect of religious duty, or to inconsiderate language reflecting upon God's providence by such contemplations. In regard to the case of oppression, which was the first that had been alleged, he appeals, ver. 8, to the fact that there is always a tribunal higher than those by whom it is perpetrated, to which appeal may be made, and ultimately, as the highest of all, there is the tribunal of God. Ver. 9 continues the same thought, and should be rendered, "Moreover a profit to the land in all is a king served by the field," (i. e., land. Comp., field of Zoan, Ps. lxx. 12, 43.) Good government by a supreme officer, to whom respect and obedience are yielded, is a great blessing to a country. It is a source of the rectification of abuses such as those described. These wrongs, which are acknowledged to exist, find redress therefore in a superior government, human or divine.

In respect to the other cases alleged, considerations are adduced, vs. 10-17, freshly confirming the truth to which they point, of the unsatisfying nature of human toil and accumu-

lations. The first is, ver. 10, to the insatiable, character of human desire, which always outruns acquisition, however great that may be. The second, ver. 11, that wealth is consumed by others more than by its owners.. The third, ver. 12, that it occasions disquiet of mind. The fourth, vs. 13-16, that its possession is uncertain and brief. Its owner may lose it by "evil travail," "by some unfortunate enterprise. He will certainly be stripped of the whole at death, and leave the world as naked as he entered it. And yet for so empty a good as this he will, ver. 17, spend all his days in painful and distressing toil.

The conclusion is, vs. 18-20, that not riches but enjoyment is the thing to be desired. The capacity to enjoy is independent of, and additional to worldly accumulations, and is the gift of God. He to whom God gives it, shall not distress himself with frequent recollections of past sorrows, or anxious solicitude for the future. The condition of this gift has been stated before, ii. 26, and is not here repeated. Men may be striving after it all their days and never attain it, if they do riot seek it in that way in which, according to his uniform plan, he chooses to bestow it. Happiness and goodness are by him linked together. And only they who possess the latter can gain the former.

Having settled this preliminary point, both by his own experience and observation, he is now prepared in the third section, vi. 1, viii. 15, to grapple with the main question. He has shown, but without stating as yet to what he means to apply it, that enjoyment is preferable to worldly accumulations, that it does not necessarily result from them, but is the gift of God, and its bestowment is regulated by his grand and beautiful plan. The next step, and this constitutes the central portion of the whole book, is to apply this to the explanation of the inequalities of divine providence. Three considerations are adduced as furnishing the solution of this perplexing problem, so that we have, as in the preceding sections, three divisions and a conclusion. The inequalities in question may be explained,

1. vi. I-vii. 15, by a just estimate of men's outward fortunes.
2. vii. 16-29, by a just estimate of their characters.
3. viii. 1-14, by a reference to government, human and divine, which will sooner or later distribute evenhanded justice.

In relation to the fortunes of men it is shown, chap. vi., that prosperity may not be a good. For a man may have, wealth and honour and everything he wishes, and yet never have any enjoyment of them. The same is true of other forms of outward good, numerous children and long life, which even putting the case in the most extravagant and exaggerated form, may yield no pleasure. Human desires are insatiable. The advantage of the wise over the fool is, that he knows that the sight of the eyes is better than the wandering of the desire; he contents himself with what he has in actual possession, instead of allowing his desires to rove unsatisfied after unattained good. This incapacity of worldly things to yield enjoyment is, ver. 10, permanent and unalterable fact, because resting upon the ordinance of God. As man is mere man, he cannot contend with nor set aside that connection between earthly things and dissatisfaction which the Almighty has established. Hence, vs. 11, 12, if external prosperity in so many cases only increases what is empty and unsatisfying, what real good or intrinsic advantage is there in it? In point of fact, no man knows in his ignorance of the future, whether outward prosperity will be an actual good to him or not.

Having thus presented one side of the subject, that prosperity is not always nor necessarily a good, he goes on, vii. 1-14, to state the converse, that adversity or affliction is not necessarily an evil, but may be, and often is, a greater good than prosperity itself. This is expressed by bringing together a number of proverbs, showing, vs. 1-4, that scenes of sadness, and, vs. 5, 6, what may occasion present pain, may prove more salutary in their effect than festivity and mirth. Ver. 7, "Oppression maketh a wise man mad;" the opportunity or the habit of oppressing others will turn the head of the best of men. Such elevation so abused will be no advantage, but the most serious spiritual injury. "And a gift, i. e. one received as a bribe by a person exercising judicial functions, "destroyeth the heart," blinds or corrupts the understanding. It is better, vs. 8, 9, to wait the issue of God's dispensations than impatiently to fret and find fault with them, or, ver. 10, to contrast the real or imaginary discomforts of the present with the pleasures of the past, as though a condition less agreeable were therefore worse.

This is not a wise view of the case, for, vs. 11, (marg.) 12, there is something better than outward good, and which may be furthered by affliction. Besides, vs; 13, 14, affliction is the appointment of God, which man cannot alter; and it and prosperity are distributed in the manner that they are "to the end that man should find nothing after him," that he may not anticipate the future, but may be kept in a state of constant dependence and trust in God for whatever lies beyond the present; which would not be so much the case if there were some evident rules for the distribution of good and evil. Whence it is, ver. 15, that men often seem in the divine allotments to be treated irrespective of their characters, the just man perishing in his righteousness, and the wicked prolonging his life in his wickedness. This, then, is the first consideration adduced for the settlement of this difficult enigma. The perishing of the one may not be in reality the evil that it is supposed to be, nor the prolongation of the life of the other the good that it is imagined. So that while their fortunes, viewed externally, appear to be in contrast with their characters, if we but penetrate beneath the surface the opposition will disappear.

The second. consideration is drawn, vii. 16-29, from the character of men. Those whom we suppose to be suffering unjustly, may not be so good as we think they are. Conformity to the preceding might lead us to expect a converse to this argument also, but it does not admit of one. When bad men prosper, it is not because they are inwardly better than they outwardly appear. There is, ver. 16, an excess of seeming righteousness, or of what passes for it in the estimate of its possessor and of others, which will as surely and as justly be visited with destruction as, ver. 17, the opposite extreme of wickedness. That the caution, not to be "righteous overmuch," cannot mean that there is danger of possessing too much real piety, is apparent not only from the absurdity of such a sentiment in itself, its opposition to other passages in this book where piety is inculcated without any such limit, and the incongruity of such an utterance from an inspired writer; but also, from ver. 18, where the fear of God is declared to be an effectual preservative against this extreme, as well as its opposite. What precise form of religious excess Solomon had in his mind, it

may not be easy to determine, as he does not more precisely define it. It may have been purposely left indefinite, with the view of covering all such pseudo-religious manifestations, as Pharisaical ostentation, sanctimoniousness and self-righteous conceit, censoriousness of others, multiplied acts of uncommanded will-worship, &c. Wisdom will, ver. 19, be a surer protection against all such errors and excesses than ten valiant captains with their armies would be to a city.

Besides the fact already stated, that much which passes under the guise of piety is not really such, but is as punishable as grosser acts of sin; It 18 added, vs. 20-22, that none are faultless in deed and word, as every man's heart must assure him with regard to himself; and, vs. 23-29, notwithstanding the original uprightness of man's nature, the truly virtuous and good are as one in a thousand. Whether the abandoned woman, ver. 26, is spoken of with the view of instancing a particular sin of great enormity, or whether she is, as some suppose, the personification of folly or sin in general, ensnaring men by its meretricious charms, the sense of the entire passage is not affected.

A right application of the considerations already urged will doubtless remove a large proportion of the apparent inequalities of providence. Those which still remain are provided for by the third consideration, viii. 1-14, of the existence of a righteous government. After bestowing, ver. 1, a passing commendation on the wisdom which can solve such perplexing enigmas as this, and can dissipate the gloom which they occasion, he proceeds, vs. 2-5, to refer to the righteous a wards of human government. The obligation of obedience to its authority is attended with a divine sanction. Persistence in evil provokes its penalties, good conduct escapes them. The doctrine is precisely that of Rom. xiii. 1-5. It is not that human governments are never unjust and oppressive; the contrary is admitted and provided for, ver. 9. But the administration of justice is the design for which they are ordained of God and instituted amongst men; this is the professed end of those who conduct them; and in spite of every perversion this is to a considerable degree really accomplished.

From human government, considered as rectifying disorders,

he passes in the last clause of ver. 5, to God's supreme control, employing language similar to that used, iii. 1, of the same subject, only adding to his previous announcement that God has a time for everything in his admirable plan, the fact which is of equal consequence here, that he has "judgment" likewise. Everything is harmoniously disposed precisely at the right time, and all is equitably administered upon principles of justice. The meaning of ver. 6 is obscured by an improper rendering of its particles. Instead of "because. . . therefore," it should read "for . . . for." God's harmonious and equitable administration is not productive of misery to men. But the greatness of human misery, man's utter ignorance of the future, his inability to resist the assaults of death or to escape from peril by his wickedness, are so many proofs that the sovereign control of all things is vested not in his hands, but in those of God, whose sway must be well-ordered and just. Rulers inflicting injury upon their subjects, ver. 9; the wicked honoured (with burial,) ver. 10; the righteous maltreated, (lit. they who have done right must go from the holy place and be forgotten. in the city,) and such delays of justice, ver. 11, as encourage men in their transgression, do not prevent but that, vs. 12, 13, the most exact justice shall be meted out to all. This shall be the case notwithstanding the apparent contrariety of the fact, ver. 14, that the fate of the wicked sometimes seems to befall the just, and vice versa. The enigma is now solved, as far at least as a solution is practicable. The considerations adduced embrace all that can be offered in its explanation. The section is accordingly brought to a close, ver. 15, by the standing formula which these reasonings have served freshly to confirm, that enjoyment is the best thing which earth affords. That serene enjoyment which is the portion only of the good, is to be preferred above all those accumulations which the wicked may possess, and which men are tempted to do wickedly in order to obtain.

The fourth section, viii. 16-xii. 14, is, as has been before said, supplementary to the preceding. It does not re-open the argument, which is not finished, but is occupied with the removal of discouragements and the enforcing of practical lessons. We have, as in former cases, three divisions and a conclusion. The

remaining mystery of this subject need be no obstacle to human joy, viii. 16-ix. 9, nor to the most strenuous activity, ix..10-xi. 6, while in both their joy and their activity men should be mindful of death and judgment, xi. 7 -xii. 8. The conclusion follows, xii. 9-14.

After all that can be said toward their explanation, there are yet, viii. 17, insolvable mysteries in divine providence. No one can tell, ix.1, by God's treatment of particular individuals, whether they are objects of his love or hatred, ver. 2, the good and the bad appear to fare alike, vs. 3-6, the existence of sin and death involve the most perplexing mysteries. But this, vs. 7-9, should prevent no one from enjoying life with a constant sense of the divine favour.

Nor is it any obstacle to the most energetic action, ver. 10, but the reverse. When it is said that "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest," it is manifest that this is no denial of a future state of intelligent activity, any more than, vs. 5, 6, where the meaning is more fully explained by saying that the dead "have no more , a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun," i. e., in this world. Men should labour with their might. It is true, vs. 11, 12, that the results attained do not always correspond with what might be expected from the means employed. And yet on the whole and .as a general rule, ix..13-x. 20, wisdom is advantageous and folly is ruinous. And, xi. 1-6, this general certainty, even though no positive assurance of a successful result can be attained in each individual case, is a sufficient warrant and incitement to vigorous exertion.

The advantages of wise action are first illustrated, ix. 13-16, by the case of a city delivered by a poor wise man from the siege of a powerful king. The same thought is then exhibited in a series of apothegms to the close of chap. x. This passage, it will be perceived; is directed to precisely the same point with the entire book of Proverbs. And it is observable to what an extent the style of the two books is here identical, possessing the same terse brevity and the same lack of connection between the individual sentences, while all conspire to teach the same general truth. The attempt to force a more intimate connection upon this passage than the writer designed or than its nature

will allow, has resulted in the strangest misinterpretations. Thus because rulers are referred to, vs. 4-7, and again, vs. 16, 17, and ver. 20, it has been quite common for interpreters to insist upon explaining all the intermediate verses in reference to the same subject. So vs. 8-10 are made to teach the evils resulting from premature or ill-concerted attempts to throw off the yoke of bad government; and ver. 18, the injury arising to the edifice of the state from negligent rulers, whose revels and avarice are supposed to be described, ver. 19. Upon the wretched government, under which it is thus (with the help of viii. 2-5, perverted to precisely its opposite sense, and ver. 17 being pronounced spurious, as inconsistent with the context) made out that the author must have lived, is based the conclusion that this could not have been written by Solomon. Our answer to which is, that the argumentation has about as much connection with the text as Geier's notion that the times spoken of, iii. 2-8, are the seven periods of the church militant.

The propriety and even necessity of acting upon a general presumption, without demanding particular certainties, is variously illustrated, xi. 1-6. Even where there seems so little antecedent likelihood of return as in casting bread upon the waters, it should be done in the hope of finding it after many days. The possibility of some time needing their assistance, is a reason for making friends everywhere by benevolent action. When the clouds are full, they empty themselves upon the earth, it may be sometimes uselessly on the rock or on barren land, yet on the whole the benefit is immense. So a tree may fall this way or that, on one man's land or another's, but it will be likely in any case to do somebody good. If a man were to insist on certainties, or even on having always the most favourable conditions prior to his acting, he would never do anything. "He that observeth the wind, shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." As, therefore, we neither understand God's natural, nor his providential operations, the only proper course is to be diligent in right action; some of it will succeed, even if all does not.

After placing death and the coming judgment before its readers as a solemn fact which should never be lost sight of amid their pleasures, and which should influence all their con-

duct, the book is brought to a formal close. The conclusion of the entire discussion is stated to be: Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole welfare of man; for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

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