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COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY ON
ECCLESIASTES

by Adam Clarke.

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without
which no man shall see the Lord” Heb 12:14*

Spreading Scriptural Holiness to the World

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A COMMENTARY AND CRITICAL NOTES

ON THE

HOLY BIBLE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

DESIGNED AS A HELP TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE SACRED WRITINGS

BY ADAM CLARKE, LL.D., F.S.A., &c.

A NEW EDITION, WITH THE
AUTHOR'S FINAL CORRECTIONS

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.—Rom. 15:4.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

THE book, entitled *Koheleth*, or *Ecclesiastes*, has ever been received, both by the Jewish and Christian Church, as written under the *inspiration* of the Almighty; and was held to be properly a part of the sacred canon. But while this has been almost universally granted, there has been but little unanimity among learned men and critics as to its *author*. To *Solomon* it has been most generally attributed, both in ancient and modern times.

Grotius, however, conjectured that it was written a long time after *Solomon*; and he says, at the close of his notes on it, that it was revised in the days of *Zerubbabel* by some learned man, who in the twelfth verse of the last chapter addresses his son *Abihud*: “And farther, by these, my son, be admonished.” But such a conjecture appears to have little foundation. This great man was more successful in his criticism on the *language* of the book; showing that there are many words in it which do not savour of the purity of the Hebrew tongue; and are found in the times of the *captivity* and *afterwards*, and such as appear principally in the books of *Ezra* and *Daniel*.

Calovius has on the other hand, not with so much success as he imagined, argued against *Grotius* for the *purity* of the language.

Mr. G. Zirkel of Wurtzburgh published an examination of this book in 1792, in which he endeavours to prove:—

1. That the *style* of *Ecclesiastes* is that of the *later Hebrew writers*, as appears by the *Chaldaisms*, *Syriasms*, and *Hellenisms* that occur in it.
2. That it may have been written between the years 380 and 130 before *Jesus Christ*, if not later.

The *Jena* reviewers seem to have thought it to be a *translation* from the *Greek*, and to have been written by a *Jew* of *Alexandria*, while the famous *library* was founding by *Ptolemy Philadelphus* king of *Egypt*, about the year 240 before *Christ*. And that it is to this circumstance that

^{<11212}**Ecclesiastes 12:12** alludes, “Of making many books there is no end;” which could not have entered into the head of a *Palestine Jew*; and such a

person might speak with propriety of an *Israel in Jerusalem*,
^{<21012>}**Ecclesiastes 1:12**, being acquainted with an *Israel in Alexandria*.

The Jews in general, and St. *Jerome*, hold the book to be the composition of *Solomon*, and the fruit of his repentance when restored from his idolatry, into which he had fallen through means of the strange or *heathenish women* whom he had taken for *wives* and *concubines*.

Others, of no mean note, who consider *Solomon* as the author, believe that he wrote it *before* his fall; there being no evidence that he wrote it afterwards; nor, indeed, that he ever recovered from his fall. Besides, it was in his *old age* that his wives turned away his heart from God; and the book bears too many evidences of mental *energy* to allow the supposition that in his *declining age*, after so deep a fall from God, he was *capable* of writing such a treatise. This opinion goes far towards destroying the *Divine inspiration* of the book; for if he did recover and repent, there is no evidence that God gave him back that *Divine inspiration* which he before possessed; for we hear of the Lord appearing to him *twice before his fall*, but of a *third* appearance there is no intimation. And lastly, Of the restoration of *Solomon* to the favour of God there is no proof in the sacred history; for in the *very place* where we are told that “in his old age his wives turned away his heart from the Lord,” we are told of his *death*, without the slightest intimation of his *repentance*. See my character of *Solomon* at the end of ^{<11143>}**1 Kings 11:43**.

Nothing, however, of this uncertainty can affect either the character, importance, or utility of the book in question. It is a production of singular worth; and the finest monument we have of the wisdom of the ancients, except the *book of Job*.

But the chief difficulty attending this book is the *principle* on which it should be interpreted. Some have supposed it to be a *dialogue* between a *true believer* and an *infidel*, which makes it to the unwary reader appear abounding with contradiction, and, in some instances, false doctrine; and that the parts must be attributed to their respective speakers, before interpretation can be successfully attempted. I am not convinced that the book has any such structure; though in some places the *opinions* and *sayings* of *infidels* may be quoted; e.g., ^{<21076>}**Ecclesiastes 7:16**, and in some of the following chapters.

In the year 1763, M. *Desvoeux*, a learned foreigner then resident in England, and who was in the British service, wrote and published a *Philosophical and Poetical Essay* on this book, in which he endeavours to prove, that the design of the author was to *demonstrate the immortality of the soul*; and that it is on this principle alone that the book can be understood and explained.

As a late commentator on the Bible has adopted this plan, and interwoven the major part of this dissertation with his notes on the book, I shall introduce the whole of M. *Desvoeux's analysis of its contents*, the *propositions, arguments, proofs, illustrations, corollaries, &c.*, on the ground of which he attempts its illustration:—

The whole of the discourse (he says) may be reduced to the three following *propositions*, each of which is attended with its *apparatus of proofs and especial observations*.

PROPOSITION 1

No labour of man in this world can render him contented, or give him true satisfaction of soul.

PROPOSITION 2

Earthly goods and possessions are so far from making us happy, that they may be even viewed as real obstacles to our ease, quiet, and tranquillity of mind.

PROPOSITION 3

Men know not what is or is not truly advantageous to them; because they are either ignorant or unmindful of that which must come to pass after their death.

The *three propositions*, with their *proofs* and *illustrations*, are contained in the following analysis:—

PROPOSITION 1

^{<210102>}Ecclesiastes 1:2, 3. No labour of man, &c.

^{<210104>}Ecclesiastes 1:4-11. First proof.—The course of nature.

^{<210112>}Ecclesiastes 1:12, &c. Second proof.—Men's occupations.

^{<210115>}Ecclesiastes 1:15-18. First head.—Wisdom or philosophy.

²¹⁰⁰¹Ecclesiastes 2:1, 2. Second head.—Pleasure.

²¹⁰⁰³Ecclesiastes 2:3-10. Both jointly.

²¹⁰²¹Ecclesiastes 2:11. General conclusion of the second proof.

A review of the second proof with special conclusions, relating to every particular therein mentioned, viz.,

²¹⁰²²Ecclesiastes 2:12-17. I. Wisdom.

²¹⁰²⁸Ecclesiastes 2:18-23. II. Riches.

²¹⁰²⁴Ecclesiastes 2:24-26. III. Pleasure.

²¹⁰³⁰Ecclesiastes 3:1, &c. Third proof.—Inconstancy of men's wills.

²¹⁰³⁹Ecclesiastes 3:9. Conclusion of the third proof

A review of the second and third proofs, considered jointly, with special observations and corollaries.

²¹⁰³⁰Ecclesiastes 3:10, 11. First observation.—God is inculpable.

²¹⁰³²Ecclesiastes 3:12, 15. Second observation.—God is the author of whatever befalls us in this world.

²¹⁰³⁶Ecclesiastes 3:16, 17. First corollary.—God shall redress all grievances.

²¹⁰³⁸Ecclesiastes 3:18-21. Second corollary.—God must be exalted, and man humbled.

²¹⁰³²Ecclesiastes 3:22. Third corollary.—God allows men to enjoy the present life.

²¹⁰⁴⁰Ecclesiastes 4:1. Fourth proof.—Men's neglect of proper opportunities, evidenced in several instances, viz.,

²¹⁰⁴⁰Ecclesiastes 4:1-3. I. Oppression.

²¹⁰⁴⁴Ecclesiastes 4:4. II. Envy.

²¹⁰⁴⁶Ecclesiastes 4:5, 6. III. Idleness.

²¹⁰⁴⁷Ecclesiastes 4:7-12. IV. Avarice.

²¹⁰⁵³Ecclesiastes 5:13-19. V. Misapplication of esteem and regard.

N. B. 1-9 is a digression containing several admonitions, in order to prevent any misconstruction of the fore-going remarks.

²¹⁰⁵¹⁰Ecclesiastes 5:10-12. VI. Expensive living.

PROPOSITION 2.- ²¹⁰⁵¹³Ecclesiastes 5:13

²¹⁰⁵¹⁴Ecclesiastes 5:14-17. First proof. Instability of riches.

²¹⁰⁵⁰¹Ecclesiastes 6:18. 2. Second proof. Insufficiency of riches to make men happy.

²¹⁰⁵¹⁸Ecclesiastes 6:3-6. Corollary. The fate of an *abortive* is, on the whole, preferable to that of him who lives without enjoying life.

²¹⁰⁵⁰⁷Ecclesiastes 6:7-9. Third proof. Men's insatiableness.

²¹⁰⁵¹⁰Ecclesiastes 6:10, 11. General *conclusion* from the *first* and *second propositions*.

PROPOSITION 3.- ²¹⁰⁵¹²Ecclesiastes 6:12

²¹⁰⁷⁰¹Ecclesiastes 7:1, &c. First proof. Wrong estimation of things. A *digression*, intended, like that ver. 1-9, to prevent any misconstruction of the preceding observations; and containing several *advices*, together with a strong commendation of him who gives them, in order to enforce the observation of the *rules* he lays down.

²¹⁰⁷⁰⁹Ecclesiastes 7:9-12. First advice. Do not blame Providence.

²¹⁰⁷¹³Ecclesiastes 7:13. Second advice. Do not judge of Providence.

²¹⁰⁷¹⁴Ecclesiastes 7:14, 15. Third advice. Submit to Providence.

²¹⁰⁷¹⁶Ecclesiastes 7:16-20. Fourth advice. Avoid excesses.

²¹⁰⁷²¹Ecclesiastes 7:21, 22. Fifth advice. Do not heed idle reports.

²¹⁰⁷²³Ecclesiastes 7:23-25. Commendation of the foregoing advices from the author's application of every thing; and especially,

²¹⁰⁷²⁶Ecclesiastes 7:26-29. I. Wickedness and ignorance.

²¹⁰⁸⁰¹Ecclesiastes 8:1-8. II. Wisdom.

Second proof. Anticipated judgments.

²¹⁰⁸⁰⁹Ecclesiastes 8:9-14. I. That sin shall go unpunished, because it is so in this world.

²¹⁰⁹¹⁵Ecclesiastes 9:15-6. II. That life is preferable to death.

²¹⁰⁹⁰⁷Ecclesiastes 9:7-9. First corollary. Earthly enjoyments are not criminal.

^{<210910>}Ecclesiastes 9:10. Second corollary. We must make a proper use of our faculties.

^{<210911>}Ecclesiastes 9:11-15. Third proof. Judgments that are seemingly right, but entirely false.

^{<210916>}Ecclesiastes 9:16, &c. Fourth proof. Little regard paid to wisdom.

^{<210916>}Ecclesiastes 9:16. I. Past services are forgotten.

II. The least fault is noticed.

^{<21105>}Ecclesiastes 10:5-19. III. Favour gets what is due to merit.

^{<21103>}Ecclesiastes 10:20. A caution to prevent the abuse of the preceding remarks.

PRACTICAL INFERENCES

^{<21105>}Ecclesiastes 11:1-4. I. From the *first* PROPOSITION,—We must give to earthly goods that stability of which they are capable.

^{<21125>}Ecclesiastes 12:5, 6. II. From the *first* and *second* PROPOSITIONS,—We must, in all our conduct, conform to the design of Providence, and leave the success to God.

^{<21137>}Ecclesiastes 12:7, 8. III. From the *three* PROPOSITIONS, but especially from the third, we must seek for happiness beyond the grave.

^{<21139>}Ecclesiastes 12:9-12. Commendation of the work, from several considerations.

^{<211213>}Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14. CONCLUSION of the whole.

This is the whole of M. *Desvoeux's Analysis*; and I place it here, that the reader who approves of the *plan* may keep it in view while he is passing through the book. For my own part, I doubt whether the author made any such technical arrangement.

The three propositions which M. Desvoeux lays down, and which are so essential to the interpretation he gives of the book, would have been expressly propounded by the inspired writer had he intended such; but they appear nowhere in it, and M. D. is obliged to *assume* or gather them from the general scope of the work. However, on his plan, he has certainly made a number of judicious observations on different passages, though his

translations are *generally* too bold, and *seldom* well supported by the original text.

In 1768 was published “Choheleth, or the Royal Preacher, a Poetical Paraphrase of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Most humbly inscribed to the King.” 4to. There is no name to this work. The late Rev. John Wesley gives the following account of the work and its author in his *Journals*:—

“Monday, Feb. 8, 1768. I met with a surprising poem, entitled, Choheleth, or the Preacher: it is a paraphrase in tolerable verse on the book of Ecclesiastes. I really think the author of it (a Turkey merchant) understands both the difficult expressions, and the connection of the whole, better than any other either ancient or modern writer whom I have seen. He was at Lisbon during the great earthquake, just then sitting in his nightgown and slippers. Before he could dress himself, part of the house he was in fell, and blocked him up. By this means his life was saved; for all who had run out were dashed to pieces by the falling houses.”

Mr. W. seems to have known the author well, but did not like to tell his name. About the year 1789 that eminent man recommended the work to me, and told me several particulars relative to it, which have escaped my memory. I procured the book the first opportunity, and read it with great satisfaction; and from it derived no small portion of information. Having now examined it anew, I can most cordially subscribe to Mr. Wesley’s opinion. I really believe that the author understood both the difficult expressions, and the connection of the whole, better than any other writer, whether ancient or modern, at least known to me. Had it comported with my plan, I should have thought a reprint of his work, with the *text*, which he does not insert, and a few philological notes, would have been quite sufficient to have given my readers a safe and general view of the whole work and its design; though I can by no means adopt the author’s hypothesis, that the book was written by Solomon *after* he was restored from his grievous apostasy. This is an assumption that never was proved and never can be.

From the *preface* to this work I have selected some general observations, which I consider to be important, and subjoin to this introduction; and what I borrow from the *work* itself I mark with a C, not knowing the author’s name. Of the *authenticity* of the book of *Ecclesiastes* I have no doubt; but I must say, the *language* and *style* puzzle me not a little.

Chaldaisms and *Syriasms* are certainly frequent in it, and not a few *Chaldee* words and terminations; and the style is such as may be seen in those writers who lived at or after the captivity. If these can be reconciled with the age of Solomon, I have no objection; but the attempts that have been made to deny this, and overthrow the evidence, are in my view often trifling, and generally ineffectual. That Solomon, son of David, might have been the *author* of the whole *matter* of this, and a *subsequent writer* put it in his own language, is a possible case; and were this to be allowed, it would solve all difficulties. Let us place the supposition thus: Solomon said all these things, and they are highly worthy of his wisdom; and a Divine writer, *after his time*, who does not mention his name, gives us a faithful version of the whole in his own language.

On other subjects relative to this book, the author of *Chohemoth* shall speak for me.

“I. Not to perplex our readers with the various expositions of the word *Chohemoth*, the title of the book in the original, (for in truth we can find none better or more significant than that commonly received, viz., *Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher*,) let us now come to the book itself. Nothing can be more interesting than the subject it treats of, to wit, *the chief or sovereign good* which man, as a rational and accountable being, should here propose to himself. Every human creature, it is certain, naturally aims at happiness; but though all apply themselves with equal ardour to this desirable end, yet such is the violence of passion, and want of reflection in the generality of mankind, that the means they use for obtaining it, instead of conducting them to the safe and direct road, only serve to mislead and bewilder them in dark and intricate labyrinths, where it is impossible to find what they seek for. Now as it was absolutely necessary to convince such men of the vanity of their pursuits, in order to induce them to turn back in the right way, Solomon shows, in the first place, what is *not* happiness, and then what really *is*. Like a skilful physician, he searches deeply into the latent cause of the malady, and then prescribes a radical cure.

“II. In the former disquisition he enumerates all those particulars which mankind are most apt to fix their hearts upon, and shows, from his own dear-bought experience, and the transient and unsatisfactory nature of the things themselves, that no such thing as

solid felicity is to be found in any of them. What he asserts on this head carries with it the greater weight, as no man upon earth was ever better qualified to speak decisively on such a subject, considering the opportunities he had of enjoying to the utmost all that this world affords. After having thus cleared away the obstacles to happiness, he enters on the main point, which is to direct us how and where it may be found. This he affirms, at the conclusion of the book, where he recapitulates the sum and substance of the sermon, as some not improperly have styled it, consists in a religious and virtuous life, with which, as he frequently intimates, a man in the lowest circumstances may be happy, and without which one in the highest must be miserable. As the whole book tends to this single point, so, in discussing thereof, many excellent observations are interspersed relating to the various duties of life, from the highest to the lowest station; the advantages resulting even from poverty, the genuine use of riches, and extreme folly of abusing them; the unequal dispensations of Divine Providence; the immortality of the human soul; and great day of final retribution. All these noble and important subjects are treated of in such a style and manner as nothing among the ancients can parallel.

“We have here given the genuine character of this inestimable piece; yet such has been the ignorance, inattention, or depravity of some persons, that it would be hard to find an instance of any thing written on so serious and interesting a subject, which has been so grossly misrepresented. How often has a handle been taken from certain passages, ill understood, and worse applied, to patronize libertinism, by such as pretend to judge of the whole from a single sentence, independent of the rest, without paying the least regard to the general scope or design! According to which rule the most pious discourse that ever was written may be perverted to atheism. Some fanatics have fallen into the contrary extreme; for, on reading that all here below was vanity, they have been so wrong-headed, as to condemn every thing as evil in itself. This world, according to them, cannot be too bitterly inveighed against; and man has nothing else to do with it, but to spend his days in sighing and mourning. But it is evident that nothing could be farther from the preacher’s intention: for notwithstanding he speaks so feelingly of the

instability and unsatisfactory nature of all sublunary things, and the vanity of human cares, schemes, and contrivances; yet, lest any one should mistake his meaning, he advises every man, at the same time, to reap the fruit of his honest labours, and take the comfort of what he possesses with a sober freedom and cheerful spirit. Not to harass and disturb his mind with anxious cares and restless solitudes about future events; but to pass the short space which Heaven has allotted him here, as pleasantly as his station will admit, with a quiet conscience. He does not condemn the things themselves, such as science, prudence, mirth, riches, honours, &c.; but only their abuse, that is, the useless studies, unreasonable pursuits, and immoderate desires, of those who pervert God's blessings to their own destruction.

“On this head Solomon gives his sentiments, not only as a divine and philosopher, but like one thoroughly acquainted with the foibles of the human heart. It was not his design to drive people out of the world, or to make them live wretchedly in it; but only that they should think and act like rational creatures; or, in other words, be induced to consult their own happiness.

“There is nothing in the whole body of pagan philosophy so elevated and magnificent, as what some have written on the important subject of this poem: but we find their opinions so various and contradictory, and the most plausible so blended with errors, even those of the *divine Plato* not excepted, that their sublimest sentiments on the *sovereign good* or *ultimate happiness* of man, when compared with those of the royal preacher, not only appear cold and languid, but always leave the mind unsatisfied and restless. We are lost in a pompous flow of words; and dazzled, but not illuminated. One sect, by confining happiness to sensual pleasures, so greatly slackened the cord as to render it wholly useless: another, by their too austere and rigid maxims, stretched it so tight that it snapped asunder; though the experience of all ages has evinced that these latter imposed both on themselves and the world, when they taught that virtue, however afflicted here, was its own reward, and sufficient of itself to render a man completely happy. Even in the brazen bull of *Perillus*, truth will cry out from the rack against such fallacious teachers, and prove them liars. The extravagant figments, therefore, of the *stoical apathy*, no less than

those of the *voluptuous epicurean*, both equally vanish at the splendour of the Divine truth delivered by Solomon. He alone decides the great question in such a manner that the soul is instantly convinced; it need seek no farther.

“III. To prevent all misapprehensions, which a slight and cursory reading of this book is apt to raise in many persons, it will be requisite to observe two cautions: First, that Solomon, who tells us that he applied his heart not only to the search of wisdom and knowledge, but also of folly and madness, frequently speaks, not according to his own sentiments, though he proposes the thing in a naked and simple manner, designedly making use of such terms as might set the picture in a fuller and clearer light, so that we often meet with certain expressions which, unless we search into their true design, seem to have a quite different force and meaning from what the author really intended. We must therefore take particular care to distinguish the doubts and objections of others from Solomon’s answers; the want of attending to which has made this book much more obscure than otherwise it would appear.

Secondly, we should not judge of the entire discourse from some parts of it; since many things are pertinently said, according to the present subject, which, in themselves, and strictly taken, are far from true. In order to come at the genuine sense, we should form our opinion from the different circumstances of the matter treated of, comparing the antecedent with the consequent passages, and always considering the preacher’s real scope and design. By carefully attending to these two cautions, this book will be seen in a very different light from what it now appears in to the generality of readers.

“IV. This book, besides the figurative and proverbial expressions to be found in no other part of the Scripture, is undoubtedly metrical; and, consequently, the grammatization, in many places, not a little perplexed, from the frequent ellipses, abbreviations, transposition of words, and other poetical licenses, allowed in all languages; to say nothing of the carelessness or ignorance of transcribers, as appears from the variety of readings. Yet, notwithstanding we are so little acquainted with the nature of the Hebrew metre, and the propriety of certain phrases which, at this vast distance of time, in a language that has been dead upwards of two thousand years, must

unavoidably occasion the same difficulties and obscurities as occur in works of far less antiquity, and in languages more generally studied and better understood; notwithstanding this, I say, a diligent and attentive observer will always find enough to recompense his trouble; and, if he has any taste, cannot avoid being struck with the exquisite beauty and regularity of the plan.

“V. The most judicious commentators have remarked on this book, that we have here a conspicuous example of that form of disputing, which was so justly admired in the soundest of the pagan philosophers; particularly in Socrates, who, whilst others were taken up with abstruse speculations about the nature of things, and investigating the number, motions, distance, and magnitude of the stars, brought down philosophy from the upper regions, and fixed its abode on earth; that is, by teaching such precepts as served for the regulation of life and manners, by far the most useful of all sciences, as being most conducive to the welfare of society, and the general benefit of mankind. Of this we have a noble specimen in the memoirs of that ancient moralist, collected by Xenophon. It is, I think, beyond all contradiction, that no one ever made deeper researches into nature, or had made so great a progress in every branch of science, both speculative and experimental. But what, after all, was the result of his inquiries? A thorough conviction of the inutility of such studies, and how little they conduce towards the obtaining that peace and tranquillity of mind wherein true happiness consists. He applied himself, therefore, to that study which might produce a real and lasting advantage, namely, to render men wise to some purpose; that is, truly virtuous. The manner of his treating this important subject bears some resemblance to that of the celebrated Greek moralist. He does not give us a long roll of dry formal precepts, with which the mind is soon tired; but, to confirm the truth of every thing he says, appeals, not only to his own experience, but to the general sense of unbiassed reason. At the same time he sets before us, in the liveliest colours, the sad effects of vice and folly; and makes use of every incentive to engage the heart to be enamoured with virtue, and pursue its own interest. Whatever he intends to inculcate is first barely proposed, and then more accurately explained and illustrated, though by gentle and almost imperceptible transitions;

with this peculiarity, that there is always much more implied than expressed; insomuch that the reader, from a slight hint given him, is left to draw such inferences as his own reflection must naturally suggest. Every thing, in short, is drawn, in this admirable composition, with equal simplicity and elegance; and hath as distinguished a superiority to whatever the best pagan philosophers have given us on the same subject, as the borrowed light of the moon is surpassed by that of the sun in his full meridian lustre; or, to use a still stronger comparison, as Solomon's knowledge of the one true God excelled the idle notion of their fictitious deities."

Some have supposed that the book of Ecclesiastes is a poem. That some poetic lines may be found in it, there is no doubt; but it has nothing in common with poetic books, nor does it exist in the hemistich form in any printed edition or MS. yet discovered. It is plain prose, and is not susceptible of that form in which the Hebrew poetic books appear.

The author already quoted thinks that the book of *Ecclesiastes* is *metrical*. I cannot see this: but it has what is essential to poetry, a truly dignified style; there are no mean, creeping words in it, whether pure Hebrew, or borrowed from any of its dialects. They are all well chosen, nervous, and highly expressive. They are, in short, such as become the subject, and are worthy of that inspiration by which the author was guided.

ECCLESIASTES OR, THE PREACHER

- Year from the Creation, according to Archbishop Usher, 3027.
- Year from the Flood of Noah, according to the common Hebrew text, 1371.
- Year before the birth of Christ, 973.
- Year before the vulgar era of Christ's nativity, 977.
- N. B. The time when this book was written is very uncertain: the above chronology is agreeable to that contained in the present authorized version.

CHAPTER 1

The prophet shows that all human courses are vain, 1-4. The creatures are continually changing, 5-8. There is nothing new under the sun, 9-11. Who the prophet was, his estate and his studies, 12-18.

NOTES ON CHAP. 1

Verse 1. The words of the Preacher] Literally, "The words of Choheleth, son of David, king of Jerusalem." But the *Targum* explains it thus: "The words of the prophecy, which Choheleth prophesied; the same is Solomon, son of David the king, who was in Jerusalem. For when Solomon, king of Israel, saw by the spirit of prophecy that the kingdom of Rehoboam his son was about to be divided with Jeroboam, the son of Nebat; and the house of the sanctuary was about to be destroyed, and the people of Israel sent into captivity; he said in his word-*Vanity of vanities* is all that I have laboured, and David my father; they are *altogether vanity*."

The word **tl hq Koheleth** is a feminine noun, from the root **l hq kahal**, to collect, gather together, assemble; and means, *she who assembles* or *collects a congregation*; translated by the *Septuagint*, **Εκκλησιαστης**, a *public speaker, a speaker in an assembly*; and hence translated by us a *preacher*. In my old MS. Bible it is explained thus: a **talker to the people; or togyder cleping**.

Verse 2. Vanity of vanities] As the words are an exclamation, it would be better to translate, *O vanity of vanities!* Emptiness of emptinesses. True,

substantial good is not to be found in any thing liable to *change* and *corruption*.

The author referred to in the introduction begins his paraphrase thus:—

“O vain deluding world! whose largest gifts
 Thine emptiness betray, like painted clouds,
 Or watery bubbles: as the vapour flies,
 Dispersed by lightest blast, so fleet thy joys,
 And leave no trace behind. This serious truth
 The royal preacher loud proclaims, convinced
 By sad experience; with a sigh repeats
 The mournful theme, that nothing here below
 Can solid comfort yield: ‘tis all a scene.
 Of vanity, beyond the power of words
 To express, or thought conceive. Let every man
 Survey himself, then ask, what fruit remains
 Of all his fond pursuits? What has he gain’d,
 By toiling thus for more than nature’s wants
 Require? Why thus with endless projects rack’d
 His heated brain, and to the labouring mind,
 Repose denied? Why such expense of time,
 That steals away so fast, and ne’er looks back?
 Could man his wish obtain, how short the space
 For his enjoyment! No less transient here
 The time of his duration, than the things
 Thus anxiously pursued. For, as the mind,
 In search of bliss, fix’d on no solid point,
 For ever fluctuates; so our little frames,
 In which we glory, haste to their decline,
 Nor permanence can find. The human race
 Drop like autumnal leaves, by spring revived:
 One generation from the stage of life
 Withdraws, another comes, and thus makes room
 For that which follows. Mightiest realms decay,
 Sink by degrees; and lo! new form’d estates
 Rise from their ruins. Even the earth itself,
 Sole object of our hopes and fears,
 Shall have its period, though to man unknown.”

Verse 3. What profit hath a man] What is the sum of the real good he has gained by all his toils in life? They, in themselves, have neither made him *contented* nor *happy*.

Verse 4. One generation passeth away] Men succeed each other in unceasing generations: but the earth is still the same; it undergoes no

change that leads to melioration, or greater perfection. And it will continue the same $\mu\lambda w[\lambda$ *leolam*, during the whole course of time; till the end of all things arrives.

Verses 5. and 6. These verses are confused by being falsely divided. The first clause of the *sixth* should be joined to the *fifth* verse.

“The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he ariseth; going to the south, and circulating to the north.”

Verse 6. “The wind is continually whirling about, and the wind returneth upon its whirlings.”

It is plain, from the clause which I have restored to the *fifth* verse, that the author refers to the approximations of the sun to the *northern* and *southern tropics*, viz., of *Cancer* and *Capricorn*.

All the *versions* agree in applying the first clause of the *sixth* verse to the *sun*, and not to the *wind*. Our *version* alone has mistaken the meaning. My old MS. Bible is quite correct:

The sunne risith up, and goth down, and to his place turnith agein; and there agein rising, goth about bi the south, and then agein to the north.

The author points out two things here: 1. *Day* and *night*, marked by the appearance of the sun above the horizon; proceeding *apparently* from *east* to *west*; where he sinks under the horizon, and appears to be lost during the night. 2. His *annual course* through the twelve signs of the zodiac, when, from the equinoctial, he proceeds southward to the tropic of Capricorn; and thence turneth about towards the north, till he reaches the tropic of Cancer; and so on.

Verse 7. **All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full]** The reason is, nothing goes into it either by the; *rivers* or by *rain*, that does not come from it: and *to the place whence the rivers come*, whether from the *sea* originally by evaporation, or immediately by *rain*, thither they return again; for the water exhaled from the sea by evaporation is collected in the *clouds*, and in rain, &c., falls upon the tops of the mountains; and, filtered through their fissures, produce *streams*, several of which *uniting*, make *rivers*, which flow into the sea. The water is again *evaporated by the sun*;

the vapours collected are precipitated; and, being filtered through the earth, become *streams*, &c., as before.

Verse 8. All things are full of labour] It is; impossible to calculate how much anxiety, pain, labour, and fatigue are necessary in order to carry on the *common operations of life*. But an *endless desire of gain*, and an *endless curiosity to witness* a variety of results, cause men to, labour on. The *eye* sees much, but wishes to see more. The *ear* hears of many things; but is curious to have the actual knowledge of them. So *desire* and *curiosity* carry men, under the Divine providence, through all the labours and pains of life.

Verse 9. The thing that hath been] Every thing in the whole economy of nature has its *revolutions*; summer and winter, heat and cold, rain and drought, seedtime and autumn, with the whole system of *corruption* and *generation*, alternately succeed each other, so that *whatever has been* shall *be again*. There is really, physically, and philosophically, nothing absolutely new under the sun, in the course of sublunary things. The same is the case in all the revolutions of the heavens.

Verse 10. Is there any thing, &c.] The original is beautiful. “Is there any thing which will say, See this! it is new?” Men may say this of their discoveries, &c.; but universal nature says, It is not new. *It has been*, and it *will be*.

Verse 11. There is no remembrance] I believe the general meaning to be this: Multitudes of *ancient transactions* have been lost, because they were not *recorded*; and of many that have been recorded, the *records* are *lost*. And this will be the case with many others which are yet to occur. How many persons, not much acquainted with books, have supposed that certain things were their own discoveries, which have been *written* or *printed* even long before they were born! *Dutens*, in his *Origin of the Discoveries attributed to the Moderns*, has made a very clear case.

Verse 12. I the Preacher was king] This is a strange verse, and does not admit of an easy solution. It is literally, “I, Choheleth, have been king over Israel, in Jerusalem.” This book, as we have already seen, has been conjectured by some to have been written about the time that *Ptolemy Philadelphus* formed his great library at Alexandria, about *two hundred and eighty-five* years before our Lard; and from the multitude of Jews that dwelt there, and resorted to that city for the sake of commerce, it was said

there was an *Israel in Alexandria*. See the *introduction*. See Clarke “~~21010~~ **Ecclesiastes 1:1**”.

It has also been conjectured from this, that if the book were written by *Solomon*, it was intended to be a *posthumous publication*. “I that was king, still continue to preach and instruct you.” Those who suppose the book to have been written *after Solomon’s fall*, think that he speaks thus through *humility*. “I was once worthy of the name of king: but I fell into all evil; and, though recovered, I am no longer worthy of the name.” I am afraid this is not *solid*.

Verse 13. And I gave my heart to seek and search] While Solomon was faithful to his God, he diligently cultivated his mind. His giving himself to the study of natural history, philosophy, poetry, &c., are sufficient proofs of it. He had not intuitive knowledge from God; but he had a *capacity* to obtain every kind of knowledge useful to man.

This sore travail] This is the way in which knowledge is to be acquired; and in order to investigate the operations of nature, the most *laborious discussions* and *perplexing experiments* must be instituted, and conducted to their proper results. It is God’s determination that knowledge shall be acquired in no other way.

Verse 14. Behold, all is vanity] After all these discussions and experiments, when even the results have been the most successful, I have found only *rational satisfaction*; but not that *supreme good* by which alone the soul can be made happy.

O curas hominum! O quantum est in rebus inane!

“How anxious are our cares, and yet how vain

The bent of our desires!”

PERS. Sat. i., v. 1.

Verse 15. That which is crooked cannot be made straight] There are many apparent irregularities and anomalies in nature for which we cannot account; and there are many *defects* that cannot be *supplied*. This is the impression from a *general view* of nature; but the more we study and investigate its operations, the more we shall be convinced that all is a *consecutive* and well-ordered whole; and that in the *chain of nature* not one *link* is broken, deficient, or lost.

Verse 16. I communed with mine own heart] Literally, “I spoke, I, with my heart, saying.” When successful in my researches, but not happy in my soul, though easy in my circumstances, I entered into my own heart, and there inquired the *cause* of my discontent. He found that, though—1. He had gotten wisdom beyond all men; 2. Wealth and honours more than any other; 3. Practical wisdom more than all his predecessors; 4. Had tried *pleasure* and animal gratification, even to their extremes; yet after all this he had nothing but *vexation of spirit*. None of these *four* things, nor the *whole* of them *conjoined*, could afford him such a *happiness* as satisfies the soul. Why was all this? Because the soul was made for God, and in the possession of him alone can it find happiness.

Verse 17. To know madness and folly] *twl kcw twl l wh holloth vesichluth. Παραβολας και επιστημην*, “Parables and science.”—*Septuagint*. So the *Syriac*; nearly so the *Arabic*.

“What were error and foolishness.”—*Coverdale*. Perhaps *gayety* and *sobriety* may be the better meaning for these two difficult words. I can scarcely think they are taken in that *bad sense* in which our translation exhibits them. “I tried pleasure in all its forms; and sobriety and self-abnegation to their utmost extent.” *Choheloth* paraphrases, “Even fools and madmen taught me rules.”

Verse 18. For in much wisdom is much grief] The more we know of *ourselves* the less satisfied shall we be with our own hearts; and the more we know of *mankind* the less willing shall we be to trust them, and the less shall we admire them.

He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.] And why so? Because, independently of God, the principal objects of knowledge are natural and moral evils.

The *Targum* gives a curious paraphrase here: “The man who multiplies wisdom, when he sins and is not converted to repentance, multiplies the indignation of God against himself; and the man who adds science, and yet dies in his childhood, adds grief of heart to his relatives.” A man in science; a foolish child in conduct. How pained must they be who had the expense of his education! But there are many men-children of this sort in every age and country.

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 2

The vanity of human courses in the works of pleasure, planting, equipage, amassing wealth, &c., 1-11. Wisdom preferable to folly, 12-14; yet little difference between the wise and the foolish in the events of life, 15-17. The vanity of amassing wealth for heirs, when whether they will be foolish or wise cannot be ascertained, 18-21. There is much sorrow in the labour of man, 22, 23. We should enjoy what the providence of God gives, 25, 26.

NOTES ON CHAP. 2

Verse 1. I will prove thee with mirth] This is well expressed by the author so often referred to. Having tried speculative knowledge in vain, passion and appetite whisper,—

*“From the rugged thorny road
Of wisdom, which so ill repays thy toil,
Turn back, and enter pleasure’s flowery paths.
Go, take thy fill of joy; to passion give
The reins; nor let one serious thought restrain
What youth and affluence prompt.”*

Verse 2. I said of laughter, It is mad] Literally “To laughter I said, O mad one! and to mirth, What is this one doing?”

Solomon does not speak here of a sober enjoyment of the things of this world, but of *intemperate pleasure*, whose two attendants, *laughter* and *mirth* are introduced by a beautiful *prosopopœia* as two persons; and the contemptuous manner wherewith he treats them has something remarkably striking. He tells the *former* to her face that *she is mad*; but as to the *latter*, he thinks her so much beneath his notice, that he only points at her, and instantly turns his back.

Verse 3. To give myself unto wine, (yet acquainting [ghn noheg, “guiding”] mine heart with wisdom,)] I did not run into *extremes*, as when I gave up myself to *mirth* and *pleasure*. *There*, I threw off all restraint; *here*, I took the middle course, to see whether a moderate enjoyment of the things of the world might not produce that happiness which I supposed man was created to enjoy here below.

Verse 4. I builded me houses] Palace after palace; the house of the forest of Lebanon, ^{<1070>}**1 Kings 7:1**, &c.; a house for the queen; the temple, &c., ^{<400>}**2 Chronicles 8:1**, &c.; ^{<1090>}**1 Kings 9:10**, &c., besides many other buildings of various kinds.

Verse 5. I made me gardens and orchards] *mysdrp* *pardesim*, “paradises.” I doubt much whether this be an original *Hebrew* word. [Arabic] *ferdoos*, is found in the *Persian* and *Arabic*; and signifies a *pleasant garden*, a *vineyard*. Hence our word *paradise*, a place *full of delights*. How well Solomon was qualified to form *gardens*, *orchards*, *vineyards*, *conservatories*, &c., may be at once conceived when we recollect his knowledge of *natural history*; and that he wrote treatises on vegetables and their properties, from the *cedar* to the *hyssop*.

Verse 6. Pools of water] *Tanks* and *reservoirs*.

To water therewith the wood] Aqueducts to lead the water from the tanks to different parts.

Verse 7. Servants and maidens] For my works, fields, folds, and various domestic labors.

Servants born in any house] Besides those hired from without, he had *married couples* in the precincts of his grounds, palaces, etc., who, when their children grew up, got them employment with themselves.

Great and small cattle] *Oxen*, *neat*, *horses*, *asses*, *mules*, *camels*, and such like; with *sheep* and *goats*. And multitudes of most of these he needed, when we are told that his household consumed daily *ten stall-fed oxen*, *with twenty from the pasture*, *with a hundred sheep*; *besides harts*, *roebucks*, *fallow deer*, *fatted fowls*, and other kinds of provision. Probably, such another court for splendor and expense was not in the universe.

Verse 8. The peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces] 1. The *taxes* levied off his subjects. 2. The *tribute* given by the neighboring potentates. Both these make the “peculiar treasure of kings;” *taxes* and *tribute*.

Men singers and women singers] This includes all *instrumental* and *vocal* performers. These may be called the *delights* of the sons of men.

Musical instruments, and that of all sorts.] For these *seven* words, there are only *two* in the original, **twdvw hdv** shiddah veshiddoth. These words are acknowledged on all hands to be utterly unknown, if not utterly inexplicable. Some render them *male* and *female* captives; others, *cups* and *flacons*; others, *cooks* and *confectioners*; others, *a species of musical compositions* derived from a celebrated Phœnician woman named *Sido*, to whom Sanchoniatha attributes the invention of *music*. Others, with more probability, *wives* and *concubines*; of the former of whom Solomon had *seven hundred*, and of the latter, *three hundred*; and if these be not spoken of here, they are not mentioned at all; whereas music, and every thing connected with that, was referred to before. The author of *Chohelath* paraphrases thus:—

*“To complete
 This scene of earthly bliss, how large a span
 Of that which most delights the sons of men
 Fell to my portion! What a lovely train
 Of blooming beauties, by connubial ties,
 By purchase, or the gifts of neighboring kings,
 Or spoils of war, made mine.”*

If, after all this, I may add one *conjecture*, it shall be this; **hdc sadeh**, in Hebrew, is a *field*, and occurs in various parts of the Bible. **twdc sadoth** is *fields*, ^{<02217>}**1 Samuel 22:7**, the *points* in such a case are of no consideration. May not Solomon be speaking here of *farms upon farms*, or *estates upon estates*, which he had added by purchase to the *common regal portion*? We know that a king of Israel (Ahab) once desired to have a vineyard (Naboth’s) which he could not obtain: now, Solomon having spoken before of *gardens, orchards, and vineyards*, why may he not here speak of supernumerary estates? Perhaps every man who critically examines the place will be dissatisfied, and have a *conjecture* of his own.

Verse 10. I withheld not my heart from any joy] He had every means of gratification; he could desire nothing that was not within his reach; and whatever he wished, he took care to possess.

Verse 11. And, behold, all was vanity] Emptiness and insufficiency in itself.

And vexation of spirit] Because it promised the good I wished for, but did not, could not, perform the promise; and left my soul discontented and chagrined.

Verse 12. For what can the man do that cometh after the king?] I have examined every thing proposed by *science*, by *maddening pleasure*, and by more refined and regulated *mirth*. I seized on the whole, and used them to the uttermost; and so far, that none ever shall be able to exceed me; as none can, in the course of things, ever have such *power* and *means* of *gratification*.

Verse 13. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly] Though in none of these pursuits I found the *supreme* good, the happiness my soul longed after; yet I could easily perceive that wisdom *excelled* the *others*, as far as *light excels darkness*. And he immediately subjoins the reasons.

Verse 14. The wise man's eyes, &c.] Well expressed by *Chohemoth*:—

*“The wise are circumspect, maturely weigh
The consequence of what they undertake,
Good ends propose, and fittest means apply
To accomplish their designs.”*

But the fool walketh in darkness]

*“But fools, deprived
Of reason's guidance, or in darkness grope,
Or, unreflecting like a frantic man,
Who on the brink of some steep precipice
Attempts to run a race with heedless steps,
Rush to their own perdition.”*

One event happeneth to them all.]

*“Though wide the difference, what has human pride
To boast? Even I myself too plainly saw,
That one event to both alike befalls;
To various accidents of life exposed,
Without distinction: nor can wisdom screen
From dangers, disappointments, grief, and pain.”*

Verse 15. As it happeneth to the fool] Literally, “According as the event is to the fool, it happens to me, even me.” There is a peculiar beauty and emphasis in the repetition of *me*. Having pointed out the advantages that

wisdom has over folly, he takes this opportunity of reminding us of the danger of trusting too much to it, by showing that it is equally subject to the common accidents of life; and, therefore, incapable of making us completely happy. Having given his sentiments on this point in *general* terms, he proceeds to those *particular* instances wherein human prudence chiefly exerts itself; and shows how egregiously it is mistaken in every one of them.—C.

Verse 16. There is **no remembrance**] The wise and the fool are equally subject to death; and, in most instances, they are equally forgotten. *Time* sweeps away all remembrances, except the very *few* out of *millions* which are preserved for a while in the *page of history*.

Verse 17. Therefore I hated life] מַיְיַךְ הַתָּא *et hachaiyim*, the lives, both of the wise, the madman, and the fool. Also all the stages of life, the child, the man, and the sage. There was nothing in it worth pursuing, no period worth re-living and no hope that if this were possible I could again be more successful.

Verse 18. I hated all my labour] Because, 1. It has not answered the end for which it was instituted. 2. I can enjoy the fruits of it but a short time. 3. I must leave it to others, and know not whether a wise man, a knave, or a fool will possess it.

Verse 19. A wise man or a fool?] Alas! Solomon, the wisest of all men, made the worst use of his wisdom, had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and yet left but one son behind him, to possess his estates and his throne, and that one was the silliest of fools!

Verse 20. I went about to cause my heart to despair] What makes all worse, there is no remedy. It is impossible in the present state of things to prevent these evils.

Verse 21. For there is a man] Does he not allude to himself? As if he had said, “I have laboured to cultivate my mind in wisdom and in science, in knowledge of men and things, and have endeavoured to establish equity and dispense justice. And now I find I shall leave all the fruits of my labour to a man that hath not laboured therein, and consequently cannot prize what I have wrought.” Does he not refer to his son Rehoboam?

Verse 22. For what hath man of all his laborer] Labour of body, disappointment of hope, and vexation of heart, have been all my portion.

Verse 23. His days are sorrows] What a picture of human life where the heart is not filled with the peace and love of God! All his *days* are *sorrows*; all his *labours* *griefs*; all his *nights* *restless*; for he has no portion but merely what *earth* can give; and that is embittered by the labour of *acquisition*, and the disappointment in the using.

This is also vanity.] Emptiness of good and substantial misery.

Verse 24. There is nothing better for a man] The sense of this passage is well expressed in the following lines:—

*“For these disorders wouldst thou find a cure,
Such cure as human frailty would admit?
Drive from thee anxious cares; let reason curb
Thy passions; and with cheerful heart enjoy
That little which the world affords; for here,
Though vain the hopes of perfect happiness,
Yet still the road of life, rugged at best,
Is not without its comforts.—————
Wouldst thou their sweetness taste, look up to heaven,
And praise the all-bounteous Donor, who bestows
The power to use aright.”*

Verse 25. For who can eat-more than I?] But instead of *ynmm xwj chuts mimmenni, more than I; wnm xwj chuts mimmennu, without HIM*, is the reading of *eight* of *Kennicott’s* and *Deuteronomy Rossi’s MSS.*, as also of the *Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic.*

“For who maye eat, drynke, or bring enythinge to pass without him?”—COVERDALE.

I believe this to be the true reading. No one can have a true relish of the comforts of life without the Divine blessing. This reading connects all the sentences: “This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God;—for who can eat, and who can relish without HIM? For God giveth to man that is good.” It is through his liberality that we have any thing to eat or drink; and it is only through his blessing that we can derive good from the use of what we possess.

Verse 26. Giveth-wisdom, and knowledge, and joy] 1. God gives *wisdom*—the knowledge of himself, light to direct in the way of salvation. 2. *Knowledge*—understanding to discern the operation of his hand; *experimental acquaintance* with himself, in the dispensing of his *grace* and

the *gifts of his Spirit*. 3. *Joy*; a hundred days of ease for one day of pain; *one thousand* enjoyments for one privation; and to them that believe, *peace of conscience*, and *JOY in the Holy Ghost*.

But to the sinner he giveth travail] He has a life of labour, disappointment, and distress; for because he is an enemy to God, he travails in pain all his days; and, as the wise man says elsewhere, *the wealth of the wicked is laid up for the just*. So he loseth *earthly good*, because he would not take a *heavenly portion* with it.

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 3

Every thing has its time and season, 1-8. Men are exercised with labour, 9, 10. Every thing is beautiful in its season, 11. Men should enjoy thankfully the gifts of God, 12, 13. What God does is for ever, 14. There is nothing new, 15. The corruption of judgment; but the judgments of God are right, 16, 17. Man is brutish, and men and brutes die in like manner, 18-21. Man may enjoy the fruit of his own labours, 22.

NOTES ON CHAP. 3

Verse 1. To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose]

Two general remarks may be made on the first *eight* verses of this chapter.

1. God by his providence governs the world, and has determined particular *things* and operations to particular *times*. In those times such things may be done with propriety and success; but if we neglect the appointed seasons, we sin against this providence, and become the authors of our own distresses. 2. God has given to man that portion of duration called TIME; the space in which all the operations of nature, of animals, and intellectual beings, are carried on; but while nature is steady in its course, and animals faithful to their instincts, man devotes it to a great variety of purposes; but very frequently to that for which God never made *time, space, or opportunity*. And all we can say, when an evil deed is done, is, there was a *time* in which it was done, though God never made *it* for that purpose.

To say any farther on this subject is needless, as the words themselves give in general their own meaning. The Jews, it is true, see in these *times* and *seasons* all the events of their own nation, from the birth of Abraham to the present times; and as to *fathers* and their followers, they see all the events and states of the Christian Church in them!

It is worthy of remark, that in all this list there are but *two* things which may be said to be done generally by the disposal of God, and in which men can have but little influence: the *time of birth*, and the *time of death*. But all the others are left to the option of man, though God continues to overrule them by his providence. The following paraphrase will explain all that is necessary to be generally understood:—

Verse 2. A time to be born, and a time to die—plant]

*“As in its mother’s womb the embryo lies
A space determined; to full growth arrived,
From its dark prison bursts, and sees the light;
So is the period fix’d when man shall drop
Into the grave.—A time there is to plant,
And sow; another time to pluck and reap.
Even nations have their destined rise and fall:
Awhile they thrive; and for destruction ripe,
When grown, are rooted up like wither’d plants.”*

Verse 3. A time to kill,—heal,—break down,—build up]

*“The healing art, when out of season used,
Pernicious proves, and serves to hasten death.
But timely medicines drooping nature raise,
And health restore.—Now, Justice wields her sword
With wholesome rigour, nor the offender spares:
But Mercy now is more expedient found.
On crazy fabrics ill-timed cost bestow’d
No purpose answers, when discretion bids
To pull them down, and wait a season fit
To build anew.”*

Verse 4. A time to weep,—laugh,—mourn,—dance]

—————”*When private griefs affect
The heart, our tears with decent sorrow flow;
Nor less becoming, when the public mourns,
To vent the deepest sighs. But all around
When things a smiling aspect bear, our souls
May well exult; ‘tis then a time for joy.”*

Verse 5. A time to cast away stones,—to gather stones,—to embrace,—to refrain]

*“One while domestic cares abortive prove,
And then successful. Nature now invites
Connubial pleasures: but, when languid grown,
No less rejects.”*

Verse 6. A time to get,—to lose,—to keep,—to cast away]

—————”*Commerce produces wealth,
Whilst time of gaining lasts; from every point
Blow prosperous gales. Now heaven begins to lower,
And all our hopes are blasted. Prudence bids,
One while, our treasure to reserve, and then
With liberal hand to scatter wide. How oft
In raging storms, the owner wisely casts
Into the deep his precious merchandise,
To save the foundering bark!*

Verse 7. A time to rend,—sew,—keep silence,—speak]

—————”*Intestine broils
And factions rend a state: at length the breach
Is heal’d, and rest ensues. Wisdom restrains
The tongue, when words are vain: but now,
‘Tis time to speak, and silence would be criminal.”*

Verse 8. A time to love,—hate,—of war,—of peace.]

*“Love turns to hatred; interest or caprice
Dissolves the firmest knot by friendship tied.
O’er rival nations, with revenge inflamed,
Or lust of power, fell Discord shakes awhile
Her baleful torch: now smiling Peace returns.*

The above paraphrase on the verses cited contains a general view of the *principal occurrences of time*, in reference to the human being, from his cradle to his grave, through all the operations of life.

Verse 9. What profit hath he] What real good, what solid pleasure, is derived from all the labours of man? *Necessity* drives him to the principal part of his *cares and toils*; he *labours* that he may *eat and drink*; and he *eats and drinks* that he may be preserved *alive*, and kept from *sickness and pain*. Love of *money*, the basest of all passions, and *restless ambition*, drive men to many labours and expedients, which perplex and often destroy them. He, then, who lives without God, travails in pain all his days.

Verse 10. I have seen the travail] Man is a sinner; and, because he is such, he suffers.

Verse 11. Beautiful in his time] God’s works are well done; there are order, harmony, and beauty in them all. Even the *caterpillar* is a finished beauty in all the *changes* through which it passes, when its structure is

properly examined, and the *end* kept in view in which each change is to issue. Nothing of this kind can be said of the works of man. The most finished works of art are bungling jobs, when compared with the meanest operation of nature.

He hath set the world in their heart] מִן הַיָּמִים הַהֵלֶךְ *haolam*, that *hidden time*—the period *beyond* the present,—ETERNITY. The proper translation of this clause is the following: “Also that eternity hath he placed in their heart, without which man could not find out the work which God hath made from the commencement to the end.” God has deeply rooted the idea of *eternity* in every human heart; and every considerate man sees, that all the operations of God refer to that endless duration. See ^{<210814>}**Ecclesiastes 3:14**. And it is only in eternity that man will be able to discover what God has designed by the various works he has formed.

Verse 12. I know that there is no good in them, but, &c.] Since God has so disposed the affairs of this world, that the great events of providence cannot be accelerated or retarded by human cares and anxieties, submit to God; make a proper use of what he has given: do thyself *no harm*, and endeavour as much as possible to do others *good*.

*Enjoy, and bless thyself; let others share
The transient blessing: 'tis the gift of God.*

Verse 14. I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever] מִן הַיָּמִים הַהֵלֶךְ *leolam*, for *eternity*; in reference to that grand consummation of men and things intimated in ^{<210811>}**Ecclesiastes 3:11**. God has produced no being that he intends ultimately to destroy. He made every thing in reference to eternity; and, however matter may be changed and refined, animal and intellectual beings shall not be deprived of their *existence*. The brute creation shall be restored, and all human spirits shall live for ever; the *pure* in a state of supreme and endless blessedness, the *impure* in a state of indestructible misery.

Nothing can be put to it] No new order of beings, whether animate or inanimate, can be produced. God *will not* create more; man *cannot* add.

Nor any thing taken from it] Nothing can be *annihilated*; no power but that which can *create* can *destroy*. And whatever he has done, he intended to be a means of impressing a just sense of

his being, providence, mercy, and judgments, upon the souls of men. A proper consideration of God's works has a tendency to make man a *religious creature*; that is, to impress his mind with a sense of the *existence* of the *Supreme Being*, and the *reverence* that is due to him. In this sense *the fear of God* is frequently taken in Scripture. The Hebrew of this clause is strongly emphatic: *wynpl m waryyv hc [myhl ahw vehaelohim asah sheiyireu millephanaiv*; "And the gods he hath done, that they might fear from before his faces." Even the doctrine of the eternal *Trinity* in *Unity* may be collected from numberless appearances in *nature*. A consideration of the herb *trefoil* is said to have been the means of fully convincing the learned Erasmus of the truth of the assertion, *These Three are One*: and yet *three distinct*. He saw the *same root*, the *same fibres*, the *same pulpy substance*, the *same membranous covering*, the *same colour*, the *same taste*, the *same smell*, in *every part*; and yet the *three leaves* distinct: but *each* and *all* a *continuation* of the *stem*, and proceeding from the *same root*. Such a fact as this may at least illustrate the doctrine. An intelligent shepherd, whom he met upon the mountains, is said to have exhibited the herb, and the illustration while discoursing on certain difficulties in the Christian faith. When a child, I heard a learned man relate this fact.

Verse 15. That which hath been is now] God governs the world *now*, as he *has governed* it from the beginning; and the revolutions and operations of nature are the *same now*, that they have been from *the beginning*. What we see *now*, is the *same* as has *been seen* by those before us.

And God requireth that which is past] i.e., That it may return again in its proper order. The heavens themselves, taking in their great revolutions, show the same phenomena. Even comets are supposed to have their revolutions, though some of them are hundreds of years in going round their orbits.

But in the *economy of grace*, does not *God require that which is past*? Whatever blessing or influence God gives to the soul of man, he intends shall remain and increase; and it will, if man be faithful. Reader, canst thou produce all the secret inspirations of his Spirit, all the drawings of his love, his pardoning mercy, his sanctifying grace, the heavenly-mindedness produced in thee, thy holy zeal, thy spirit of prayer, thy tender conscience, the witness of the Spirit, which thou didst once receive and enjoy? **WHERE are they? God requireth that which is past.**

Verse 16. The place of judgment, that wickedness was there] The abuse of power, and the perversion of judgment, have been justly complained of in every age of the world. The following paraphrase is good:—

*“But what enjoyment can our labours yield,
When e’en the remedy prescribed by heaven
To cure disorders proves our deadliest bane?
When God’s vicegerents, destined to protect
The weak from insolence of power, to guard
Their lives and fortunes, impious robbers turn?
And, or by force or fraud, deprive of both?—
To what asylum shall the injured fly
From her tribunal, where perverted law
Acquits the guilty, the innocent condemns?”*

C.

Verse 17. For there is a time there for every purpose] Man has *his time* here below, and God shall have *his time* above. At his throne the judged shall be rejudged, and iniquity for ever close her mouth.

Verse 18. That they might see that they themselves are beasts.] The author of *Chohemoth* has given a correct view of this difficult verse, by a proper translation: “I said in my heart, reflecting on the state of the sons of men, O that God would enlighten them, and make them see that even they themselves are like beasts.” These words are to be referred to those in authority who abused their power; particularly to the corrupt magistrates mentioned above.

Verse 19. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts] From the present comparison of *great men* to *beasts*, the author takes occasion to enforce the subject by mentioning the state of mankind in general, with respect to the *mortality* of their *bodies*; and then, by an easy transition, touches in the next verse on the point which is of such infinite consequence to religion.

As the one dieth, so dieth the other] Animal life is the same both in the *man* and in the *beast*.

They have all one breath] They respire in the same way; and when they cease to respire, animal life becomes extinct.

Befalleth beasts—This is wanting in six of *Kennicott’s* and *Deuteronomy Rossi’s* MSS.

Verse 20. All go unto one place]

—————”*Man was born
To die, nor aught exceeds in this respect
The vilest brute. Both transient, frail, and vain,
Draw the same breath; alike grow old, decay,
And then expire: both to one grave descend;
There blended lie, to native dust return’d.*”
—C.

Verse 21. Who knoweth the spirit of man] I think the meaning of this important verse is well taken by the above able writer:—

*The nobler part of man, ‘tis true, survives
The frail corporeal frame: but who regards
The difference? Those who live like beasts, as such
Would die, and be no more, if their own fate
Depended on themselves. Who once reflects,
Amidst his revels, that the human soul,
Of origin celestial, mounts aloft,
While that of brutes to earth shall downward go?”*

The word **j wr ruach**, which is used in this and the *nineteenth* verse, has two significations, *breath* and *spirit*. It signifies *spirit*, or an *incorporeal* substance, as distinguished from *flesh*, or a *corporeal* one, ^{<12221>}**1 Kings 22:21, 22**, and ^{<23108>}**Isaiah 31:3**. And it signifies the *spirit* or *soul of man*, ^{<93106>}**Psalm 31:6**; ^{<25716>}**Isaiah 57:16**, and in this book, ^{<21137>}**Ecclesiastes 12:7**, and in many other places. In this book it is used also to signify the *breath*, *spirit*, or *soul* of a beast. While it was said in ^{<21019>}**Ecclesiastes 3:19**, *they have all one breath*, i.e., the *man* and the *beast* live the same kind of animal life; in this verse, a proper distinction is made between the **j wr ruach**, or *soul* of man, and the **j wr ruach**, or *soul* of the beast: the one *goeth upwards*, the other *goeth downwards*. The literal translation of these important words is this: “Who considereth the **j wr ruach**) immortal spirit of the sons of Adam, which ascendeth? it is from above; (**hl [ml ayh hi lemalah**;) and the spirit or breath of the cattle which descendeth? it is downwards unto the earth,” i.e., it tends to the earth only. This place gives no countenance to the materiality of the soul; and yet it is the strongest hold to which the cold and fruitless materialist can resort.

Solomon most evidently makes an *essential difference* between the human soul and that of brutes. Both have *souls*, but of different natures: the soul of man was made for *God*, and to *God* it shall return: *God is its portion*, and when a holy soul leaves the body, it goes to *paradise*. The soul of the beast was made to *derive its happiness* from this *lower world*. Brutes shall have a resurrection, and have an endless enjoyment in a *new earth*. The *body of man* shall arise, and join his *soul* that is already above; and both enjoy final blessedness in the fruition of God. That Solomon did not believe they had the *same kind of spirit*, and the same *final lot*, as some materialists and infidels say, is evident from ^{<21127>}**Ecclesiastes 12:7**: “The spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”

Verse 22. A man should rejoice in his own works] Do not turn God’s blessings into sin by perverseness and complaining; make the best of life. God will sweeten its bitters to you, if you be faithful. Remember this is the *state to prepare for glory*; and the evils of life may be so sanctified to you as to work for your good. Though even wretched *without*, you may be happy *within*; for God can make all grace to abound towards you. You may be happy if you please; cry to God, who never rejects the prayer of the humble, and gives his Holy Spirit to all them that ask him.

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 4

The vanity of life is increased by oppression, 1-3; by envy, 4; by idleness, 5. The misery of a solitary life, and the advantages of society, 6-12. A poor and wise child; better than an old and foolish king, 13. The uncertainty of popular favour, 14-16.

NOTES ON CHAP. 4

Verse 1. Considered all the oppressions] **מַיִצְוִן** [*ashukim* signifies any kind of *injury* which a man can receive in his *person*, his *property*, or his *good fame*.

On the side of their oppressors there was power] And, therefore, neither protection nor comfort for the oppressed.

Verse 2. Wherefore I praised the dead] I considered those happy who had escaped from the pilgrimage of life to the place where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest.

Verse 3. Which hath not yet been] Better never to have been born into the world, than to have *seen* and *suffered* so many miseries.

Verse 4. For this a man is envied] It is not by injustice and wrong only that men suffer, but through *envy* also. For if a man act uprightly and properly in the world, he soon becomes the object of his neighbour's envy and calumny too. Therefore the encouragement to do good, to act an upright part, is very little. This constitutes a part of the *vain* and *empty* system of human life.

Verse 5. The fool foldeth his hands] After all, without *labour* and *industry* no man can get any comfort in life; and he who gives way to idleness is the veriest of fools.

Verse 6. Better is a handful with quietness] These may be the words of the *slothful* man, and spoken in vindication of his idleness; as if he had said, "Every man who labours and amasses property is the object of *envy*, and is marked by the oppressor as a subject for spoil; better, therefore, to act as I

do; gain little, and have little, and enjoy my handful with quietness.” Or the words may contain Solomon’s *reflection* on the subject.

Verse 8. There is one alone, and there is not a second] Here *covetousness* and *avarice* are characterized. The man who is the centre of his own existence; has neither wife, child, nor legal heir; and yet is as intent on getting money as if he had the largest family to provide for; nor does he only labour with intense application, but he even refuses himself the comforts of life out of his own gains! This is not only *vanity*, the excess of foolishness, but it is also *sore travail*.

Verse 9. Two are better than one] Married life is infinitely to be preferred to this kind of life, for the very reasons alleged below, and which require no explanation.

Verse 13. Better is a poor and a wise child] The *Targum* applies this to *Abraham*. “Abraham was a *poor child* of only *three* years of age; but he had the spirit of prophecy, and he refused to worship the idols which the *old foolish king-Nimrod*-had set up; therefore Nimrod cast him into a furnace of fire. But the Lord worked a miracle and delivered him. Yet here was no knowledge in Nimrod, and he would not be *admonished*.” The *Targum* proceeds:

Verse 14. For out of prison he cometh to reign] “Then Abraham left the country of the idolaters, where he had been *imprisoned*, and came and *reigned* over the land of Canaan; and Nimrod became *poor* in this world.” This is the *fact* to which the ancient rabbins supposed Solomon to allude.

Verse 15. With the second child that shall stand up] The *Targum* applies this to the case of *Jeroboam* and *Rehoboam*. History affords many instances of mean persons raised to sovereign authority, and of kings being reduced to the meanest offices, and to a morsel of bread. Agrippa himself ascended the throne of Israel after having been long in prison. See Josephus, Ant. lib. xviii. c. 8. This the heathens attributed to *fortune*.

*Si fortuna volet, fies de rhetore consul;
Si volet haec eadem, fies de consule rhetor.
JUV. Sat. vii., ver. 197.*

Though I have given what the Jews suppose to be the allusion in these verses, yet the reader may doubt whether the reference be correct. There is

a case implied, whether from *fact* or *assumption* I cannot say; but it seems to be this:

A king who had abused the authority vested in him by oppressing the people, had a son whose prudent conduct promised much comfort to the nation, when he should come to the throne. The father, seeing the popular wish, and becoming jealous of his son, *shut him up in prison*. In the interim the old king either *dies* or is *deposed*, and the son is brought *out of prison*, and *placed on the throne*. Then (^{<210415>} **Ecclesiastes 4:15, 16**) multitudes of the people flock to him, and begin to *walk under the sun*; i.e., the prosperous state to which the nation is raised by its redemption from the former tyranny. However, the wise man insinuates that this *sunshine* will not last long. The young king, feeling the reins in his own hands, and being surrounded by those whose interest it was to *flatter* in order to obtain and continue in *court favour*, he also becomes corrupted so that those who come after shall have no cause of rejoicing in him. This appears to be the case; and similar cases have frequently occurred, not only in *Asiatic*, but also in *European* history, I have, in another place, referred to the case of *Rushn Achter*, who was brought *out of prison* and set upon the *throne of Hindoostan*. This is expressed in the following elegant Persian couplet, where his fortune is represented as similar to that of the patriarch *Joseph*:—

[Persian]

[Persian]

***“The bright star is now become a moon:
Joseph is taken out of prison, and become a king.”***

Rushn Achter signifies a *bright* or *splendid star*.

Verse 16. There is **no end of all the people**] This is supposed to refer to the multitudes of people who hail the advent and accession of a new sovereign; for, as *Suetonius* remarks, *A plerisque adorari solem orientem*, “Most people adore the rising sun.” But when the new king becomes old, very few regard him; and perhaps he lives long enough to be as much despised by the very persons who before were ready to worship him. This is also a miserable vanity. Thus the blooming heir-

***“Shall feel the sad reverse: honoured awhile;
Then, like his sire, contemn’d, abhorr’d, forgot.” — C.***

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 5

The reverence to be observed in attending Divine worship, 1-3. We should be faithful to our engagements, 4-7. The oppression of the innocent, 8. The king dependent on the produce of the soil, 9. Against covetousness, 10, 11. The peace of the honest labourer, 12. The evil effect of riches, 13, 14. Man cannot carry his property to the grave, 15-17. We should thankfully enjoy the blessings of God, 18-20.

NOTES ON CHAP. 5

Verse 1. Keep thy foot] This verse the *Hebrew* and all the versions join to the preceding chapter.

Solomon, having before intimated, though very briefly, that the only cure against human vanity is a due sense of religion, now enters more largely on this important subject, and gives some excellent directions with regard to the right performance of Divine service, the nature of vocal and mental prayer, the danger of rash vows, &c.—C.

The whole verse might be more literally translated thus:—

“Guard thy steps as thou art going to the house of God; and approach to hearken, and not to give the sacrifice of fools, for none of them have knowledge about doing evil.” “They offer gifts for their sins, and do not turn from their evil works; for they know not (they distinguish not) between good and evil.” See the *Chaldee*.

Verse 2. Be not rash with thy mouth] Do not hasten with thy mouth; weigh thy words, feel deeply, think much, speak little.

*“When ye approach his altar, on your lips
Set strictest guard; and let your thoughts be pure,
Fervent, and recollected. Thus prepared,
Send up the silent breathings of your souls,
Submissive to his will.” C.*

Verse 3. For a dream cometh] That is, as *dreams* are generally the effect of the business in which we have been engaged during the day; so a *multitude of words* evidence the feeble workings of the foolish heart.

Verse 4. When thou vowest a vow] When in distress and difficulty, men are apt to promise much to God if he will relieve them; but generally forget the vow when the distress or trouble is gone by.

Verse 5. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, &c.] We are under *constant obligations* to live to God; no *vow* can make it more so. Yet, there may be cases in which we should bind ourselves to take up some particular cross, to perform some particular duty, to forego some particular attachment that does not tend to bring our souls nearer to God. Then, if fully determined, and strong in faith relative to the point, *bind* and *hold fast*; but if not fully, rationally, and conscientiously determined, “do not suffer thy mouth to cause thy soul to sin.”

Verse 6. Neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error] Nor think of saying “before the cruel angel, who shall exercise authority over thee in the judgment of the great day, that thou didst it through ignorance.”—*Chaldee*. I believe by the *angel* nothing else is intended than the *priest*, whose business it was to take cognizance of *vows* and *offerings*. See ^{<1804>}**Leviticus 5:4, 5**. In ^{<3007>}**Malachi 2:7**, the priest is called the “angel of the Lord of hosts.”

Verse 7. In—dreams—are—divers vanities; but fear thou God.] If, by the disturbed state of thy mind during the day, or by Satanic influence, thou dream of evil, do not give way to any unreasonable fears, or gloomy forebodings, of any coming mischief:—FEAR GOD. Fear neither the *dream* nor its *interpretation*; God, will take care of and protect thee. Most certainly, he that fears God need fear nothing else. Well may an upright soul say to *Satan* himself, I fear God; and because I fear *him*, I do not fear *thee*.

Verse 8. If thou seest the oppression of the poor] For this was a frequent case under all governments; and especially in the *provinces* or *colonies* which being far from the *seat* of government, were generally oppressed by the sovereign’s deputies.

Marvel not at the matter] xpxj h *hachephets*, the *will*, i.e., of God; which permits such evils to take place; for all things shall work together for good to them that love him.

*“Marvel not,
 Ye righteous, if his dispensations here
 Unequal seem. What, though disorders reign?
 He still presides, and with unerring hand
 Directs the vast machine. His wisdom can
 From discord harmony produce; and make
 Even vice itself subservient to his ends.”*

Verse 9. The profit of the earth is for all] The earth, if properly cultivated, is capable of producing food for every living creature; and without cultivation none has a right to expect bread.

The king himself is served by the field.] Without the field he cannot have supplies for his own house; and, unless *agriculture* flourish, the necessary expenses of the state cannot be defrayed. Thus, God joins the *head* and *feet* together; for while the peasant is protected by the king as executor of the laws, the king himself is dependent on the peasant; as the wealth of the nation is the fruit of the labourer’s toil.

Verse 10. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver] The more he gets, the more he would get; for the saying is true:—

Crescit amor nummi, quantum ipsa pecunia crescit.

“The love of money increases, in proportion as money itself increases.”

Verse 11. When goods increase] An increase of property always brings an increase of expense, by a multitude of servants; and the owner really possesses no more, and probably *enjoys* much less, than he did, when every day provided its own bread, and could lay up no store for the next. But if he have more *enjoyment*, his cares are multiplied; and he has no kind of profit. “This also is vanity.”

Verse 12. The sleep of a labouring man is sweet] His labour is healthy exercise. He is without possessions, and without cares; his sleep, being undisturbed, is sound and refreshing.

Verse 13. Riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.] This may be the case through various causes: 1. He may make an improper use of them, and lose his health by them. 2. He may join in an unfortunate partnership and lose all. 3. His riches may excite the desire of the *robber*; and he may spoil him of his goods, and even take away his life. 4. Or, he

may leave them to his son, who turns profligate, spends the *whole*, and ruins both his body and soul. I have seen this again and again.

Verse 14. And he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand.] He has been stripped of his property by unfortunate trade or by plunderers; and he has nothing to leave to his children.

Verse 15. As he came forth] However it may be, he himself shall carry nothing with him into the eternal world. If he die worth millions, those millions are dead to him for ever; so he has had no real profit from all his labours, cares, anxieties, and vast property!

Verse 17. All his days also he eateth in darkness] Even his enjoyments are embittered by *uncertainty*. He fears for his goods; the possibility of being deprived of them fills his heart with anguish. But instead of *I kay yochel*, “he shall eat,” *kl y yelech*, “he shall walk,” is the reading of several MSS. *He walks* in darkness—he has no evidence of salvation. There is no ray of light from God to penetrate the gloom; and all beyond life is darkness impenetrable!

And wrath with his sickness.] His *last hours* are *awful*; for,

*“Counting on long years of pleasure here,
He’s quite unfurnish’d for the world to come.”*

BLAIR.

He is full of anguish at the *thought* of death; but the *fear* of it is horrible. But if he have a sense of *God’s wrath* in his guilty conscience, what horror can be compared with his horror!

Verse 18. Behold that which I have seen] This is the result of my observations and experience. God gives every man, in the course of his providence, the necessaries of life; and it is his will that he should thankfully use them.

For it is his portion.] What is requisite for him in the lower world; without them his life cannot subsist, and earthly blessings are as truly the *portion* of his *body* and *animal life*, as the *salvation of God* is the portion of his soul.

Verse 20. For he shall not much remember] The person who acts in this way, extracts all the good requisite from life. He passes through things temporal so as not to lose those that are eternal:—

*“Calm and serene, the road of life to him,
Or long or short, rugged or smooth, with thorns
O’erspread, or gay with flowers, is but a road.
Such fare as offers grateful he accepts,
And smiling to his native home proceeds.” — C.*

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 6

The vanity of riches without use, 1, 2. Of children and of old age without riches and enjoyment, 3-7. Man does not know what is good for himself, 8-12.

NOTES ON CHAP. 6

Verse 2. A man to whom God hath given riches] A man may possess much earthly goods, and yet enjoy nothing of them. Possession and fruition are not necessarily joined together; and this is also among the *vanities* of life. It is worthy of remark, that it belongs to God as much to give the power to enjoy as it does to give the earthly blessings. A wise heathen saw this:—

Di tibi divitias dederant, artemque fruendi.

HOR. Ep. lib. i., ep. 4, ver. 7.

“The gods had given thee riches, and the art to enjoy them.”

Verse 3. If a man beget a hundred children] If he have the most numerous family and the largest possessions, and is so much attached to his riches that he grudges himself a monument; an *abortion* in the eye of reason is to be preferred to such a man; *himself* is contemptible, and his *life* worthless. The abortion *comes in with vanity*—balks expectation, *departs in darkness*—never opened its eyes upon the light, and *its name is covered with darkness*—it has no place in the family register, or in the chronicles of Israel. This, that hath neither *seen the sun, nor known any thing* is preferable to the *miser* who has his coffers and granaries well furnished, should he have *lived a thousand years, and had a hundred children*. He *has seen*—possessed, no good; *and he and the abortion go to one place, equally unknown, and wholly forgotten*.

Verse 7. All the labour of man] This is the grand primary object of all human labour; merely to provide for the support of life by procuring things *necessary*. And life only exists for the sake of the soul; because man puts these things in place of *spiritual good*, the *appetite*—the intense desire after the *supreme good*—is not *satisfied*. When man learns to provide as distinctly for his *soul* as he does for his *body*, then he will begin to be happy, and may soon attain his end.

Verse 8. For what hath the wise more than the fool?] They must both labour for the same end. Both depend upon the labour of themselves or others for the necessaries of life. Both must eat and drink in order to live; and the rich man can no more eat two meals at a time, than he can comfortably wear two changes of raiment. The necessaries of life are the same to both, and their *condition* in life is nearly similar; liable to the same diseases, dissolution, and death.

Verse 9. Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire] This is translated by the *Vulgate*, as a sort of adage: *Melius est videre quod cupias, quam desiderare quod nescias*, “It is better to see what one desires than to covet what one knows not.” It is better to enjoy the present than to feed one’s self with vain desires of the *future*. What we translate *the wandering of desire*, *vpn Ēl hm mehaloch nephesh*, is the *travelling of the soul*. What is this? Does it simply mean *desire*? Or is there any reference here to the state of *separate spirits*! It however shows the soul to be in a *restless state*, and consequently to be *unhappy*. If Christ dwell in the heart by faith, the soul is then *at rest*, and this is properly the *rest of the people of God*.

Verse 10. That which hath been is named already] The *Hebrew* of this verse might be translated, “Who is he who is? His name has been already called. And it is known that he is Adam; and that he cannot contend in judgment with him who is stronger than he.”

“What is more excellent than man; yet can he not, in the lawe, get the victory of him that is mightier than he.”—COVERDALE.

ADAM is his name; and it at once points out, 1. His *dignity*; he was made in the image of God. 2. His *fall*; he sinned against his Maker and was cast out of Paradise. And 3. His *recovery* by *Christ*; the *second man* (Adam) was *the Lord from heaven*, and a *quickenng Spirit*.

Verse 12. For who knoweth what is good for man in this life] Those things which we deem *good* are often *evil*. And those which we think *evil* are often *good*. So ignorant are we, that we run the greatest hazard in making a *choice*. It is better to leave ourselves and our concerns in the hands of the Lord, than to keep them in our own.

For who can tell a man what shall be after him] Futurity is with God. While he lives, man wishes to know what is before him. When he is about

to die, he wishes to know what will be after him. All this is vanity; God, because he is merciful, will reveal neither.

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 7

The value of a good name, 1. Advantages of sorrow and correction, 2-5. The emptiness of a fool's joy, 6. Of oppression, 7. The end better than the beginning, 8. Against hastiness of spirit, 9. Comparison of former and present times, 10. Excellence of wisdom, 11, 12. Of the dispensations of Providence, 13-15. Against extremes, 16-18. The strength of wisdom, 19. Man is ever liable to sin and mistake, 20. We should guard our words, 21, 22. Difficulty of obtaining wisdom, 23-25. A bad woman dangerous, 26. There are few who are really upright, 27-29.

NOTES ON CHAP. 7

Verse 1. A good name] Unsatisfactory as all sublunary things are, yet still there are some which are of great consequence, and among them a good name. The place is well paraphrased in the following verses:—

*“A spotless name,
By virtuous deeds acquired, is sweeter far
Than fragrant balms, whose odours round diffused
Regale the invited guests. Well may such men
Rejoice at death's approach, and bless the hours
That end their toilsome pilgrimage; assured
That till the race of life is finish'd none
Can be completely blest.”*

Verse 2. It is better to go to the house of mourning] *Birthdays* were generally kept with great festivity, and to these the wise man most probably refers; but according to his maxim, the miseries of life were so many and so oppressive that the day of a man's *death* was to be preferred to the *day of his birth*. But, in dependently of the allusion, it is much more profitable to visit the house of mourning for the dead than the house of festivity. In the *former* we find occasion for serious and deeply edifying thoughts and reflections; from the *latter* we seldom return with one profitable thought or one solid impression.

Verse 3. Sorrow is better than laughter] The reason is immediately given; for *by the sorrow of the countenance—the grief of heart* that shows itself in the countenance—

The heart is made better.] In such cases, most men try themselves at the tribunal of their own consciences, and resolve on amendment of life.

Verse 4. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning] A wise man loves those occasions from which he can derive spiritual advantage; and therefore prefers *visiting the sick*, and *sympathizing* with those who have *suffered privations* by death. But the *fool*—the gay, thoughtless, and giddy—prefers places and times of diversion and amusement. Here he is prevented from seriously considering either himself or his latter end. The grand fault and misfortune of youth.

Verse 6. For as the crackling of thorns] They make a great noise, a great blaze; and are extinguished in a few moments. Such indeed, comparatively, are the joys of life; they are noisy, flashy, and transitory.

Verse 7. Oppression maketh a wise man mad] This has been translated with good show of reason, “Surely oppression shall give lustre to a wise man: but a gift corrupteth the heart.”

The chief difference here is in the word **l l why yeholel**, which, from the root **l l h halal**, signifies to *glisten, irradiate*, as well as to *move briskly, to be mad, furious, in a rage*; and certainly the former meaning suits this place best. We cannot think that the wise man—he that is truly religious, (for this is its meaning in the language of Solomon,) can be made *mad* by any kind of oppression; but as he trusts in God, so in patience he possesses his soul.

Verse 8. Better is the end] We can then judge of the whole, and especially if the matter relate to the conduct of Divine Providence. At the beginning we are often apt to make very rash conjectures, and often suppose that such and such things are against us; and that every thing is going wrong. Dr. *Byrom* gives good advice on such a subject:—

*“With patient mind thy course of duty run:
God nothing does, nor suffers to be done,
But thou wouldst do thyself, couldst thou but see
The end of all events, as well as HE.”*

I may add, in the words of our paraphrast:—

*“Wait the result, nor ask with frantic rage
Why God permits such things. His ways, though now
Involved in clouds and darkness, will appear
All right, when from thine eyes the mist is cleared.
Till then, to learn submission to his will
More wisdom shows, than vainly thus to attempt
Exploring what thou canst not comprehend,
And God for wisest ends thinks fit to hide.” — C.*

Verse 9. Anger resteth in the bosom of fools.] A wise man, off his guard, may feel it for a moment: but in him it cannot *rest*: it is a *fire* which he immediately casts out of his breast. But the *fool*—the man who is under the dominion of his own tempers, harbours and fosters it, till it takes the form of malice, and then excites him to seek full revenge on those whom he deems enemies. Hence that class of *dangerous* and *empty fools* called *duellists*.

Verse 10. The former days were better than these?] This is a *common saying*; and it is as *foolish* as it is common. There is no weight nor truth in it; but men use it to excuse their crimes, and the folly of their conduct. “In former times, say they, men might be more religious, use more self-denial, be more exemplary.” This is *all false*. In former days men were wicked as they are now, and religion was unfashionable: God also is the same *now* as he was *then*; as just, as merciful, as ready to help: and there is no depravity in the age that will excuse your crimes, your follies, and your carelessness.

Among the oriental proverbs I find the following:—

“Many say, *This is a corrupt age*. This mode of speaking is not just; it is not the age that is corrupt, but the men of the age.”

Verse 11. Wisdom is good with an inheritance] In this chapter Solomon introduces many observations which appear to be made by objectors against his doctrine; and as he was satisfied of their futility, he proposes them in their own full strength, and then combats and destroys them. It is quite necessary to attend to this; else we shall take the *objector’s words* for *those of Solomon*; and think, as some have done, that the wise man contradicts and refutes himself. Observations, reflections, and objections of friends and adversaries are frequently introduced in the works of ancient authors, without mentioning them as such. This is frequent, more

particularly in *ethic* writers; and we have many specimens in *Horace*; and without this distinction, it would be impossible to make sense of some of his writings. Here, an *objector*, who had listened to the wise man declaiming in favour of wisdom, suddenly interrupts him, and says in effect, “I grant the truth of what you have said. Wisdom is very good in its place; but what is it without property? A man who has a good inheritance may be profited by wisdom, because it will show him how to manage it to the best advantage.”

Verse 12. Wisdom is a defence] To whom Solomon answers: All true *wisdom* is most undoubtedly a great advantage to men in all circumstances; and *money* is also of great use: but it cannot be compared to wisdom. *Knowledge* of Divine and human things is a great blessing. *Money* is the means of supporting our animal life: but *wisdom*—the religion of the true God—gives *life* to *them that have it*. *Money* cannot procure the favour of God, nor give *life* to the soul.

Verse 13. Consider the work of God] Such is the nature of his providence, that it puts money into the hands of few: but wisdom is within the reach of all. The first is not necessary to happiness; therefore, it is not offered to men; the latter is; and therefore God, in his goodness, offers it to the whole human race. The former can rarely be acquired, for God puts it out of the reach of most men, and you cannot *make that straight which he has made crooked*; the latter may be easily attained by every person who carefully and seriously seeks it from God.

Verse 14. In the day of prosperity be joyful] When ye receive these temporal gifts from God, enjoy them, and be thankful to the Giver: but remember, this sunshine will not *always* last. God has balanced *prosperity* and *adversity* against each other; and were it not so, how many would put the former in the place of God himself!

Verse 15. There is a just man that perisheth] This is another objection as if he had said, “I also have had considerable experience; and I have not discovered any marked approbation of the conduct of the righteous, or disapprobation of that of the wicked. On the contrary, I have seen a righteous man perish, while employed in the work of righteousness; and a wicked man prosperous, and even exalted, while living wickedly. The former is indeed a victim to his righteousness, while the life and prosperity of the latter were preserved: hence I conclude, it is not prudent, whatever good there may be in religion, and whatever excellence in wisdom, that

men should be overmuch righteous, or over-wise: for why should they by austerity and hard study destroy themselves?" So far the objector.

Verse 16. Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?] μmwvt *tishshomem*, make thyself *desolate*, so that thou shalt be obliged to stand *alone*; neither make thyself over-wise, $\mu\text{kj tt}$ *tithchaccam*, do not pretend to abundance of wisdom. Why shouldest thou be so singular? In other words, and in modern language, "There is no need of all this watching, fasting, praying, self-denial, &c., you carry things to *extremes*. Why should you wish to be reputed singular and precise?" To this the man of God answers:—

Verse 17. Be not overmuch wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?] hbrh [vrt l a *al tirsha harbeh*. Do not multiply wickedness, do not add direct opposition to godliness to the rest of your crimes. Why should you provoke God to destroy you before your time? Perdition will come soon enough. If you will not turn from your sins, and avoid it finally, yet keep out of it as long as you can.

It cannot be supposed, except by those who are totally unacquainted with the nature of true religion, that a man may have *too much holiness, too much of the life of God* in his soul! And yet a learned doctor, in three sermons on this text, has endeavoured to show, out-doing Solomon's infidel, "the *sin, folly, and danger* of being righteous overmuch." O rare darkness!

Verse 18. It is good that thou shouldest take hold or this] Do not let such an observation slip: *take hold of this; do not forget that*. Get what you can in an honest way; but do not forget to get true religion; for he that fears God will be saved from all evil.

Verse 19. Wisdom strengtheneth the wise] One wise, thoroughly learned, and scientific man, may be of more use in fortifying and defending a city, than ten *princes*. Witness the case of *Syracuse*, when attacked by the Romans both by sea and land. *Archimedes*, by his engines, burnt and dashed their fleet to pieces, and destroyed all that came near the walls. And had not the city been betrayed, and he killed, all their force and skill could not have taken it.

Verse 20. There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.] acj y al *lo yechta*, that *may not sin*. There is not a man

upon earth, however just he may be, and habituated to do good, but is *peccable*—liable to commit sin; and therefore should continually watch and pray, and depend upon the Lord. But the text does not say, the *just man does commit sin*, but simply that he *may sin*; and so our translators have rendered it in ^{<1025>}**1 Samuel 2:25**, twice in ^{<1081>}**1 Kings 8:31, 46**, and ^{<1406>}**2 Chronicles 6:36**; and the reader is requested to consult the note on ^{<1086>}**1 Kings 8:46**, where the proper construction of this word may be found, and the doctrine in question is fully considered.

Verse 21. Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken] This is good advice, and much for every man's peace through life.

Thy servant curse thee] **Ēl l qm** *mekallelecha*, make light of thee, speak evil of thee.

Verse 22. Thou thyself-hast cursed others.] **tl l q** *kalalta*, thou hast spoken evil; hast vilified others. O, who is free from evil speaking, from uncharitable speaking; from detailing their neighbour's faults, from whispering, talebearing, and backbiting? Do not wonder if God, in his justice, permit *thee* to be calumniated, seeing thou hast so frequently calumniated others. See my discourse on ^{<19150>}**Psalm 15:1-5**.

Verse 23. All this have I proved by wisdom] These rules I have laid down for my own conduct, and sought after more wisdom; but have fallen far short of what I wished to be.

Verse 24. That which is far off] Though the wisdom that is essential to our salvation may be soon learned, through the teaching of the Spirit of wisdom, yet in wisdom itself there are *extents* and *depths* which none can reach or fathom.

Verse 25. I applied mine heart] I cast about, **ytwbs** *sabbothi*, I made a circuit; I circumscribed the ground I was to traverse; and all within my circle I was determined to *know*, and to *investigate*, and to *seek out wisdom*, and the *reason of things*. Has man *reason* and *understanding*? If so, then this is his work. God as much calls him to use these powers in this way, as to believe on the Lord Jesus that he may be saved; and he that does not, according to the means in his power, is a slothful servant, from whom God may justly take away the misemployed or not used talent, and punish him for his neglect. Every doctrine of God is a subject both for reason and faith to work on.

To know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.]

*“And my own heart, with scrutiny severe,
By far the harder task survey’d; intent
To trace that wisdom which from heaven descends,
Fountain of living waters, and to explore
The source of human folly, whose foul streams
Intoxicate and kill.” —C.*

Verse 26. And I find more bitter than death the woman] After all his investigation of the *wickedness of folly*, and the *foolishness of madness*, he found nothing equally dangerous and ruinous with the *blandishments of cunning women*. When once the affections are entangled, escape without ruin is almost impossible.

Whoso pleaseth God] The man who walks with God, and he alone, shall escape this sore evil: and even he that fears God, if he get with an artful woman, may be soon robbed of his strength, and become like other men. A bad or artful woman is represented as a *company of hunters*, with *nets, gins, &c.*, to catch their prey.

Verse 27. Counting one by one] I have gone over every particular. I have compared one thing with another; man with woman, his wisdom with her wiles; his strength with her blandishments; his influence with her ascendancy; his powers of reason with her arts and cunning; and in a *thousand* men, I have found *one* thoroughly upright *man*; but among *one thousand* women I have not found *one such*. This is a lamentable account of the *state of morals* in Judea, in the days of the wise King Solomon. Thank God! it would not be difficult to get a *tithe* of *both* in the same number in the present day.

The *Targum* gives this a curious turn:—”There is another thing which my soul has sought, but could not find: a man perfect and innocent, and without corruption, from the days of Adam until *Abraham* the just was born; who was found faithful and upright among the thousand kings who came together to construct the tower of Babel: but a *woman* like to *Sarah* among the wives of all those kings I have not found.”

Verse 29. Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright] Whatever evil may be now found among men and women, it is not of God; for God made them all upright. This is a singular verse, and has been most variously translated:

µybr twnbvj wvqb hmhw rvy µdah ta µyhl ah hc[*asah haelohim eth haadam yashar vehemhah bikkeshu chishbonoth rabbim.*

“Elohim has made mankind upright, and they have sought many computations.”

“*He hath meddled with endless questions.*”—VULGATE.

“*Many reasonings.*”—SEPTUAGINT, SYRIAC, and ARABIC.

“*They seek dyverse sotylties.*”—COVERDALE.

And he himself mengide with questions without eend.—Old MS. Bible.

The *Targum* considers the text as speaking of *Adam* and *Eve*.

“This have I found out, that the Lord made the first man upright before him, and innocent: but the serpent and Eve seduced him to eat of the fruit of the tree, which gave the power to those who ate of it to discern between good and evil; and was the cause that death came upon him, and all the inhabitants of the earth; and they sought that they might find out *many stratagems* to bring this evil upon all the inhabitants of the world.”

I doubt much whether the word **twnbvj** *chishbonoth* should be taken in a *bad* sense. It may signify the whole of human *devices, imaginations, inventions, artifice*, with all their products; arts, sciences, schemes, plans, and all that they have found out for the destruction or melioration of life. God has given man wondrous faculties; and of them he has made strange uses, and sovereign abuses: and they have been, in consequence, at one time his help, and at another his bane. This is the fair way of understanding this question.

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 8

A man's wisdom makes his face shine, 1. Kings are to be greatly respected, 2-4. Of him who keeps the commandment; of the misery of man; of the certainty of death, 5-8. Of him that rules another to his own hurt, 9. The end of the wicked, 10. God's longsuffering, 11, 12. It shall be ill with wicked men, 13. Strange events in the course of Providence, 14, 15. God's works cannot be found out, 16, 17.

NOTES ON CHAP. 8

Verse 1. Who knoweth the interpretation] *r***vp** *pesh*, a pure *Chaldee* word, found nowhere else in the Bible but in the *Chaldee* parts of *Daniel*. "A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine." Every state of the heart shines through the countenance; but there is such an evidence of the contented, happy, pure, benevolent state of the soul in the *face* of a truly pious man, that it must be observed, and cannot be mistaken. In the Hebrew the former clause of this verse ends the preceding chapter. Who has ever been deceived in the appearance of the face that belonged to a savage heart? Those who represent, by painting or otherwise, a *wise man*, with a *gravely sour face*, striking awe and forbidding approach, have either mistaken the man, or are unacquainted with some essential principles of their art.

The boldness of his face shall be changed.] Instead of *anvy* *yeshunne*, which signifies *shall be hated*, many of *Kennicott's* and *Deuteronomy Rossi's* MSS. have *hnvy* *yeshunneh*, *shall be changed* or *doubled*. Hence the verse might be read, "The wisdom of a man shall illuminate his face; and the strength of his countenance shall be doubled." He shall speak with full confidence and conviction on a subject which he perfectly understands, and all will feel the weight of his observations.

Verse 2. To keep the king's commandment] This sentence would be better translated, *I keep the mouth of the king*; I take good heed not to meddle with state secrets; and if I know, to hide them. Or, I am obedient to the commands of the laws; I feel myself bound by whatever the king has decreed.

In regard of the oath of God.] You have sworn obedience to him; keep your oath, for the engagement was made in the *presence of God*. It appears that the Jewish princes and chiefs took an oath of fidelity to their kings. This appears to have been done to *David*, ^{<1080>}**2 Samuel 5:1-3**; to *Joash*, ^{<2117>}**2 Kings 11:17**; and to *Solomon*, ^{<1322>}**1 Chronicles 29:24**.

Verse 3. Be not hasty] I consider the first *five* verses here as directions to *courtiers*, and the more immediate servants of kings.

Be steadily faithful to your sovereign. *Do not stand in an evil thing*. If you have done wrong, do not endeavour to vindicate yourself before him; it is of no use; his power is *absolute*, and *he will do what he pleases*. He will take his *own view* of the subject, and he will *retain* it. The language of a despotic sovereign was ever this, *Sic volo sic jubeo, stat pro ratione voluntas*; "I will this. I command that. No hesitation! My will is law!" Therefore it is added here, *Where the word of a king is*, there is *power-influence*, authority, and the sword. And *who may say unto him*, whether he acts right or wrong, *What doest thou?* ^{<21004>}**Ecclesiastes 8:4**. No wonder in such governments there are so many *revolutions*; but they are *revolutions* without *amendment*, as it is one *tyrant* rising up to destroy *another*, who, when seated in authority, acts in the way of his predecessor; till another, like himself, do to him as he has done to the former. In our country, after a long trial, we find that a *mixed monarchy* is the safest, best, and most useful form of government: we have had, it is true, unprincipled ministers, who wished to turn our *limited* into an *absolute monarchy*; and they were always ready to state that *an absolute monarchy was best*. Granted; provided the monarch be as *wise*, as *holy*, and as *powerful* as GOD!

Verse 5. Both time and judgment.] It is a matter of great importance to be able to discern WHEN and HOW both to *speak* and *act*; but when *time* and *manner* are both determined, the *matter* comes next. WHAT shall I *speak*? WHAT shall I *do*? *When*, *how*, and *what*, answer to *time*, *manner*, and *matter*. To discern all these, and act suitably, is a *lesson* for a *philosopher*, and a *study* for a *Christian*.

Verse 6. To every purpose there is time] xpj *chaphets*, every *volition*, every thing that *depends on the will of man*. He has generally the *opportunity* to do whatever he purposes; and as his purposes are frequently evil, his acts are so too: and in consequence his misery is great.

Verse 8. There is **no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit]** The *Chaldee* has, “There is no man who can rule over the spirit of the breath, so as to prevent the animal life from leaving the body of man.” Others translate to this sense: “No man hath power over the *wind* to restrain the wind; and none has power over *death* to restrain him; and when a man engages as a *soldier*, he cannot be discharged from the war till it is ended; and by wickedness no man shall be delivered from any evil.” Taking it in this way, these are maxims which contain self-evident truths. Others suppose the verse to refer to the *king* who *tyrannizes* over and oppresses his people. He shall also account to God for his actions; he shall die, and he cannot prevent it; and when he is judged, his wickedness cannot deliver him.

Verse 9. One man ruleth over another to his own hurt.] This may be spoken of rulers generally, who, instead of *feeding, fleece the flock*; tyrants and oppressors, who come to an untimely end by their mismanagement of the offices of the state. All these things relate to *Asiatic* despots, and have ever been more applicable to *them* than to any other sovereigns in the world. They were despotic; they still are so.

Verse 10. Who had come and gone from the place of the holy] The place of the holy is the sacred office which they held, *anointed* either as *kings* or *priests* to God; and, not having fulfilled the holy office in a holy way, have been carried to their *graves* without *lamentation*, and lie among the dead without remembrance.

Verse 11. Because sentence] $\mu\text{g}\text{t}\text{p}$ *pithgam*, a *Divine decree* or *declaration*. This is no *Hebrew*, but a mere *Chaldee* word, and occurs only in the *later books* of the Bible-*Esther*, *Ezra* and *Daniel*, and nowhere else but in this place. Because God does not immediately punish every delinquency, men think he disregards evil acts; and therefore they are emboldened to sin on. So this longsuffering of God, which *leadeth to repentance*, is abused so as to *lead to farther crimes!* When men sin against the remedy of their salvation, how can they escape perdition?

Verse 12. Though a sinner do evil a hundred times] If God bear so long with a transgressor, waiting in his longsuffering for him to repent and turn to him, surely he will be peculiarly kind to them that *fear him*, and endeavour to walk uprightly before him.

Verse 13. But it shall not be well with the wicked] Let not the long-spared sinner presume that, because sentence is not speedily executed on his evil works, and he is suffered to go on to his *hundredth transgression*, God has forgotten to punish. No; *he feareth not before God*; and therefore he shall not ultimately escape.

Verse 14. There be just men] See on ^{<210716>}**Ecclesiastes 7:16.**

Verse 15. Then I commended mirth] These are some more of the cavils of the infidel objector: “Since *virtue* is frequently under oppression, and *vice* triumphs in health, and rolls in wealth, I see plainly that we should not trouble ourselves about future things; and therefore should be governed by the maxim EDE, BIBE, LUDE. *Post mortem nulla voluptas.*”

*Eat, drink, and play,
While here you may;
For soon as death
Has stopp'd your breath,
Ye ne'er shall see a cheerful day.*

Verse 16. When I applied mine heart to know wisdom] This is the reply of the wise man: “I have also considered these seeming contradictions. God governs the world; but we cannot see the reasons of his conduct, nor know why he does this, omits that, or permits a third thing. We may *study night and day*, and deprive ourselves of *rest and sleep*, but we shall never fathom the depths that are in the Divine government; but all is right and just. *This* is the state of *probation*; and in it neither can the wicked be punished, nor the righteous rewarded. But eternity is at hand; and then shall every man receive according to his works. He that spends his life in the *eat, drink, and play*, will find in that day that he has lost the *time* in *which* he could have prepared for *eternity*.”

Verse 17. Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun] I saw it to be of such a nature-1. That *a man cannot find it out*. 2. That if he *labour to find it out*, he shall not succeed. 3. That though he be *wise*—the *most instructed* among men, and *think to find it out*, he shall find *he is not able*. It is beyond the wisdom and power of man. How vain then are all your *cavils* about Providence. You do not understand it; you cannot comprehend it. Fear God!

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 9

No man knows, by any present sign, what is before him, 1. All things happen alike to all, 2, 3. Comparison of the state of the dead and the living, 4-6. Enjoy God's mercies, and live to his glory, 7-10. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, 11. Man is ignorant of futurity, 12, 13. The account of the little city, and the poor wise man, 14-18.

NOTES ON CHAP. 9

Verse 1. The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God] This is a continuation of the preceding subject; and here the wise man draws a conclusion from what he had seen, and from the well-known character of God, that the *righteous*, the *wise*, and *their conduct*, were all in *the hand of God*, protected by his power, and safe in his approbation: but we cannot judge from the occurrences which take place in life who are the objects of God's love or displeasure.

Verse 2. All things come alike to all] This is very generally true; but God often makes a difference; and his faithful followers witness many interventions of Divine Providence in their behalf. But there are general blessings, and general natural evils, that equally affect the just and the unjust. But in this all is right; the *evils* that are in nature are the effects of the FALL of man; and God will not suspend *general laws*, or *alter* them, to favour *individual* cases. Nor does he design that his approbation or disapprobation shall be shown by any of these occurrences. Every holy man has a testimony of God's approbation in his own heart; and this makes him truly happy, let outward things be as they may. And, in general, what the wicked suffer is the fruit of their own doings. But the general state of nature as to what are called *natural evils*, is just as it ought to be. There is *evil* enough to show that *man has fallen* from God, and *good* enough to show that God deals with him in *mercy*. I cannot see that there is any rational cause for me to stumble at the dispensations of Divine Providence on these accounts.

Verse 3. The heart of the sons of men is full of evil] No wonder then that the curse of God should be frequent in the earth.

Verse 4. For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope] While a man lives he hopes to *amend*, and he hopes to have a *better lot*; and thus life is spent, hoping to *grow better*, and hoping to *get more*. The *Vulgate* has, “There is none that shall live always, nor has any hope of such a thing.” Perhaps the best translation is the following: “What, therefore, is to be chosen? In him that is living there is hope.” Then choose that eternal life which thou hopest to possess.

A living dog is better than a dead lion.] I suppose this was a proverb. The smallest measure of *animal* existence is better than the largest of *dead matter*. The poorest living peasant is infinitely above Alexander the Great.

Verse 5. The living know that they shall die] This is so self-evident that none can doubt it; and therefore all that have this conviction should prepare for death and eternal blessedness.

But the dead know not any thing] Cut off from *life*, they know nothing of *what passes under the sun*. Their day of *probation* is ended, and therefore they can have no farther *reward* in living a holy life; nor can they be liable to any *farther punishment* for crimes in a state of probation, that being ended.

Verse 6. Also their love, and their hatred] It is evident that he speaks here of the ignorance, want of power, &c., of the *dead*, in reference only to *this life*. And though they have no more a *portion* under the sun, yet he does not intimate that they have none anywhere else. A man threatens to conquer kingdoms, &c. He dies; what are his *threats*?

Verse 7. Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy] Do not vex and perplex yourselves with the dispensations and mysteries of Providence; enjoy the blessings which God has given you, and live to his glory; and then *God will accept your works*.

Verse 8. Let thy garments be always white] The Jews wore white garments on festal occasions, as emblems of joy and innocence. Be always pure, and always happy. The inhabitants of India are all dressed in clean *white cotton*, and to this is the allusion in the text.

The *Targum* says: “At all times let thy garments be washed and pure from the stain of sin. Acquire a good name, which is likened to the oil of anointing, that blessings may be called down up thy head, and goodness not forsake thee.”

Verse 9. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest] Marry prudently, keep faithfully attached to the wife thou hast chosen, and rejoice in the labour of thy hands.

Some understand this as the words of the libertine objector: “Live joyfully with the woman whom thou lovest best.” But this does not comport so well with the scope of the place.

Verse 10. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do] Examine here the WHAT the HOW, and the WHY.

I. *What* is necessary to be done in this life, in reference to another? 1. Turn from sin. 2. Repent. 3. Frequent the ordinances of God, and associate with the upright. 4. Read the Scriptures. 5. Pray for pardon. 6. Believe on the Lord Jesus, that thou mayest obtain it. 7. Look for the gift of the Holy Spirit. 8. Bring forth in their seasons the fruits of it—(1) Repentance, (2) Faith; and (3) The Holy Spirit. 9. Live to get good. 10. And to do good. 11. And refer every purpose and act to the eternal world.

II. *How* should these be done? *With thy might*. 1. Be fully convinced of the necessity of these things. 2. Be determined to act according to this conviction. 3. Then act with all thy strength; put forth all thy power in avoiding evil, repenting of sin, &c., &c.

III. *Why* should this be done? 1. Because thou art a dying man. 2. Thou art going into the grave. 3. When thou leavest this life, thy state of probation, with all its advantages, is eternally ended. 4. If thou die in sin, where God is thou shalt never come. For, 1. There is no *work* by which thou mayest profit; 2. No *device* by which thou mayest escape punishment; 3. No *knowledge* of any means of help; and, 4. No *wisdom*—restoration of the soul to the favour and image of God, *in that grave whither thou goest*. Therefore, work while it is called *to-day*.

My old MS. Bible translates this nervously: *Whatever thinge may thin hond don, besily wirch: for nouthur werc, ne resoun, ne wisdom, ne keenynng schuln be a nentis hell, whither thou gost*. Properly speaking, every sinner is *going to hell*, and the wisdom of God calls upon him to turn and live.

Verse 11. The race is not to the swift] It is not by swiftness, nor by strength and valour, that races are gained and battles won. God causes the *lame* often to take the *prey*, the prize; and so works that the *weak*

overthrow the *strong*; therefore, no man should confide in himself. All things are under the government, and at the disposal of God.

But time and chance] **t** [*eth*, time or opportunity, and [gp *pega*, incident or occurrence,—

Happeneth to them all.] Every man has what may be called *time* and *space* to act in, and *opportunity* to do a particular work. But in this TIME and OPPORTUNITY there is INCIDENT, what *may fall in*; and OCCURRENCE, what may *meet* and frustrate an attempt. These things should be wisely weighed, and seriously balanced; for those *four things* belong to every human *action*. While you have TIME, seek an OPPORTUNITY to do what is right; but calculate on *hinderances* and *oppositions*, because *time* and *opportunity* have their INCIDENT and OCCURRENCE. *Coverdale* translates this verse well: “I sawe that in runnyng, it helpeth not to be swift; in batayll, it helpeth not to be stronge; to fedyng, it helpeth not to be wyse; to riches, it helpeth not to be sutyll; to be had in favoure, it helpeth not to be connyng; but that all lyeth in time and fortune.”

Verse 12. As the birds that are caught] Man acts so heedlessly, notwithstanding all his wisdom, and all his warnings, that he is often taken, as a *fish* is, by the baited hook; and the *bird* by the baited snare. And thus, *an evil time*, like the snare, gin, trap, hook, falleth suddenly upon them; and they are taken in a moment, and have no means of escaping. How frequently do we see these comparisons illustrated!

Verse 14. There was a little city, and few men within it] Here is another proof of the vanity of sublunary things; the *ingratitude of men*, and the *little compensation* that *genuine merit* receives. The little history mentioned here may have either been a *fact*, or intended as an instructive fable. A *little city*, with *few to defend* it, being besieged by a *great king* and a powerful army, was delivered by the *cunning and address on a poor wise man*; and afterwards his *townsmen* forgot their *obligation to him*.

Those who *spiritualize* this passage, making the *little city* the CHURCH, the *few men* the APOSTLES, the *great king* the DEVIL, and the *poor wise man* JESUS CHRIST, abuse the text.

But the *Targum* is not less whimsical: “The *little city* is the human body; *few men in it*, few *good affections* to work righteousness; *the great king*, evil concupiscence, which, like a strong and powerful king, enters into the

body to oppress it, and besieges the heart so as to cause it to err; *built great bulwarks against it*—evil concupiscence builds his throne in it wheresoever he wills, and causes it to decline from the ways that are right before God; that it may be taken in the greatest nets of hell, that he may burn it seven times, because of its sins. But there is *found in it a poor wise man*—a good, wise, and holy affection, which prevails over the evil principle, and snatches the body from the judgment of hell, by the strength of its wisdom. Yet, after this deliverance, the man did not remember what the good principle had done for him; but said in his heart, I am innocent,” &c.

What a wonderful text has this been in the hands of many a modern *Targumist*; and with what force have the *Keachonians* preached Christ *crucified* from it!

Such a passage as this receives a fine illustration from the case of *Archimedes* saving the city of *Syracuse* from all the Roman forces besieging it by sea and land. He destroyed their ships by his *burning-glasses*, lifted up their galleys out of the water by his machines, dashing some to pieces, and sinking others. One man’s wisdom here prevailed for a long time against the most powerful exertions of a mighty nation. In this case, wisdom far exceeded strength. But was not *Syracuse* taken, notwithstanding the exertions of this poor wise man? No. But it was *betrayed* by the baseness of *Mericus*, a Spaniard, one of the *Syracusan* generals. He delivered the whole district he commanded into the hands of *Marcellus*, the Roman consul, *Archimedes* having defeated every attempt made by the Romans, either by sea or land: yet he commanded no company of men, made no sorties, but confounded and destroyed them by his machines. This happened about 208 years before Christ, and nearly about the time in which those who do not consider *Solomon* as the author suppose this book to have been written. This wise man was *not remembered*; he was slain by a Roman soldier while deeply engaged in demonstrating a new problem, in order to his farther operations against the enemies of his country. See *Plutarch*, and the historians of this *Syracusan* war.

When *Alexander* the Great was about to destroy the city *Lampsacus*, his old master *Anaximenes* came out to meet him. *Alexander*, suspecting his design, that he would intercede for the city, being determined to destroy it, swore that he would *not* grant him any thing he should ask. Then said

Anaximenes, “I desire that you *will destroy* this city.” Alexander respected his oath, and the city was spared. Thus, says *Valerius Maximus*, the narrator, (lib. vii. c. iii., No. 4. Extern.,) by this sudden turn of sagacity, this ancient and noble city was preserved from the destruction by which it was threatened. “Haec velocitas sagacitatis oppidum vetusta nobilitate inclytum exitio, cui destinatum erat, subtraxit.”

A stratagem of *Jaddua*, the *high priest*, was the means of preserving *Jerusalem* from being destroyed by *Alexander*, who, incensed because they had assisted the inhabitants of Gaza when he besieged it, as soon as he had reduced it, marched against Jerusalem, with the determination to raze it to the ground; but Jaddua and his priests in their sacerdotal robes, meeting him on the way, he was so struck with their appearance that he not only prostrated himself before the high priest, and spared the city, but also granted it some remarkable privileges. But the case of *Archimedes* and *Syracuse* is the most striking and appropriate in all its parts. That of Anaximenes and Lampsacus is also highly illustrative of the maxim of the wise man: “Wisdom is better than strength.”

Verse 16. The poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.] I cannot help pursuing this illustration a little farther. The soldier who found Archimedes busily employed in drawing figures upon the sand, put to him some impertinent question, withal rudely obtruding himself on his operations. To whom this wonderful mathematician replied, “Stand off, soldier, and do not spoil my diagram;” on which the bloody savage struck him dead!

Verse 17. The words of wise men are heard in quiet] In the tumult of war the words of *Archimedes* were not heard; and his *life* was lost.

Verse 18. Wisdom is better than weapons of war] So proved in the case of *Archimedes*.

But one sinner] Such as the Roman butcher above mentioned.

Destroyeth much good] Such as were the life and skill of the Syracusan mathematician. One sinner has often injured the work of God; one stumbling-block has sometimes destroyed a revival of religion. Sin acts like a ferment; whatever comes in contact with it, it assimilates to itself.

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 10

Observations on wisdom and folly, 1-3. Concerning right conduct towards rulers, 4. Merit depressed, and worthlessness exalted, 5-7. Of him who digs a pit and removes a landmark, 8, 9. The use of wisdom and experience, 10. Of the babbler and the fool, 11-15. The infant king, 16. The well-regulated court, 17. Of slothfulness, 18. Of feasting, 19. Speak not evil of the king, 20.

NOTES ON CHAP. 10

Verse 1. Dead flies] Any putrefaction spoils perfume; and so a foolish act ruins the character of him who has the reputation of being wise and good. Alas! alas! in an unguarded moment how many have tarnished the reputation which they were many years in acquiring! Hence, no man can be said to be safe, till he is taken to the paradise of God.

Verse 2. A wise man's heart is at his right hand] As the *right hand* is ordinarily the best exercised, strongest, and most ready, and the *left* the contrary, they show, 1. The command which the wise man has over his own mind, feelings, passions, &c., and the prudence with which he acts. And, 2. The want of prudence and management in the fool, who has no restraint on his passions, and no rule or guard upon his tongue. The *right hand* and the *left* are used in Scripture to express *good* and *evil*. The wise man is always employed in doing *good*; the fool, in nonsense or evil.

Verse 3. When—a fool walketh by the way] In every act of life, and in every company he frequents, the irreligious man shows what he is. Vanity, nonsense, and wickedness are his themes: so that in effect *he saith to every one that he is a fool*.

Verse 4. If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee] If the king get incensed against thee.

Leave not thy place] Humble thyself before him, that is *thy place* and duty; for yielding to him, and not standing stoutly in thy defence, pacifieth *great offenses*: and then, when his anger is appeased, he will hear any thing in thy justification, if thou have any thing to offer. This is good advice to a *child* in reference to his *parents*, and to an *inferior* of any kind in reference to his *superiors*.

Several of the fathers understood this differently, *If the spirit of the ruler—the influence of Satan—hath risen up against and prevailed over thee, to bring thee into some sin; leave not thy place—do not despair of God’s mercy; humble thyself before him, and seek pardon through the Son of his love, and this will be **aprm marpe**, a remedy or cure even for **μϣλ wdg μϣacj chataim gedolim**, great errors or sins. All this is true in itself, whether found in this text or not.*

Verse 5. An error which proceedeth from the ruler] What this error in the ruler is, the two following verses point out: it is simply this—an injudicious distribution of offices, and raising people to places of trust and confidence, who are destitute of *merit*, are neither of *name* nor *family* to excite public confidence, and are without *property*; so that they have no *stake in the country*, and their only solicitude must naturally be to enrich themselves, and provide for their poor relatives. This is frequent in the governments of the world; and *favouritism* has often brought prosperous nations to the brink of ruin. *Folly* was set in *dignity*; the man of property, sense, and name, in a *low place*. *Servants*—menial men, *rode upon horses*—carried every thing with a high and proud hand; and *princes*,—the nobles of the people, were obliged *to walk by their sides*, and often from the state of things to become in effect *their servants*. This was often the case in this country, during the reign of *Thomas a Becket*, and *Cardinal Woolsey*. These insolent men lorded it over the whole nation; and the people and their gentry were raised or depressed according as their pride and caprice willed. And, through this kind of errors, not only a few sovereigns have had most uncomfortable and troublesome reigns, but some have even lost their lives.

Verse 8. Whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.] While spoiling his neighbour’s property, he himself may come to greater mischief: while pulling out the sticks, he may be bit by a serpent, who has his nest there. Some have supposed that **vj n nachash** here means a *thorn*; perhaps from the similarity of its *prick* to the serpent’s *sting*. He who forces his way through a hedge will be pricked by the thorns.

Verse 9. Whoso removeth stones] This verse teaches care and caution. Whoever *pulls down* an old building is likely to be hurt by the stones; and in *cleaving wood* many accidents occur for want of sufficient caution.

Verse 10. If the iron be blunt] If the axe have lost its edge, and the owner do not sharpen it, he must apply the more strength to make it cut: but the *wisdom that is profitable to direct* will teach him, that he should *whet his axe*, and *spare his strength*. Thus, without wisdom and understanding we cannot go profitably through the meanest concerns in life.

Verse 11. The serpent will bite without enchantment] *vj l al b belo lachash*, without *hissing*. As a snake may bite before it hiss, so also will the babbler, talkative person, or calumniator. Without directly speaking evil, he insinuates, by innuendoes, things injurious to the reputation of his neighbour. *¶ If the eddir bite in silence, noything lasse than he hath that privily backbiteth.*—Old MS. Bible. “A babbler of his tongue is no better than a serpent that styngeth without hyssynge.”—COVERDALE. The *moral* of this saying is simply this: A calumniator is as dangerous as a poisonous serpent; and from the envenomed tongue of slander and detraction no man is safe. The comparing the serpent, *vj n nachash*, to a *babbler*, has something singular in it. I have already supposed that the creature mentioned, ^{<OR>}**Genesis 3:1**, was of the genus *simia*. This has been ridiculed, but not *disproved*.

Verse 12. The words of a wise man’s mouth] Every thing that proceeds from him is decent and orderly, creditable to himself, and acceptable to those who hear him. But the *lips of the fool*, which speak every thing at random, and have no understanding to guide them, are not only not pleasant to others, but often destructive to himself.

Verse 14. A man cannot tell what shall be] A foolish babbling man will talk on every subject, though he can say as little on the *past*, as he can on the *future*.

Verse 15. He knoweth not how to go to the city.] I suppose this to be a proverb: “He knows nothing; he does not know his way to the next village.” He may labour; but for want of *judgment* he wearies himself to no purpose.

Verse 16. Wo to thee, O land, when thy king is a child] *Minorities* are, in general, very prejudicial to a state. Regents either disagree, and foment civil wars; or oppress the people. Various discordant interests are raised up in a state during a minority; and the young king, having been under the tutelage of interested men, acts *partially* and *injuriously* to the interests of

the people when he comes to the throne; and this produces popular discontent, and a troubled reign.

Thy princes eat in the morning!] They do nothing in order; turn night into day, and day into night; sleep when they should wake, and wake when they should sleep; attending more to chamberings and banquetings, than to the concerns of the state.

Verse 17. When thy king is the son of nobles] Υιος ελευθερων, the son of freemen; persons well acquainted with the principles of civil liberty, and who rule according to them.—*Septuagint*. Such a one as comes to the throne in a legitimate way, from an ancient regal family, whose right to the throne is incontestable. It requires such a long time to establish a regal right, that the state is in continual danger from *pretenders* and *usurpers*, where the king is not the son of nobles.

And thy princes eat in due season] All persons in places of trust for the public weal, from the king to the lowest public functionary, should know, that the public are exceedingly scandalized at repeated accounts of entertainments, where irregularity prevails, much money is expended, and no good done. These things are drawn into precedent, and quoted to countenance debauch in the inferior classes. The natural division of the day for necessary *repasts* is, BREAKFAST, *eight*, or *half after*; DINNER, *one*, or *half after*; SUPPER, *eight*, or *half after*. And these, or even *earlier* hours were formerly observed in these countries. Then we had scarcely any such thing as *gout*, and no *nervous disorders*.

In ancient nations the custom was to eat but *once*; and then about mid-day.

Verse 18. By much slothfulness] This is remarkably the case in some countries. Houses are not repaired till they almost fall about the ears of the inhabitants. We have an adage that applies to all such cases: “A stitch in time saves nine.”

Verse 19. A feast is made for laughter] The object of it is to produce merriment, to banish care and concern of every kind. But who are they who make and frequent such places? Epicures and drunkards generally; such as those of whom *Horace* speaks:—

Nos numerus sumus, et fruges consumere nati.
Epist. lib. i., ep. 2, ver. 27.

“Those whose names stand as indications of *men*, the *useless many*; and who appear to be born only to consume the produce of the soil.”

But money answereth all] This saying has prevailed everywhere.

*Scilicet uxorem cum dote, fidemque, et amicos,
Et genus, et formam REGINA PECUNIA donat;
Ac bene nummatum decorat Suadela, Venusque.
HOR. Ep. lib. i., ep. 6, ver. 36.*

*“For gold, the sovereign QUEEN of all below,
Friends, honour, birth, and beauty, can bestow.
The goddess of persuasion forms her train;
And Venus decks the well-bemonied swain.”*

FRANCIS.

Verse 20. Curse not the king] Do not permit thyself even to think evil of the king; lest thy tongue at some time give vent to thy thoughts, and so thou be chargeable with treason.

For a bird of the air shall carry the voice] Does he refer here to such fowls as the *carrier pigeon*, which were often used to carry letters under their wings to a great distance, and bring back answers? The *Targum* turns it curiously: “Do not speak evil of the king in thy conscience, nor in the secret of thy heart, nor in the most hidden place in thy house, curse not a wise man; for *Raziel* calls daily from heaven upon Mount Horeb, and his voice goes through the whole world; and *Elijah*, the great priest, goes, flying through the air like a winged eagle, and publishes the words which are spoken in secret by all the inhabitants of the earth.”

Civil government is so peculiarly of God, that he will have it supported for the benefit of mankind; and those who attempt to disturb it are generally *marked* by his *strong disapprobation*. And though there have been multitudes of treasons hatched in the deepest secrecy; yet, through the providence of God, they have been discovered in the most singular manner. This shows God’s care for government.

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 11

Give alms to all, 1-4. The works of God unknown to man, 5. Diligence necessary, 6. Prosperity frequently succeeded by adversity, 7, 8. There will be a day of judgment, 9, 10.

NOTES ON CHAP. 11

Verse 1. Cast thy bread upon the waters] An allusion to the *sowing of rice*; which was sown upon muddy ground, or ground covered with water, and trodden in by the feet of cattle: it thus took root, and grew, and was *found after many days* in a plentiful harvest. Give alms to the poor, and it will be as seed sown in good ground. God will cause thee *afterwards* to receive it with abundant increase. The *Targum* understands it of giving bread to poor sailors. The *Vulgate* and my *old Bible* have the same idea. *Send thi brede upon men passing waters.*

Verse 2. Give a portion to seven] Never cease giving while thou seest a person in distress, and hast wherewithal to relieve him.

Thou knowest not what evil] Such may be the change of times, that thou mayest yet stand in need of similar help thyself. *Do as thou wouldst be done by.*

Verse 3. If the clouds be full of rain.] Act as the clouds; when they are full they pour out their water indifferently on the *field* and on the *desert*. By giving charity indiscriminately, it may be that thou wilt often give it to the unworthy: but thou shouldst ever consider that he is an object of thy charity, who *appears* to be in real want; and better relieve or give to a *hundred* worthless persons, than pass by one who is in real distress.

Where the tree falleth, there it shall be.] Death is at no great distance; thou hast but a short time to do good. Acquire a heavenly *disposition* while here; for there will be no *change after this life*. If thou die in the love of God, and in the love of man, in that state wilt thou be found in the day of judgment. If a tree about to fall lean to the *north*, to the north it will fall; if to the *south*, it will fall to that *quarter*. In whatever *disposition* or *state of soul* thou diest, in that thou *wilt be found* in the *eternal world*. Death

refines nothing, purifies nothing, kills no sin, helps to no glory. Let thy continual *bent* and *inclination* be to God, to holiness, to charity, to mercy, and to heaven: then, fall when thou mayest, thou wilt fall well.

Verse 4. He that observeth the wind shall not sow] The man that is too scrupulous is never likely to succeed in any thing. If a man neither plough nor sow till the weather is entirely to his mind, the season will in all probability pass before he will have done any thing: so, if thou be too nice in endeavouring to find out who are the *impostors* among those who *profess to be in want*, the real object may perish, whom otherwise thou mightest have relieved, and whose life might have been thereby saved. Those very punctilious and scrupulous people, who will *sift every thing* to the bottom in *every case*, and, before they will act, must be *fully satisfied* on all points, seldom do any good, and are themselves generally good for nothing. While they are *observing the clouds* and *the rain*, others have joined hands with God, and made a poor man live.

Verse 5. As thou knowest not—the way of the spirit] Why God should have permitted such an such persons to fall into want, and how they came into all their distresses, thou canst not tell, no more than thou canst how *their soul* is united to their body, how it came to *inform* that body, or how the *child* was formed in *the womb of its mother*. Nor canst thou discern the *end* which God has in view in these things. *He maketh all*, every thing is open to him; and take heed lest, while pretending motives of scrupulosity and prudence, in not relieving the distresses of those thou pretendest to suspect to be *unworthy*, he does not *see* that a *love of money* is the *motive* of thy conduct, and a *want of the bowels of mercy* the *cause* why thou drivest this *suspected* beggar from thy door.

Verse 6. In the morning sow thy seed] Be ready at *all times* to show mercy; begin in the *morning*, continue till the *evening*. Thou knowest not the most worthy object; it is enough that God knoweth; and if thy motive be *good*, he will applaud and reward thee; not according to the *worthiness* or *unworthiness* of the *object* of thy charity, but according to the *motive* which induced thee to relieve him.

Verse 7. Truly the light is sweet] Life is dear to every man as the *light of the sun* is to the *eye*. A man would give all that he has for his life, and it is particularly dear to him when he is in ease and affluence: but let each remember that,

Verse 8. If a man live many years] And even have *prosperity* through the whole; yet the *days of darkness*-times of affliction, weakness, and perhaps *old age, will be many*. If he die not a *violent death*, which no man can wish, he will die a *lingering death*; and this is ordinarily attended with many *pains*, and many *sorrows*; therefore let him prepare to meet his God; and to carry this thought through life, that all must terminate in death. The writer of *Ecclesiasticus*, ^{2107B}**Ecclesiastes 7:36**, has a good saying, similar to this: “Whatsoever thou takest in hand, remember *thy* END; and thou shalt never do amiss;” οὐκ ἀμαρτησεις, *thou wilt not sin*.

Verse 9. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth] *Youth* is devoid of cares; and, consequently, of many perplexities and distresses. Were it not so, we should have no *old men*; nay, perhaps not *one* even of *middle age*. It is in the order of a most gracious God, that the *young* should *rejoice* in their *youth*; but they should make such a moderate use of all their enjoyments, that they may not be confounded in the day of judgment. But, O young man, if thou wilt follow the propensities of thy *own heart*, the noisy mirth of the *fool*, and the dissipation of the *profligate-go on*; take thy full swing; but take this with thee, that “for all these things, God will judge thee;” and if the righteous are scarcely saved, where shall the *ungodly* and the *sinner* appear?

Verse 10. Therefore remove sorrow] s[*k caas, anger*; every kind of violent passion, all filthiness of *the flesh* and spirit. “Childhood and youth are vanity;” they pass away and come to nothing. Eternity alone is permanent; live for eternity.

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 12

Youth should remember their Creator, 1. A description of old age and its infirmities, with the causes of death and dissolution, 2-9. How the Preacher taught the people knowledge, 9-11. General directions, and conclusion of the work, 12-14.

NOTES ON CHAP. 12

Verse 1. Remember thy Creator] Ēyarwb *Boreeycha*, thy CREATORS.

The word is most certainly in the *plural* number in all our common Hebrew Bibles; but it is in the *singular* number, Ēarwb *Borecha*, in *one hundred and seventy-six* of Dr. Kennicott's MSS., and *ninety-six* of Deuteronomy Rossi's; in many *ancient editions*; and in all the *ancient versions*. There is no dependence on the *plural* form in most of the modern editions; though there are some editions of great worth which exhibit the word in this form, and among them the *Complutensian, Antwerp, Paris, and London polyglots*.

The evidence, therefore, that this text is supposed to give to the doctrine of the *ever blessed Trinity*, is but precarious, and on it little stress can be laid; and no man who loves truth would wish to support it by dubious witnesses. Injudicious men, by laying stress on texts dubious in themselves, and which may be interpreted a different way, greatly injure the true faith. Though such in their hearts may be friends to the orthodox faith, they are in fact its *worst friends*, and their assistance is such as helps their *adversaries*.

But what does the text say? It addresses the *youth* of both sexes throughout the creation; and says in effect:—

I. You are not your own, you have no right to yourselves. God made you; he is your *Creator*: he made you that you might be happy; but you can be happy only *in him*. And as he *created* you, so he *preserves* you; he *feeds, clothes, upholds* you. He has *made* you capable of *knowing, loving, and serving* him in this world, and of *enjoying* him in his own glory for ever. And when you had *undone yourselves* by *sin*, he sent his Son to *redeem* you by his blood; and he sends his *Spirit* to *enlighten, convince, and draw*

you away from childishness, from vain and trifling, as well as from sinful, pursuits.

II. *Remember* him; consider that he is your *Creator*, your *loving* and affectionate *Father*. In youth *memory* is strong and tenacious; but, through the *perversion of the heart* by *sin*, young people can *remember any thing* better than GOD. If you get a kindness from a friend, you can *remember* that, and *feel gratitude* for it; and the *person* is therefore *endeared* to you. Have any ever given you such *benefits* as your *Creator*? Your *body* and *soul* came from him; he gave you your *eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet, &c.* What blessings are these! how *excellent!* how *useful!* how *necessary* and will you *forget* HIM?

III. *Remember him in thy* YOUTH, in order that you may have a *long* and *blessed life*, that you may be saved from the corruption and misery into which young people in general run; and the evils they entail upon themselves by giving way to the sinful propensities of their own hearts. As in youth all the powers are more active and vigorous, so they are capable of superior enjoyments. *Faith, hope, and love*, will be in their best *tenor*, their greatest *vigour*, and in their *least encumbered state*. And it will be *easier* for you to *believe, hope, pray, love, obey, and bear your cross*, than it can be in old age and decrepitude.

IV. *Remember him* NOW, in *this part* of your *youth*-you have no certainty of life; *now* is yours, to-morrow may not be. You *are* young; but you may *never* be old. *Now* he waits to be gracious; *tomorrow* may be too late. God *now* calls; his *Spirit* now strives; his *ministers* now exhort. You have now *health*; sin has not now *so much dominion over you* as it will have, increasing by every future moment, if you do not give up your hearts to your Maker.

V. There is another consideration which should weigh with you: should you live to *old age*, it is a very disadvantageous time to begin to serve the Lord in. *Infirmities* press down both body and mind, and the oppressed nature has enough to do to bear its own infirmities; and as there is *little time*, so there is generally *less inclination*, to call upon the Lord. *Evil habits* are strengthened by long continuance; and every desire and appetite in the soul is a strong hold for Satan. There is little time for repentance, little for faith, *none* for obedience. The *evil days* are *come*, and the *years* in which you will feelingly be obliged to say, Alas! "we have no pleasure in

them;” and, what is worse, the heart is hardened through the *deceitfulness of sin*.

Verse 2. While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened] i.e., in the SPRING, prime, and prosperity of life.

Nor the clouds return] The infirmities of old age of which WINTER is a proper emblem, as *spring* is of *youth*, in the former clause of this verse.

Verse 3. In the day when the keepers of the house] The BODY of *man* is here compared to a HOUSE:—mark the metaphors and their propriety.

1. *The keepers shall tremble*—the *hands* become paralytic, as is constantly the case, less or more, in old age.

2. **The strong men shall bow]** The *legs* become feeble, and unable to support the weight of the body.

3. **The grinders cease because they are few]** The *teeth* decayed and mostly lost; the *few* that remain being incapable of properly masticating hard substances or animal food. And so they *cease*; for soft or pulpy substances, which are requisite then, require little or no mastication; and these aliments become their ordinary food.

4. **Those that look out of the windows]** The *optic nerves*, which receive impressions, through the medium of the different *humours* of the eye, from surrounding objects—they *are darkened*; the humours becoming *thick, flat, and turbid*, they are no longer capable of transmitting those images in that clear, distinct manner, as formerly. There may be an allusion here to the *pupil* of the eye. Look into it, and you will see *your own image* in extreme minature *looking out* upon you; and hence it has its name *pupillus*, a *little child*, from *pupus*, a *baby*, a *doll*; because the image in the eye resembles such. The *optic nerve* being seated at the *bottom of the eye*, has the images of surrounding objects painted upon it; *it looks out through the different humors*. The different membranes and humours which compose the eye, and serve for vision, are, the *tunica conjunctiva*, the *tunica sclerotica*, the *cornea*, the *iris*, the *pupil*, the *choroides*, and the *retina*. The *iris* is perforated to admit the rays of light, and is called the *pupil*; the *retina* is a diffusion of the *optic nerve* in the bottom of the eye, on which the images are painted or impressed that give us the *sensation* we term *sight* or *vision*. All these *membranes, humours, and nerves*, are more or

less *impaired*, thickened, or rendered *opaque*, by *old age*, expressed by the metaphor, “Those that look out of the windows are darkened.”

Verse 4. And the doors shall be shut in the streets]

5. The *doors*—the *lips*, which are the *doors* by which the *mouth* is *closed*.

6. **Be shut in the streets]** The *cavities* of the *cheeks* and *jaws*, through which the food may be said to *travel* before it is fitted by *mastication* or chewing to go down the *œsophagus* into the stomach. The *doors* or *lips* are *shut* to hinder the food in chewing from dropping out; as the *teeth*, which prevented that before, are now lost.

7. **The sound of the grinding is low]** Little noise is now made in eating, because the *teeth* are either lost, or become so infirm as not to suffer their being pressed close together; and the mouth being kept shut to hinder the food from dropping out, the *sound* in eating is scarcely heard. The *teeth* are divided into *three* kinds:—1. The *dentes incisores*, or *cutting teeth*, in the front of the jaw. 2. The *dentes canini*, or *dog teeth*, those in the sides of the jaws, for *gnawing*, or *tearing* and *separating* hard or *tough substances*. And, 3. *Dentes molares*, or *grinding teeth*, the posterior or *double teeth*, in both jaws, generally termed the *grinders*; because their office is to *grind down* the substances that have been *cut* by the *fore teeth*, *separated* into their parts or fibres by the *dog teeth*, and thus prepare it for digestion in the stomach.

8. **He shall rise up at the voice of the bird]** His sleep is not *sound* as it used to be; he *slumbers* rather than *sleeps*; and the *crowing of the cock* awakes him. And so much difficulty does he find to *respire* while in bed, that he is glad of the dawn to rise up and get some relief. The chirping of the sparrow is sufficient to awake him.

9. **All the daughters of music shall be brought low]** The VOICE, that wonderful *instrument*, almost endless in the *strength* and *variety* of its *tones*, becomes *feeble* and *squeaking*, and merriment and pleasure are no more. The tones *emitted* are all of the *querulous* or *mournful* kind.

Verse 5. When they shall be afraid of that which is high]

10. Being so *feeble*, they are afraid to trust themselves to *ascend steps*, *stairs*, &c., without help. And when they *look upwards*, their heads turn giddy, and they are ready to fall.

11. **Fears shall be in the way]** They dare not walk *out*, lest they should meet some danger, which they have not *strength* to repel, nor *agility* to *escape*. A second childishness has taken place—apprehensions, fears, terrors, and weakness.

12. **The almond tree shall flourish]** *xany yenaets*, not *flourish*, but *fall off*. The *hair* begins to change, first *gray*, then *white*; it having no longer that supply of nutritive juices which it once had, this *animal vegetable withers* and *falls off*. The *almond tree*, having *white flowers*, is a fit emblem of a *hoary head*; or as *Hasselquist* says, who observed the tree in full flower in Judea, “like an old man with his *white locks*.”

13. **The grasshopper shall be a burden]** Even such an inconsiderable thing as a *locust*, or a very small *insect*, shall be deemed burdensome, their strength is so exceedingly diminished. In cases of the *gout*, especially in *old men*, the *shadow* of a person passing by puts them to acute pain! How much less can they bear the smallest pressure! But probably the words refer to the man himself, who, bent at the loins, and his arms hanging down, exhibits some caricature of the animal in question. The poor grasshopper has become a burden to himself. Another interpretation has been given of the *grasshopper*; but I pass it by as impertinent and contemptible; such commentators appear as if they wished to render the text ridiculous.

14. **Desire shall fail]** Both *relish* and *appetite* for food, even the most *delicate*, that to which they were formerly so much *attached*, now *fails*. The *teeth* are no longer able to *masticate* the food, or have all *dropped out*; the stomach no longer able to digest any thing; and, as the body is no longer capable of receiving nourishment, *appetite* and *relish* necessarily fail.

15. **Because man goeth to his long home]** *wml w[tyb l a el beith olamo*, “to the house of his age;” the place destined to receive him, when the *whole race* or *course* of life shall be *finished*; for *ml w[olam* takes in the *whole course* or *duration of a thing*; if applied to a *dispensation*, such as the LAW, it takes in its whole *duration*; to the *life* of man, it takes in the *whole life*; to *time*, it includes its whole compass; to *eternity*, it expresses its infinite duration. So *old age* terminates the *olam*, the complete duration of human life; and when life is no longer desired, and nutrition ceases, the *olam* of man is terminated. My old MS. Bible translates it, **The hous of his everlastingness.**

16. He is just departing into the invisible world; and this is known by the *mourners going about the streets*, the *long hollow groans and throat rattlings* which proceed from him; the sure prognostications of the extreme *debility* and *speedy cessation* of those essential animal functions next mentioned.

Verse 6. Or ever the silver cord be loosed] We have already *had* all the *external* evidences of *old age*, with all its attendant infirmities; next follow what takes place *in* the body, in order to produce what is called *death*, or the separation of body and soul.

1. *The silver cord.*—The *medulla oblongata* or *spinal marrow*, from which all the nerves proceed, as itself does from the *brain*. This is termed a *cord*, from its *exact similitude* to one; and a *silver cord*, from its *colour*, as it strikingly exhibits the *silver gray*; and from its *preciousness*. This is said to be *loosed*; as the *nervous system* became a little before, and at the article of death, wholly debilitated. The last *loosing* being the *fall of the under jaw*, the invariable and never-failing evidence of *immediate death*; a few struggles more, and the soul is dismissed from its clay tenement.

2. **The golden bowl be broken]** The *brain* contained in the *cranium*, or skull, and enveloped with the membranes called the *dura* and *pia mater*; here called a *bowl*, from its resemblance to such a vessel, the *container* being put for the *contained*; and *golden* because of its *colour*, and because of its exceeding *preciousness*, as has been noticed in the former case. *Broken*—be rendered *unfit to perform its functions*, neither supplying nor distributing any *nervous energy*.

3. **Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain]** The *vena cava*, which brings back the blood to the *right ventricle* of the heart, here called the *fountain*, [*wbmh hammabbua*, the *spring* whence the water *gushes up*; properly applied here to the heart, which by its *systole* and *diastole* (*contraction* and *expansion*) sends out, and afterwards receives back, the blood; for all the blood flows from, and returns back to, the heart.

4. **The wheel broken at the cistern]** The *great aorta*, which receives the blood from the *cistern*, the *left ventricle* of the heart, and distributes it to the different parts of the system. These may be said, as in the case of the *brain* above, to be *broken*, i.e., rendered useless; when, through the *loosening of the silver cord*, the total relaxation of the *nervous system*, the *heart* becomes incapable of *dilatation* and *contraction*, so that the blood,

on its return to the *right ventricle* of the heart, is not *received*, nor that already contained in the *ventricles* propelled into the great *aorta*. The *wheel* is used in allusion to the Asiatic *wheels*, by which they raise water from their wells and tanks, and deep cisterns, for domestic purposes, or to irrigate the grounds. Thus, then, the blood becomes stagnate; the lungs cease to respire; the blood is no longer *oxidized*; all motion, voluntary and involuntary, ceases; the body, the house of the immortal spirit, is no longer tenable, and the soul takes its flight into the eternal world. The man D-I-E-S! This is expressed in the following verse:—

Verse 7. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God]

5. Putrefaction and solution take place; the whole mass becomes decomposed, and in process of time is reduced to dust, from which it was originally made; while the spirit, *jwrh haruach*, that spirit, which God at first breathed into the nostrils of man, when he in consequence became a LIVING SOUL, an intelligent, rational, discoursing animal, returns to God who gave it. Here the wise man makes a most evident distinction between the body and the soul: they are not the same; they are not both matter. The body, which is matter, returns to dust, its original; but the spirit, which is *immaterial*, returns to God. It is impossible that two natures can be more distinct, or more emphatically distinguished. The author of this book was not a materialist.

Thus ends this affecting, yet elegant and finished, picture of OLD AGE and DEATH. See a description of old age similar, but much inferior, to this, in the Agamemnon of Æschylus, v. 76-82.

It has been often remarked that the *circulation of the blood*, which has been deemed a modern discovery by our countryman Dr. *Harvey*, in 1616, was known to Solomon, or whoever was the author of this book: the *fountains, cisterns, pitcher, and wheel*, giving sufficient countenance to the conclusion.

Verse 8. This affecting and minute description of *old age* and *death* is concluded by the author with the same exclamation by which he began this book: *O vanity of vanities*, saith Koheleth, *all is vanity*. Now that man, the masterpiece of God's creation, the delegated sovereign of this lower world, is *turned to dust*, what is there *stable* or worthy of contemplation besides? ALL—ALL is VANITY!

Verse 9. Because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge] And in order to do this he took *good heed*—considered what would be most useful. *He set in order*—collected and arranged, many parables, probably alluding to the book over which we have already passed.

Verse 10. He sought to find out acceptable words] *xpj yrbd dibrey chephets*, words of desire, words of will; the best, the most suitable words; those which the people could best understand. But these words were not such as might merely please the people; they were *words of truth*; such as came from God, and might lead them to him.

Verse 11. The words of the wise] Doctrines of faith, illustrated by suitable language, are *as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies*, *twpasa yl* [*b baaley asuphoth*, the *masters of collections*, those who had made the best collections of this kind, the *matter* of which was of the most excellent nature; every saying sinking as deeply into the mind, by the *force* of the *truth* contained in it, as a *nail well pointed* does into a *board*, when *impelled by the hammer's force*. These *masters of collections* have been supposed to be public persons appointed by the *prince* himself, the *sole shepherd*, to see that nothing was put into the people's hands but what would be profitable for them to read; and that, when any wise man gave public instructions, a good *scribe* sat by to take down the words; and then the master examined what he *had written*, to see that it was *upright*, and that the words were *doctrines of truth*. These were something like our *licensors of the press*; but the existence of such is little more than conjecture.

After all, *masters of assemblies* may mean *public teachers*; that *which was written*, the oracles of God, out of which they instructed the people; the *one Shepherd*, GOD ALMIGHTY, from whom they received their authority and unction to preach the truth; and by the energy of whose *Spirit* the heavenly teaching was fastened in their hearts, as a *well-driven nail* in a *sound piece of wood*.

Verse 12. And farther, by these, my son, be admonished] Hear such teachers, and receive their admonitions; and do not receive the grace of God in vain.

Of making many books there is no end] Two thousand years have elapsed since this was written; and since that time some millions of treatises have been added, on all kinds of subjects, to those which have gone before.

The press is still groaning under and teeming with books, books innumerable; and no one subject is yet *exhausted*, notwithstanding all that has been written on it. And we who live in these *latter times* are no nearer an end, in the investigation of NATURE and its *properties*; of GOD, his attributes, his providence, his justice, and his mercy; of MAN, his animal life, his mode of nutrition and existence, and his soul and its powers; of JESUS, and the redemption by him; of ETERNITY, and what it implies as exhibiting to us the pains of the cursed, and the glories of the blessed. Of several of these we know no more than they who have lived *five thousand* years before us; nor do we know any thing *certainly* by the *endless books* that have been published, except what bears the seal of the God of heaven, as published in that word which was declared by his Spirit.

And much study is a weariness of the flesh.] O how true is this! Let the trembling knees, the palsied hands, the darkened eyes, the aching heart, and the puzzled mind of every real student declare! And should none more worthy of the name of student be within reach to consult, the writer of this work is a proof in point.

Verse 13. After all, the sum of the great business of human life is comprised in this short sentence, on which some millions of books have been already written!

FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

1. Know that HE IS, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. 2. Reverence him; pay him adoration. 3. Love him, that you may be happy.

Keep his commandments] They are contained in two words: 1. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;” 2. “And thy neighbour as thyself.” Blessed be God, much reading and much study are not necessary to accomplish this, which is called *ṁdah l k col haadam*, the whole of Adam; the whole that God required of the *first man* and of *all his posterity*. But the *Gospel* of Jesus Christ must be understood to comprehend the full force of this short saying.

The word *duty*, added here by our translators, *spoils*, if not PERVERTS, the sense.

The whole passage is rendered with great simplicity by *Coverdale*:—

“The same preacher was not wyse alone: but taught the people knowledge also. He gave good hede, sought out the grounde, and set forth many parables. His diligence was to fynde out acceptable wordes, right scripture, and the wordes of trueth. For the wordes of the wyse are like prickes and nales that go thorow, wherewith men are kepte together: for they are geven of one Shepherd onely. Therefore be warre (my sonne) that above these thou make thee not many and innumerable bookes, nor take dyverse doctrynes in hande, to weery thy body withall.

“Let us heare the conclusion of all thinges; Feare God, and kepe his comaundementes, for that toucheth all men; for God shall judge all workes and secrete thinges, whether they be good or evell.”

I shall give the same from my old MS. Bible:—

And wan Ecclesiastes was most wiis he taght the peple, and told out what he had don, and enserchinge maade many parablis. He soght profitable wordis, and wrote most right sermons, and ful of trowth, The wordis of wismen as prickis and as nailis into herte pigt: that bi the counseyle of maisteris ben geven of oon scheperd. More thann thes sone myn, ne seche thou; of making many bokes is noon eend, and oft bethinking is tormenting of the flesche. Eend of spekinge alle togydir heere mee. Drede God, and his hestis kepe; that is eche man. Alle thingis that ben maad schal bringen into dome, for eche erid thinge, whithir good or evyl it be.

Verse 14. For God shall bring every work into judgment] This is the *reason* why we should “fear God and keep his commandments.” 1. Because there will be a *day of judgment*. 2. Every soul of man shall stand at that bar. 3. God, the infinitely wise, the heart-searching God, will be judge. 4. He will bring to light every *secret thing*—all that has been done since the creation, by all men; whether *forgotten* or *registered*; whether *done in secret* or *in public*. 5. All the works of the *godly*, as well as all the works of the *wicked*, shall be judged in that day; the *good* which the *godly* strove to *conceal*, as well as the *evil* which the *wicked* endeavoured to *hide*. This, then, will be the *conclusion* of the whole mortal story. And although in this world *all is vanity*; yet *there*, “vanities will be vain no more.” Every thing, whether *good* or *evil*, will have its own proper stable, eternal *result*. O God! prepare the reader to give up his accounts with joy in that day! Amen.

MASORETIC NOTES

Number of verses, 222.

Middle verse, ^{<210510>}**Ecclesiastes 6:10.**

Sections, 4.

The ARABIC subjoins this colophon:—”Praise be to God for ever and ever!”

“By the assistance of the Most High God this book of Ecclesiastes, which is vanity of vanities, written by Solomon the son of David who reigned over the children of Israel, is completed.”

The SYRIAC has, “The end of the book of Koheleth.”

There are others, but they are of no importance.