LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF PROVERBS (3 VOLS.)

by Ralph Wardlaw

Ralph Wardlaw's extensive commentary on the Book of Proverbs exploring Solomon's wisdom, the nature of true knowledge, and the spiritual foundations of practical moral instruction.

99 Chapters

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00.4-Preface

Preface.

Some years have now elapsed since my venerated Father's "Systematic Theology" made its appearance, under the editorial care of the Kev. J. R. Campbell, A. M., of Bradford; whose valuable services in carrying that work through the press, I would here, in my own name, and that of others, gratefully acknowledge.

It is a work for the few rather than the many-for the theologian rather than for the ordinary student of God's Word; and a desire has been repeatedly expressed, since my return from India, for the publication of some other portions of my father's writings, of a less elaborate character, and likely to prove of more general interest. Arrangements have, accordingly, been made, as already intimated, for the issue of a Series of Volumes, commencing with his Lectures On The Book Of Proverbs.

These Lectures were delivered on the Lord's day morning, in the ordinary course of his ministry. Their delivery extended over a long period, numerous interruptions having been occasioned by absence from home, and various incidental circumstances. They were commenced in the close of 1838, and finished in January 1844. By those privileged to hear them they were much admired; and the request was frequently and urgently made for their publication; but the continuous pressure of other engagements, numerous and varied, rendered compliance witb it impracticable. Had he himself prepared the Lectures for the press, some portions would, in all probability, have been recast, and the whole, having received his finishing touch, would have appeared in a more perfect form. The recent works of Arnot and Bridges, may tend to diminish the interest these Lectures might have awakened had they been given to the public immediately after their delivery. Still they have their peculiar characteristics, differing widely from either of the works referred to, both in style of thought and mode of illustration; and they may to some present attractions which the others fail to afford.

It is right to mention, that it has been found necessary to bring them within narrower limits than they would have occupied had they been printed entire. This has been accomplished chiefly by the omission, in whole or in part, of hortatory matter at the close of many of the Lectures, which it was thought unnecessary to retain; and by the further omission, to some extent, of passages in which the same sentiment is illustrated afresh, in very similar language. Of this there are frequent instances; for, in the Book of Proverbs, some subjects recur again and again, with at most but slight shades of difference; and as, in a course of Lectures extending over so long a period, they came up at considerable intervals of time, the Lecturer felt at liberty to enlarge upon them as they arose, and anew to press them home on the conscience and the heart. The propriety of avoiding, in some measure, the repetition of these passages in a printed volume, will be at once apparent. Should such repetition be occasionally noticed, it will be pardoned on the ground that the subject is, in every instance, one of practical importance-that importance being indicated by the very frequency with which it appears on the sacred page. Of wisdom, as it occurs in the eighth chapter

and some other parts of this Book, a different view is adopted from that usually held, at which some will, no doubt, be surprised; though all acquainted with the Author’s character will be ready to admit, that it was not adopted hastily, and still less from love of singularity. To the ordinary interpretation he long clung. "All my predilections," he writes, "were in favour of that interpretation; I was reluctant to abandon it, and would gladly have kept by it could I have done so consistently with sound principles of exegesis. Should others be disposed still to adhere to it I should not be inclined to argue the point keenly with thein."

Two Lectures on Temperance, founded on the first verse of the 20th chapter, which appear in the Second Volume, have been given in full; and one on the close of the 23d chapter, has been introduced in connexion with them, having been delivered in that order. These Lectures created considerable excitement at the time, especially among the advocates of the Total Abstinence cause, many of whom attended on the occasion. Notes were taken by some, and the Lectures printed and circulated in a very garbled form, accompanied by strictures more bitter than hurtful. The principles laid down on the question were those of mature thought, and possess equal interest and importance still. A considerable time has elapsed since the intended publication of these volumes was announced. The delay has arisen from causes over which neither editor nor publisher had any control, and will be pardoned. For anything in the form of a note the editor must be held responsible.

J. S. Wardlaw.

01-Pro_1:1

Proverbs 1:1

LECTURE I.

Proverbs 1:1.

"The Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel."

Here is the Title of the Book-"the Proverbs Of Solomon." There is no necessity, however, from this title, for considering the collection, in the precise state in which we now have it, as the work of Solomon. The proverbs which the Book contains were all his; but the selection and arrangement of them appear, from the very statements of the Book itself, to have been made by different hands. In chap. Proverbs 25:1, we read,-"These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." "The men of Hezekiah" were, without question, "holy men of God," prophets, appointed by that eminently pious prince to the execution of the good work. By whom the previous and larger part of the collection was made, we cannot with certainty say-Agur, possibly, and Ezra, and others. But the proverbs forming the contents of the Book had been partly written by Solomon, and partly spoken and taken down from his lips.

Solomon was successor to his father David, and swayed the sceptre of Israel for forty years. He has obtained, by way of eminence, the designation of The wise man; and as this Book, had it been the only source of our judgment of him, is itself sufficient to vindicate his title to the distinction, we are naturally led to notice the origin and the recorded extent of his wisdom.

Youth, and especially youth in high station,-born to wealth and honour, and, above all, heir to a throne,-is in proverbial hazard of being high-minded, self-sufficient, and reckless of control. Solomon was to the young, in the outset of his career, an eminent example of the contrary;-of humility, and self-diffidence, and pious dependence upon God. How beautiful! How interesting and instructive the manifestation of these lovely features of character, at the commencement of his public life! When God said, "Ask what I shall give thee," his reply was, "O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?"* Here we have the origin of Solomon’s unparalleled wisdom. And yet, in one sense, it preceded the answer to his request. Was not the request itself a proof of it? Yes, my young friends, in that request it was manifest that he had already the best of wisdom-"the fear of the Lord,"-the principles of early piety. And these, too, we can trace to their origin, not only as to the divine influence which inspired them, but as to the human means by which that influence operated, "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. For I was my father’s son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine

heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live," Proverbs 4:1-4. He owed much, then, as many among us also do, to parental instruction. When he was born, the pleasing intimation was made, by a divine message to his father, that the special favour of Jehovah rested upon him; the name being by the same authority given him of Jedidiah-the beloved of the Lord, (2 Samuel 12:24.) And afterwards the expectations of David were raised high respecting him, although in the language there is a reference to a greater than Solomon, in whom it received its higher and more perfect fulfilment, (1 Chronicles 22:9-10.) This incident of his early choice was a fair commencement of the verification of all the hopes which intimations so remarkable had inspired. Let all, and especially the young, learn from his example, to whom they should apply, not only for the production and progress of those religious principles and affections of which the early exercise is the wisdom of youth, and the late exercise, amid the maturity of experience, the wisdom of age;-but also, for acuteness of discernment, enlargement of comprehension, and general illumination of mind, to fit them for the acquisition of all descriptions of knowledge, as well as to guide them successfully to its attainment. The powers by which all knowledge is acquired are, in all their variety of degrees, His gift. "There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding," Job 32:8. All the mind in the universe is from Him. The human mind was His, when its powers were in all their original vigour and expansion, undebased and uncontracted by the power of evil. And still, in the inscrutable arrangements of his providence, according to the dictates of his sovereign will, it is He that makes the mind of the philosopher differ from that of the idiot,-conferring on the former faculties and means of their improvement, associated with an awful responsibility, of which the conscious possessor too often, in the plenitude of a lofty self-sufficiency, thinks not; but for the violation of which the solemn reckoning at last will make him envy the man whose destitution of them saves him from so fearful an account. The philosopher and the genius may forget to trace their powers to the true source; but it is He,-the omniscient God-that "teacheth man knowledge." Let the powers and the means be ever ascribed to Him, by which knowledge is obtained; and let the knowledge itself, when obtained, be consecrated to His glory.

* Compare the whole passage, 1 Kings 3:5-15. The extent of the wisdom of Solomon is briefly sketched, 1 Kings 4:29-34. The son of Sirach, in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus, says of him, that "he was a flood filled with understanding; that his soul covered the whole earth; and that he filled it with parables." This is the language of hyperbole, and befits more an apocryphal than an inspired book; but it shows the height of estimation in which the wisdom of Solomon was held. In the spirit of national partiality and vanity, which engender the disposition to exaggerate whatever contributes to our country’s glory, the Jewish historian Josephus magnifies the three thousand proverbs of Solomon to three thousand books of proverbs; and it is not the only instance in which he is chargeable with the same fault,-a fault which, however the principle from which it springs may be natural and commendable, is a very serious one in a historian; and may, in some cases, be productive of no trivial evils. The Bible is not given to teach us philosophy, but religion; not to show us the way to science, but the way to holiness and to heaven. Notwithstanding, therefore, the extent and variety of Solomon’s knowledge in botany, in natural history, and other departments of science, we have in preservation none whatever of his discoveries or his speculations on such subjects.

We have only three productions of the wisdom of Solomon handed down to us; and they are all contained in the sacred canon of revelation, and are all in harmony, in their contents and their tendencies, with the other portions of the same blessed and holy Book. All that is preserved there is fitted to impart true spiritual wisdom, to change and sanctify the heart, and to regulate the life. Of the whole Old Testament canon, as it existed in his day, and as it exists in ours, the apostle Paul says:-"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," 2 Timothy 3:15-17. Of these "holy scriptures" the Book of Proverbs forms an integral and important part.

I do not think there is any reason that should lead us to conclude, that all has been preserved that ever was written by divine inspiration, any more than all that was spoken. From the mere fact of any dictate of the Spirit having been committed to writing, it does not follow that it was the divine purpose it should be preserved. A thing might be written for a temporary purpose, as well as spoken for a temporary purpose. Providence watched over, and preserved, and furnished with full evidence of authenticity and genuineness, all that divine wisdom saw needful to be transmitted to future generations, as containing the complete discovery of His mind and will, in regard to our own character, condition, and prospects. The canon of the Old Testament appears to have been made up chiefly in the time of Ezra, and under his divinely directed superintendence. The Book of Proverbs, as forming a part of that canon, we regard as having been "given by inspiration of God," and as having, therefore, in all its contents, the sanction of Heaven. Our subjection to its dictates, therefore, is something quite different from mere deference to the judgment of a fellow-man, of extraordinary sagacity and eminent wisdom, and of unwonted extent of observation and experience. Such a man, how unparalleled soever his natural and acquired endowments, is still fallible. His authority imposes no obligation. But, considered as part of the divine oracles, the contents of this Book bind our consciences. They are from God; and not only may but must be received, and laid up in our hearts, and practised in our lives. It is not a book of which we may take or reject what we please. We must not presume to question the correctness of any of its maxims. Our only object must be to understand them rightly. "When we do understand them, they are binding on us. We have simply to believe and obey." This Book has, by frequent citation and allusion, the full sanction of the New Testament. Instances of quotation from it occur in Hebrews 12:5-6, of Proverbs 3:11-12; in James 4:6, of chap. Proverbs 3:34; in 1 Peter 4:8, of chap. Proverbs 10:12; in Romans 12:20, of chap. Proverbs 25:21-22. I make these references the rather, for the purpose of showing you the identity, in their great principles and practical features, of the religion and the morality of the two great divisions of divine revelation,-the Old Testament and the New; between which there is frequently a disposition to make by much too wide a difference,-as if there were moral principles and practices tolerated and connived at, if not sanctioned, under the one, which are set aside and explicitly condemned under the other.

Such references in the New to the Old, at the same time show, that the Old and the New are mutually, in regard to authority, bound up in each other; so that they stand or fall together. And the entire evidence of the divine authority of the New is, by this means, brought to bear also in confirmation of the divine authority of the Old; so that we cannot consistently take the one and reject the other, but must receive or refuse both. There are, it is true, evidences of genuineness,

authenticity, and inspiration peculiar to each; but from the reference of each to the other,-of the Old forward to the New, and of the New back to the Old,-the former being the introduction to the latter, and the latter the verification and completion of the former,-it is quite vain to attempt their separation, or to fancy the possibility of holding the New independently of the Old. They form together one consistent and perfect whole.

Proverbs are short, weighty, authoritative sayings;-sententious maxims of practical wisdom. They are the condensations of human knowledge and observation, in a pithy and memorable form; resembling concentrated essences in chemistry, in which the strength of a large measure of a liquid is distilled into a few drops. The practice of expressing sentiments in this way is very ancient; and it was common to the Jews as with other oriental nations. The proverbs of the Old Testament are reckoned by eminent critics as belonging to the didactic poetry of the Hebrews. They are distinguished by the two characters of brevity and elegance; brevity being essential to their very nature, as well as necessary for aiding the memory in their retention; and their elegance giving them an attraction to taste, and contributing to fix them in the mind and promote their circulation. "When I say these things, I speak of Eastern proverbs generally. Those of Holy Scripture stand on still higher ground. They are to be regarded, not as the mere recorded results of human wisdom, but as "the true sayings of God." The proverbs contained in this Book are not, by any means, to be regarded merely as ancient sayings which were in common use, and which Solomon only set himself to collect. This opinion has been adopted by some; but it is untenable. It is founded principally on the difficulty of imagining such a collection of wise sayings to be the work of one man. But this is weak ground. The difficulty arises from forgetting the passages quoted, in which the character and extent of Solomon’s wisdom are described. To suppose him the mere gatherer of current sayings, is to assign him an occupation for which, surely, such wisdom as is ascribed to him was by no means necessary. Besides, there are many, very many of the sententious maxims of the Book that could not by possibility be proverbs in the currency of other oriental nations. They are such as could be found nowhere but among a people possessing the knowledge of the true God. The Book, throughout, bears all the marks in itself-internal evidence the most satisfactory, of being something infinitely superior to a mere collection of sayings in common use,-the gathered maxims of uninspired prudence. That some of them might be in currency need not be denied. If any were, they have acquired by the place here assigned them, the full weight of divine authority. The Book of Ecclesiastes, there can, in my opinion, be no doubt, was the production of Solomon’s last days, after he had been recovered from his fearful apostasy. It contains the lessons he had learned by bitter experience in "the days of his vanity," when "his heart departed from the Lord;" and the solemn warnings which these lessons dictated to others, to keep them from the rocks on which he had well nigh irrecoverably foundered. That the Book of Proverbs was written in the same period, I am myself persuaded, from the whole style of the commencing chapters; which are strongly and affectionately monitory to youth, and are evidently dictated by a similar experience to that which dictated Ecclesiastes, of the misery arising from the evils against which he warns. His warnings are those of a man who had drunk deeply of the cup, against whose intoxicating qualities and bitter and deadly effects he lifts his monitory voice,-the voice of faithful and earnest dissuasion. The whole of the sayings are a record of his long observation of human nature,-of men and things. That they were written in order before Ecclesiastes seems clear from chap. Ecclesiastes 12:9, of that Book, "And, moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs."

This was one of the various methods which "the preacher" adopted in imparting instruction. He "gave good heed," applying himself to the object carefully; investigating truth with deep deliberation; not uttering hasty and crude sayings, but the results of meditation and prayer, and divine illumination. His "many proverbs" were "sought out"-not, as I have said, from other existing collections, but from wise and divinely directed observation of the circumstances, characters, and prospects of men; and having been thus, with attentive care, sought out, they were committed to writing as they were successively framed, and then "set in order," as far as they were susceptible of arrangement, for public benefit. A wonderful book it is!" "What an inexhaustible treasure of admirable practical counsel! The more deeply it is searched into, the more will be discovered in it; and the more attentive and close our observation of human life, and of human nature both in ourselves and others, the more of truth and accuracy will there be found in its various and valuable sayings." The Book is usually divided into five parts. 1. The introductory-comprising the first nine chapters. This introduction is addressed principally to youth, and was, in all probability, prefixed, after the collection of proverbs, so far as made by Solomon, had been completed. 2. From chapter 10:1 to 22:15: which part contains proverbs generally, though not always, unconnected. 3. From chap. 22:16. to the end of chap. 24: where the pupil is again addressed, somewhat more connectedly, as in the introduction. 4. From chap. 25 to chap. 29 inclusive,-which contain an additional collection of Solomon’s proverbs, "copied out," by selection probably from a larger number, by such men as Eliakim, Joah, Shebnah, Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah, who lived in his reign:-and 5. Chapters 30 and 31;-the various opinions respecting whose authorship must be left till we shall arrive at that portion of the Book. In entering on the exposition of the Book, I desire to apply-and do you, brethren, apply with me, to the source from which Solomon, its author, derived all his wisdom; that we may obtain, in answer to prayer, the Spirit’s aid, so as rightly to understand its instructions; and receive that, in which we are all chiefly defective, the disposition to follow them, remembering the words of Jesus, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." May you, beloved brethren, enjoy the teaching of that Spirit, to give light to your minds and love to your hearts; and to prevent the indisposition to what is good, from engendering such prejudice as may come, like a film over your mental vision, and hinder your clear perception of the truth and the will of the Lord! And may the same teaching be imparted to your instructor, that he may thus be enabled, out of this treasure of "unsearchable riches," to bring forth, for your edification, and direction, your comfort and joy, your present spiritual improvement, and your final salvation, "things new and old!"

02-Pro_1:2-9

Proverbs 1:2-9

LECTURE II.

Proverbs 1:2-9.

"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck." In the Introductory Lecture I took some notice of the title and author, the general structure and arrangement of this Book, purposely avoiding all minute and elaborate discussion, my special object being the elucidation and enforcement of the important truths themselves contained in this interesting portion of the Sacred Volume. For the same reason I should deem it an unprofitable expenditure of your time, were I to enter into critical disquisition as to the exact shades of meaning which attach to various terms of very similar import employed in this and other passages. Excepting when such distinctions become really necessary for some important practical end, it is not my intention to trouble you with them. From verse second to verse sixth, we have a statement of the general design of the Book. The first object here indicated, in regard to the readers of it, is that they may "know," that is, understand aright "wisdom and instruction"-the wisdom and instruction that come from the highest source,-divine wisdom,-divine instruction. The general idea of wisdom is that it consists in the choice of the best ends, and of the best means for their attainment. This definition admits of application both in a lower and in a higher department. In the first place, it may be applied to the whole conduct of human life, in all its daily intercourse and ordinary transactions, and amidst all its varying circumstances. We stand in different relations; we occupy different conditions; we are subjected to different trials; we are exposed to different temptations; our lot is characterized by different changes, difficulties, and perplexing incidents; one day, one hour, may shift our position, and require an entire alteration of our course. To accommodate our conduct to these variations,-to suit to all of them the application of the great general principles and precepts of the divine law, and to "guide our affairs with discretion" in them all-requires "wisdom." And for enabling us to act our part rightly, creditably, and usefully, from day to day, there is, in this Book, an immense fund of admirable counsel, and salutary direction. And then, secondly, the knowledge of wisdom may be taken in its higher application, to interests of a superior order, to spiritual duties, to the well-being of the better part, to all that regards true religion and the salvation of the soul. Wisdom, in this Book, is generally understood in this its highest application, as might indeed be expected in a book of instructions from God. We would hardly imagine a communication from Him, confined to the mere prudential and successful regulation of

our temporal affairs. How important soever this may be in a life, of which the personal and the social enjoyment, so long as it lasts, is to so great an extent made up of little things and dependent on their due adjustment;-yet in a divine communication to man, as an immortal creature, and occupying a position, in regard to God and his everlasting destinies, so peculiar and so pregnant with interesting results,-we cannot conceive these to be the only, or even the principal subjects. Nor are they. They are in every way subordinate. We shall see, ere the close of the present lecture, wherein the "Oracles of God" place the true wisdom of man. Of important "instruction," both as it relates to temporal and to spiritual concerns, there is a vast amount compressed in this Book into narrow bounds,-presented in a condensed form. The proverbial sayings, being very generally unconnected with each other, so that in many instances it is hardly possible to discern any link of association or of suggestion between them, are by no means easily committed to memory in a series-in the order in which they stand. But each maxim, by itself, when rightly understood, becomes "as a nail fastened in a sure place;" and, being thus fixed in the mind, is ready for application in the practical business of life. The Book is thus fitted to store the mind with true, and excellent, and useful principles,-principles, not of merely speculative abstraction, but of daily and hourly use.

"To perceive the words of understanding"-is a phrase which may be interpreted as meaning the discrimination of these from the dictates of folly, so as to entertain the one, as worthy of consideration, and to reject the other;-the power of justly distinguishing between good and evil counsel,-that which is right in its principle and salutary in its operation, and that which is unsound and pernicious:-and, as a consequence of such discriminative knowledge, the possession of the necessary qualifications for being a counselor of others; for guiding them in "the way of understanding"-keeping them from evil and conducting them to good. But it is not enough to possess the mere knowledge, or speculative understanding, of even the most profitable maxims of wisdom. There must be the acceptance of them, as really good, with an approving purpose of application. We must "receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity." A disposition to "receive instruction," is the first and most important lesson for all, and especially for youth;-a humble, docile, self-diffident temper,-a mind open to the admission of sound advice, and desirous to apply it to practice. This disposition is the opposite of self-conceit, and self-will, which are amongst the greatest obstacles to improvement.

"Justice, judgment, and equity," are terms which have different shades of import; but they may all be considered as meaning a correct apprehension of the principles of rectitude, and their impartial and judicious application, in all the private and in all the more public concerns of life: in the regulation of our own conduct; in the arbitrative settlement of appealed differences; in giving direction in cases of difficult and doubtful casuistry; or in the official administration of government. The Book is full of important and discriminative maxims, as to all that is right and just, fair and equitable, in an endless variety of situations and circumstances. In the fourth verse, we have an instance or more instances than one, of the different senses in which the same word is used; and especially at different stages in the history of the same language. The word subtlety is now generally understood in a bad sense, as meaning a cunning, artful deceitfulness-that is when it is applied to character. When used in reference to metaphysical or other recondite discussions, it has the sense of minuteness and refinement of discrimination in the process of investigation or of reasoning. It is obviously in a sense analogous to this that the term is employed here. I need not

say that it does not, as used by our translators in their day, signify cunning or artfulness. This is a feature of character that is odious in all, wheresoever it may be found; and it is peculiarly distressing to witness it in the youthful mind. There, an open, frank, artless, generous disposition is what we look for and delight to find. Even when such a temper leads to occasional imprudences, we greatly prefer it to a shrewd and guileful craftiness. "Subtlety" means here-discriminative prudence. It may be considered as explained by the admonition of our Lord to his apostles-"Be ye, therefore, wise as serpents." And this wisdom of the serpent, He at the same time teaches them, was to be associated with the harmlessness of the dove, (Matthew 10:16.)

It is contrasted with simplicity. Now simplicity is sometimes used in a good sense, in contrast with subtlety in its bad sense. Thus in Psalms 106:6: "The Lord preserveth the simple;" and in 2 Corinthians 1:12: "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world." But in the passage before us, "the simple" are the foolish and inexperienced; those who lack wisdom, and are in constant danger of being misled.

"To give subtlety to the simple" is not, then, to make the artless cunning; but to make the inconsiderate prudent,-the short-sighted discerning,-the foolishly wayward wisely submissive to superior guidance.

True wisdom has for its companion, in the mind that possesses it, true lowliness and self-diffidence: "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning: and a man of understanding will attain unto wise counsels." Ignorance and folly are generally self-conceited and self-confident. They don’t need direction-not they. They are not, therefore, disposed to "hear"-to listen, that is, to the instructions and counsels of others. They think it would be more seemly that others should listen to them. But it is a mark of true wisdom to be ever ready to hear. It is ever conscious of its own deficiency, and desirous to gain new acquisitions to its stores of knowledge,-and to lay up hints for the regulation of its future course. The more a man knows, the more sensible will he become of his ignorance. As the circle of information widens before him, he sees the more of its unexplored extent. He becomes more and more convinced of the truth of the poet’s answer to the question, "What is knowledge? Tis but to know, how little can be known." And mark it, my friends:-this hearing is the only way to "increase learning." A vast deal of information is many a time lost, from the mere fear and shame of discovering our ignorance; but he who hears, acquires new ideas by the intercourse of mind with mind. It is incomparably better, surely, to obtain the knowledge at the expense of the detection of our previous ignorance, so as to become wiser today than we were yesterday, than to retain the ignorance and forfeit the knowledge, for the sake of the false credit of having what we have not. There are few descriptions of vanity more pernicious than this. The proverbial sayings of this book afford numberless instances of what are called parallelisms in Hebrew composition. The structure of this verse is an example of parallelism; the second clause corresponding very nearly in meaning with the first:-"A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." While he who hears increases knowledge, he who intelligently attends to direction and counsel, grows in a profitable acquaintance with the principles of human conduct; and, while he learns to regulate his own course of life aright, acquires the capability of being himself a judicious and useful adviser of others. He "attains unto wise counsels." His understanding is enlarged and sharpened under divine teaching.

"To understand a proverb, and the interpretation," signifies, to understand at once its true original import, and the proper and beneficial application of it to practice. The word rendered "dark sayings," occurs also Psalms 78:2; Psalms 49:4. It means, properly, Enigmae or Riddles. These were used of old, as one of the methods of conveying instruction. It was conceived, that by giving exercise to the understanding in finding out the solution of the enigma, it was calculated to deepen on the mind the impression of the lesson which was wrapped up in it. This was not done for mere amusement, but for imparting serious instruction;-although to the young, there might, in some instances, be the blending of an intellectual entertainment with the conveyance of useful information or salutary counsel. These enigmatical maxims of wisdom were sometimes rendered the more attractive, by being thrown into the form of verse, and even being set to music. A poetical taste and a musical ear were thus made subservient to the communication and impression of truth. To this latter practice allusion is made in the second of the two passages just quoted, "I will open my dark saying upon the harp!'

We have, in verse seventh (Proverbs 1:7), an explicit declaration of what Solomon means by wisdom: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." The fear of Jehovah* is a phrase which may fairly be interpreted as meaning true religion-all the principles of godliness. The same sentiment is to be found in other parts of Scripture; as in Psalms 111:10; and in an inspired book of much greater antiquity, Job 28:12-28; a passage marked by a sublimity worthy of the lesson with which it closes;-a lesson which should be "graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever." Or rather, for that is of incomparably greater consequence, which ought to be written deeply and indelibly on the heart of every youth in this assembly. O that it were!-for if it be not written there,-on a heart softened to receive it by the Spirit of God, what would avail the permanent record of it on the flinty rock? It is preserved here-in this Book of God,-a Book under his own special keeping, and which, while the world lasts, can never be lost:-but if it be not transcribed from the book to the heart, what doth it profit?

* It is Jehovah in the Hebrew, in all cases where Lord is printed in small capitals in the English version. This "fear of the Lord" is in invariable union with love, and in invariable proportion to it. You truly fear God just in proportion as you truly love him. It is founded in knowledge-in the knowledge of the divine character, especially as it is revealed in his word, and more especially still, in the gospel; where the lovely and blessed harmony of all the divine perfections is manifested in the work of man's , salvation.-In Psalms 34:11, the Psalmist invites the young to him, and promises to "teach them the fear of the Lord"-to teach them, that is, the nature of true religion, in its principles and in its practice. And this is properly the first lesson for the young to learn. It is pronounced "the beginning of wisdom." All else is folly without it. All the previous part of life is spent in folly till this one lesson is learned,-till this fear takes possession of the heart. Every day's observation shows us, that a vast amount of knowledge may be accumulated in minds that are utter strangers to its residence and power; that a man may be eminent for learning, and science, and elegant literature, without religion-without the indwelling principles of godliness. Ah! How sadly true!-and how sadly exemplified in the literary and scientific history of our own day! Have we not seen men- "Thro' learning, and thro' fancy, take Their flight sublime, and on the loftiest top Of Fame's dread mountain sit"- who have, at the same time, discovered a melancholy destitution of the first lesson of true wisdom-" the fear of the Lord?" O that I could impress the conviction on the mind of every youth before me, that is engaged, and laudably engaged, in the pursuit of science

and literature in all their departments, that valuable as their acquisitions may be, there is one thing that is above them all in dignity, and better than them all in real and permanent worth,-even this primary lesson of the wisdom of Heaven. "Without this, I repeat, all is comparatively folly; and the more ample the powers, and the more abundant and various the learning they enable their possessor to acquire-still the greater the folly; because the more fearful the responsibility and the final account of the man, who with such powers, by God bestowed, has lived without God; who instead of inscribing on them, and on the attainments they enabled him to make, "holiness to the Lord," has pursued his course with a lofty independence of his Maker, and has consecrated all to the idolatry of self; and, it may be, associated all the light and sublimity of genius with the darkness and the degradation of profligacy and vice. He who pursues any description of knowledge, however good and honorable in itself, while he "forgets God," is, according to this book, emphatically "a fool." He may be admired by men, as a very prodigy of science, or philosophy, or literature, and may be adorned with all the titles of human honor, and send down his name to future ages with a halo of the light of this world around it; but in the eye of God, he stands the object of deep and merited condemnation; and, while eulogized and extolled on earth, is pitied and deplored in heaven. Far be it, that I should be understood as under valuing or disparaging human science. It is interesting and useful to man; and its discoveries are glorifying to God. But what I say is, in the language of a second poet-that "an undevout astronomer is mad;" in other words, that the man is beside himself who, while ever busied about the works of God, disregards and forgets God himself; who lives in disobedience to his will, and in the neglect or contumelious rejection of his revealed mercy,-providing an imaginary immortality on earth and leaving unprovided for the real immortality of the world to come! When I think on conduct like this, I cannot but say of those who thus "spend the little wick of life’s poor shallow lamp"-in the lofty and devout language of a third poet- "When I see such games Play’d by the creatures of a power who swears That he will judge the earth and call the fool To a sharp reck’ning that has liv’d in vain; And when I weigh this seeming wisdom well, And prove it in th’ infallible result, So hollow, and so false-I feel my heart Dissolve in pity, and account the learned, If this be learning, most of all deceived."

O let me recommend to you, first of all, the divine science here and throughout this book inculcated. There can be no infatuation more wretched than to "despise this wisdom and instruction." Such contempt has been lamented in tears of bitter anguish by many a one whom it has brought ultimately to ruin. To this contempt and negligence there is, alas! A sad tendency in the heart by nature, and it is strong in youth. And the foolish are very often found, by the language of ridicule, tempting each other to the scorn and mockery of religion as unmanly; as nursery prejudice and antiquated restraint, to which no youth of spirit will submit; or as at best befitting only the graver sobriety and dull decorum of a later stage of life. We shall have a full answer to everything of this kind in the closing verses of this chapter. Should you hear it, as you often may, applied to the restraining and salutary lessons of parental education "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,"-let me recommend to you, in preference, the counsel which follows- Proverbs 1:8. "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother."

Mark, my young friends, the dark list of characters in which the "disobedient to parents" are placed by an inspired apostle. He ranks them with "backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things," and others of like stamp, Romans 1:29-32. The command of God is, "Honour thy father and mother," Ephesians 6:2; and the judgment of God, couched in a beautiful

figure, is-"The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it," Proverbs 30:17.

It is hardly necessary to say, that in all such counsels there is an implied restriction. It is implied that parental instructions, whether as to truth or duty, are in agreement with the mind and will of God made known in his word. Should they, in any case, be otherwise, no choice is left. The maxim with us all must be-"We ought to obey God rather than men," Acts 5:29. When He commands the young to obey their parents, He cannot mean to enjoin that, in obedience to them, they should do what involves disobedience to Him. Parents, on their part, should be careful that they give no orders that are out of harmony with God's word. Children, on their part, must be diffident of their own judgment, and very sure of their ground, ere they venture to decline obedience. But when anything is taught, or anything commanded, that is manifestly inconsistent with the truth or with the will of God, then comes in the solemn declaration, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me!"

Youth is naturally fond-and truly the fondness is not peculiar to youth-of what will recommend it to notice and regard. This is sought in a great variety of ways; sometimes by attention to external appearance; or by the cultivation of various attractive accomplishments. Solomon sets before you, young friends, the best of all recommendations- Proverbs 1:9. "For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck."

"The instruction of thy father" and "the law of thy mother" are to be regarded as the instruction and the law of true religion-the faith of its doctrines, and the practice of its precepts. And this is what Solomon here recommends, as the loveliest, the most beautiful, and the most precious ornament. The first question, with each one of you, ought surely to be, "On what does God set the highest value? What is it that is most attractive and estimable in His eyes!" He is infinite in wisdom. His judgment is infallibly right. And consider,-the judgment and taste of all whose opinion is worth having are in harmony with His;-all the wise, all the good. Would you set any value on what could recommend you only to fools? O! What avails their admiration and applause, how rapturously soever paid, if the eye of God loathes to look upon you; if the countenance of God frowns and turns away from you; if all holy and happy beings behold you with pity and aversion? Let me recommend to you, my youthful hearers, the beauty of early piety. O that I could so impress the conviction on your minds, that irreligion is degradation and deformity, the greatest that can attach to an intellectual and moral nature, and that of such a nature true piety is the only honour and the only loveliness, as that you might, with full purpose of heart, disown the one, and embrace the other! Alas! That in the eyes of fallen creatures, piety should so sadly have lost its charms!-They "savour not the things that be of God."

How affectingly was this perverted relish manifested, in regard to Jesus himself! His character was the perfection of sinless rectitude; yet what said the prophet of him-and bow literally was it verified,-"He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him," Isaiah 53:2. His holy loveliness had no attractions for the worldly and carnal mind. But let him, my young friends, be your pattern, who was indeed "fairer than the children of men,"-"altogether lovely." Seek to be like him, when, in his early years, he showed his subjection to his heavenly Father in his subjection to his parents on earth; and when, as he "grew in stature,"

he grew "in wisdom," "and in favour with God and man." The ornament of true religion is an ornament that shall endure forever;-that shall continue to be your adorning where "ornaments of grace upon the head, and chains about the neck" can be worn no more; and when the body which by these was decked, shall be humbled to the dust of the tomb, and be food for the loathsome worms. True religion is the ornament of the better, of the immortal part-the ornament of the soul; and shall continue its ornament forever in heaven. You may read at times, on festive days in the high places of the earth, of the elegance and splendor of royal and courtly attire; and your imaginations may be dazzled by the profusion of diamonds, and pearls, and brilliants, and tasteful decorations, and costly finery, indicating the anxiety felt and the pains expended, to adorn this "painted piece of living clay." Amidst all this profusion of cost and care for such a purpose-for the passing pomp and pageantry of the hour,-Ah! How little thought too generally is there about the adorning of the inner man-"the hidden man of the heart!"-of those "ornaments of grace," in a higher sense than that in which the word is used here, "which are, in the sight of God, of great price," and which shall last, in all their beauty and in all their worth, "When gems, and monuments, and crowns, Shall moulder down to dust!"

Let such be your adorning now, that it may be your adorning forever! For you must not forget-or if you do, it must not be by my ceasing to remind you-that those ornaments of heaven must be put on on earth. And in order to your putting them on here, remember where they are to be found. Study the Bible. Here is true religion. It is taught here, recommended here, exemplified here. May God grant, as to every one of you, that you may rightly learn its lessons, imbibe its pure and sacred spirit, and exemplify its holy and consistent practice!

03-Pro_1:10-19

Proverbs 1:10-19

LECTURE III.

Proverbs 1:10-19.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse. My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof."

We have already considered what may be regarded as the primary and fundamental lesson of this Book; and indeed of the whole Bible, so far as the practical counsels of it are concerned, and the ultimate design of all its discoveries:-"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." It is in beautiful harmony with this great general lesson, that Solomon, in solicitude for the youth around him, and for the youth of all coming generations, makes his first solemn warning, a warning against the dangers of Bad Company;-"My son, if sinners entice thee-consent thou not." There is also an interesting connexion between this admonition and the previous exhortation to mind parental counsel. To such counsel the enticements of sinners are conceived to be in opposition, (the father and the mother of whom he speaks, being evidently understood to make "the fear of the Lord" the great principle and end of their tuition and training,) and to be, of course, in their tendency and result the reverse;-so that instead of estimation and honour of the truest and highest kind, they would infallibly bring to shame all who hearkened to them and followed them.

"Sinners" is a designation sometimes used in Scripture as the generic or universal designation of our race; to every member of which, without exception, it is appropriate-for "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." But it is also used, not unfrequently, of those who remain under the power of their natural sinful lusts and passions, in distinction from such as have been turned from the error of their way, and are walking in newness of life. (See Psalms 1:5. John 9:31.)

Here it signifies those who do not fear God,-those who hear not the instruction of their pious fathers, if they enjoy such instruction, but "forsake the law of their mother." Against the enticements of such, the young are here affectionately admonished.-Youth is the season of ardent passions and of buoyant and sanguine hopes. Not having, as yet, tried his strength, the young man is naturally self-confident; and, unexperienced as he is in the deceitfulness of the world and the precariousness of temporal things, he is incredulous of the premonitions of coming evil. He smiles at them as the gloomy presages of sombre and superstitious minds, and exults in the lively anticipation of good. The morning of life sparkles before his eyes in dewy freshness, and

promises, to his ardent spirit, a long day of sunshine and joy. It is neither the purpose nor the tendency of the discoveries of the Bible, to sadden the natural vivacity of early life; to quench the gleam of light-hearted pleasure in the youthful eye; to shroud the rising morn with dark clouds of melancholy. God is good. All his prohibitions are only prohibitions of what would be injurious to ourselves;-and all the principles of which he orders the cultivation and exercise, are inseparably associated with the attainment and enjoyment of happiness.

But, alas! How small a proportion of mankind are under the influence and guidance of these "great principles." And in a world where the true fearers of God are so sadly in the minority, those who are under their dominion cannot fail to stand exposed to many temptations and to corresponding hazards. They are surrounded, on all sides, by "sinners" of every description and of every degree. They come in contact, at all points, with the infection of evil. They are in danger, at every step, from the corrupting and deadening power of all the varieties of irreligion,-that of the openly profligate, and that of the creditably sober,-that of the avowed infidel, and that of the inconsistent professor of the faith. In a city like the one in which we dwell, such young men as are at all inclined to the fear of God are environed with innumerable perils. Their incipient piety, when not yet confirmed into decided godliness, is like a spark of fire hovering over the surface of the ocean. Allurements on the one hand, and intimidations on the other, everywhere abound; and the Arch-Adversary plies all his wiles, to catch away whatever seeds of truth and elements of goodness have been sown in their hearts. Of all the dangers to which the young can be exposed, there is not one which experience pronounces more imminent than the company and example of the ungodly. "Sinners" are fond to have associates in their evil courses. Some of these courses are such as cannot be pursued without associates. And in how many instances besides, is solitary vice,-vice, of which the perpetrator has no companion but his own conscience,-felt to be irksome and miserable! How often is it for the purpose of preventing the intrusions, and silencing the annoying whispers or louder remonstrances of this troublesome visitor, that company is courted!" Hand joins in hand." They keep one another in countenance. They rally each other’s spirits. They drown "dull care." They unite in "making a mock at sin." They help each other to "break God’s bands asunder, and cast away his cords from them," and, for the time at least, to give their foreboding fears to the winds. And, while the fearers of God, in the exercise of a pure benevolence, rejoice with the angels of heaven over a repenting sinner-over one who turns from the "fatal paths of folly, sin, and death," into the paths of wisdom, purity, and peace,-these children of the "Wicked One" participate in his infernal pleasure, when they succeed in seducing any from the right way, and thus obtaining an accession to their numbers, and an encouragement to their selfish indulgences, from the ranks of religion and virtue. In the verses before us, Solomon evidently selects a particular case, in illustration of the counsel with which the passage commences-"If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." The particular case selected in exemplification, is that of young men combining into parties for plundering or marauding expeditions,-either against the caravans of travellers in the desert, or into the territories of adjacent tribes. You may, and not without reason, think that the case is one that has very little application to you. And, assuredly, I am under no serious apprehension of any of my youthful auditors forming themselves into bands of freebooters,-into gangs of thieves and robbers. But there are involved in the particular exemplification, important principles, capable of general application. It shall be my aim to bring out these principles; and in doing this, I shall avoid dwelling on the particular case further than may be necessary for due illustration; conceiving that there is nothing more

unprofitable, than to spend time in dissuading from courses which there is not the remotest likelihood of one amongst my hearers following out. We have, in the first portion of the passage, the Enticement Of Sinners,-and in the last, the Divine Warning Against It. The Enticement is contained in verses Proverbs 1:11-14. "Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse."

I wish your attention here to the style of artful temptation that is adopted,-the inducements that are held out to compliance.

1. The first is-the privacy and concealment of their villainies. "Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause."-Even by minds that are little if at all under the influence of the fear of God, a strong objection might be stated against compliance with solicitation to evil because of the risk of discovery, and of consequent disgrace and punishment from men. This very natural objection is here met and overruled. "There is no danger," say those tempters; "we do nothing openly-we 'lay wait'-we 'lurk privily'-we take good care not to expose ourselves-we have eluded detection hitherto, and we shall elude it still." And they boast themselves in the very art and skill with which they have evaded discovery, and cheated all their pursuers. And is not the same objection many a time silenced in the same way, in every department of wickedness?-in every description of solicitation to evil? How often do the profligate, in coaxing the inexperienced and unwary youth to become one of their party, tell him, with insinuating address, how easily the thing may be done without detection,-without father or mother, or any one knowing at all about it!" It may be kept perfectly secret, you know; you may depend upon our secresy; no one of us, be assured, will ever betray you; and, unless you choose to be such a fool as to blab it out yourself, who is to know it? Come away. If no one finds it out-where's the harm?"

Now, my young friends, there is only one thing which requires to be said in answer to such insinuating address. These persons do not choose to remember, what, I fondly trust, you will never allow yourselves to forget-that there is an eye that never sleeps, always present, always wakeful.-"Thou, God, Seest Me!" "There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." O beware. "Be sure your sin will find you out." You cannot dig deep enough to hide it from the eyes of the Lord. And if He sees it, what although it eludes the detection of every human eye! Should your sins never find a place in any record on earth, forget not, they are recorded in heaven, marked indelibly for judgment, in the book of God's remembrance.

2. The second enticement is-the courage and boldness of their exploits: "Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit."-This is the boastful language of determined bravoes. To many youthful spirits, there are few qualities so dazzling and captivating as courage. And some of the books which furnish lessons for early life, by presenting courage in attractive forms, and yet in association with qualities and actions far from justifiable, serve to take off from the opening mind the decided feeling of moral reprobation, which, but for such association, these qualities and actions would draw upon them. So strong, frequently, is this tendency to admire intrepid boldness, that we feel it difficult to help admiring it, even when the

exploits in which it signalizes itself are in themselves unprincipled and wicked. And, as is the case in the passage before us, the imagination is artfully drawn away from the nature of the deed, of which, were it allowed to be duly contemplated, the atrocity might be startling, and is fixed on the heroism displayed in the doing of it.

Now, only change the term. For courage, substitute spirit; and we have immediately before us an every-day temptation to sin,-one in constant, hourly use,-extensively and ruinously prevalent. No charge is more dreaded by the young than that of want of spirit-the imputation of shrinking and dastardly timidity. A lad of spirit is the designation they are ambitious to attain. Now, here, too, my young friends, my warning is similar. I remind you, affectionately and seriously, how miserably perverted such terms as courage, and spirit, and others of like character, are, when the authority to be violated, and the displeasure to be incurred, and the sentence to be brought upon you, are the authority, the displeasure, and the sentence of the infinite God. Every sin is a direct defiance of omnipotence. O let not the name of courage be abused and desecrated by being so applied. It is not courage. It is insensibility. It is profanity. It is madness. (Job 9:4. Isaiah 45:9.)

3. The third enticement is, the profit of crime:-"We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil." The allurement thus held out is that of immediate inches;-the acquisition at once, by a single bold adventure or two, of what it usually requires years of unrelaxing thought, and solicitude, and toil, and travail, to obtain. These seducers present the allurement of a short cut to wealth,-"Come with us; we shall soon make a man of you; you shall wallow in wealth immediately." And is this not capable of extended application? Are there no circles of companionship into which a youth may be drawn by circumstances or by solicitation, in which the old-fashioned every-day methods of making money are laughed at as spiritless and sickening; and shorter and easier ways to riches, or at least to what is necessary for the indulgence of vicious passions, are proposed and adopted! And when against particular startling practices, he ventures to raise objections on the ground of moral principle, he is coaxed, or ridiculed and bantered, out of them; or satisfied by unsound but specious arguments. He incurs the expenses I have alluded to. The funds for these must from time to time be recruited, for paying debts of vice or debts of honour; and the how becomes a question of agonizing perplexity and bitter disquietude. He is induced, by pressing but criminal necessity, to venture in thought on methods, or to listen to them when hinted or boldly proposed by others, from which, before, his conscience would have shrunk in horror. But that conscience has lost of its sensitiveness; and it is now to be soothed and drugged by the powerful though illegitimate pleadings of necessity. Objections are overruled and put down; and the moral obliquity of the action is as plausibly as possible covered from the arrows of self-reproach, by the force of the all-sufficient, irresistible plea-that necessity has no law;-the thing must be done; there is absolutely no help for it.

I hope I have not been describing a reality in the experience of any youth now hearing me. It is no mere fiction. It has many a time been a reality; and I warn you against whatever seductions, or enticements of sinners, might by possibility make it a reality with you.

4. The last consideration of an enticing nature here presented is-the honourable union, and the frank and openhearted generosity of the fraternity by which the invitation is urged:-" Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse."

"The heart is deceitful above all things,"-and there are few ways in which its deceitfulness is more strikingly apparent than in the considerations by which even the worst, the most unprincipled of men, quiet their consciences, and get even beyond that,-plume themselves, and flatter one another with imaginary good qualities. Confederates in the very worst of evils have valued themselves on their mutual good faith;-their fidelity to the very engagements and oaths that constitute their chief guilt;-their very honour and consistency in crime. The tempters in the passage before us are a kind of gentlemen banditti. And the representation held forth of a generous, social brotherhood, pledged honour, joint stock, common risks and common profits, is not a little imposing and captivating to the youthful mind. Is not this, too, or something akin to this, one of the enticements incessantly held out by dissipated associates in the merriment and the profligacy of vice, when they have marked out a victim of seduction, and court him to join their company? They are the choice spirits. Theirs is the good fellowship; so open, so jovial, so kind-hearted; so free of all the puling cant of sanctimonious grimace; so generous and honourable to one another; so-every thing that can be wished for enjoying life!-But O my young friends, beware of the enticing illusion. That it is an illusion let the dear-bought experience of thousands convince you, without your venturing to put it to the test of experiment for yourselves. You would but add to the accumulation of proof and of practical warning. It was the maxim even of a heathen moralist, that there is no true friendship but amongst the good. Where there is not sound principle, union cannot be depended upon. It is but a name, an empty pretension, a deceitful lure, a snare of golden texture, for the feet of the inexperienced and thoughtless. May God deliver you from it! Again I say-Beware!

Let me now request your attention to the Divine Dissuasion-monitory and authoritative, which follows in verses Proverbs 1:15-19, "My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path: for their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof."

1. The first thing to be noticed here is, the language of affectionate interest and trembling solicitude in which the admonition is couched;-"my Son." Whether Solomon had any eye, as a father, to his own son, Rehoboam, we cannot with certainty say. It is more likely, that it is the language of affectionate concern for the young in general, expressing itself in individual address, for the sake of impression and effect-that so each youth who read the dissuasion might regard it as if he himself were personally spoken to. I call on each, therefore, now hearing me, to hear for himself. And if I know my own heart, I think I can adopt the address with a measure at least of the affection by which it was originally dictated-"My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path." Every Christian minister, as well as every Christian parent, ought to feel for, and so to warn, the objects of his affection. How exquisite the delight of a godly parent, when he sees the child of his heart’s love choosing the "fear of the Lord,"-walking in His ways, and departing from evil! How he "travails in birth" for those who are "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh," "until Christ be formed in them!" And surely, to every benevolent and pious mind, there can be few sights more deeply moving than that of a young man-after a struggle, perhaps, with early impressions and the restraints and compunctions of conscience-giving way before temptation, yielding to the enticements, joining the company, and lending-at first a timid, but afterwards a more

prompt and daring hand to the practices of the ungodly;-like the heedless insect, insensible of its danger, wheeling and fluttering, in sportive mazes, round the consuming flame;-like the gallant ship, that has come within the outermost slowly circling eddies of the whirlpool, and is gradually, and with increasing celerity, sucked in to its destruction! When we behold such a youth, incredulous of warning because unconscious of his peril, thus going forward to irretrievable shame and ruin, it is not anger that is waked in our bosoms; it is pity; it is tender anxiety; it is compassionate and thrilling fear. Our heart swells; our eye fills; our hand is stretched out; our voice is lifted up in the accents of earnest and tender expostulation-"my Son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path."

2. Mark, in the second place, the extent to which the admonition goes.-It is not to a gradual but an immediate; it is not to a partial but an entire, abandonment. It advises complete and instant separation; a renouncing of all intercourse; and a keeping cautiously and constantly aloof;-"Walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path." This is the counsel of sound wisdom, not that of Solomon only, but of God. Half-measures will not do. There must be no tampering with temptation-no compromise-no partial adoption of the practices of sinners, in the hope, or with the resolution of stopping and retracing your steps when you have advanced a certain length. Would you swallow poison by degrees to try how much your constitution would bear,-how far you could go without actual suicide? No. You must not only not comply,-you must not listen. He who has listened, has half complied; and he who makes one step in compliance, wretchedly deludes himself, if he imagines he can recede at pleasure, or can tell confidently how far he is to go. O do not think of trying your own strength of principle and power of self-command. Rather, let the first exertion be, to resist the first solicitations to evil; or, if with these you have unhappily complied, to arrest your progress at the present point. To try your own strength is presumption; and God helps not the presumptuous. He "giveth grace unto the lowly."

3. In immediate connection with this, and partly indeed identical with it,-consider to what extremes the commencements of evil ultimately lead:-often to such extremes as the youth who is enticed into wicked company never anticipated,-never dreamed of, or imagined it within the range of the possible that he should ever endure even to witness, far less to participate:-"For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood."

There is a natural and fearful progress in sin. Success in it is a curse; for it is an encouragement to go on. In the course of advancement, the inclination onward gains strength, while the power of receding declines. Beware then, I pray you, of first steps. Smile not in self-confident scorn at the well-meant but needless warning. Many have scorned it before you, whose scorn has been turned into the bitterness of unavailing regret, when miserable experience has forced upon them the lesson of their folly. Deem nothing impossible for you, that it is within the reach of human power to do in the form of evil, if you have once given way to the violation of principle. You may not only go lengths that will ruin yourselves, you may contribute to the shame and ruin of the companions and victims of your vices; you may ruin families and fortunes; you may break honest and sensitive hearts; you may bring down grey hairs with sorrow to the tomb,-the grey hairs of your own loving but disappointed and grief-stricken parents, or of the fathers and mothers of your associates in evil.

4. The objects of Solomon’s affectionate solicitude are further reminded, that their folly and their guilt would be the more aggravated and inexcusable, if they should venture into the society of sinners in despite of admonition:-"Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." These words, it is true, might be interpreted of the artfulness and cautious secrecy, with which the seducers described lay their snares. They take care not to let their gins be seen by the birds they are laid to catch, which might scare them, and defeat their end. They do not expose their designs all at once. They deal subtlety. They show them at first as little as possible; and the little that must be seen they present in its least repulsive or most attractive form,-keeping studiously out of view what might startle and shock the uninitiated in the "mysteries of iniquity." They lay their schemes of seduction warily; and suit their decoys to the various characters and circumstances of their victims.

I am disposed, however, to understand the words as rather signifying the aggravation of the guilt which would be incurred in consequence of the warning thus given: as if he had said-"Now you are put on your guard. I have given you faithful premonition. I have set before your eyes the gins of the seducer. If you go into them, you go in with your eyes open. Let my warning have the effect upon you which the sight of the fowler setting his nets has on the fowls of heaven. Flee from temptation. If your foot be taken now, you will sin presumptuously-sin against light and knowledge. The guilt will be entirely your own; and your blood will be upon your own heads. Let the snare, then, now you are warned, be spread for you "in vain." Show that you are aware of your danger. ’He that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.’"

5. The last dissuasive consideration is-the ruinous consequences of yielding to the enticements of sinners:-"And they lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof." In the latter of these two verses, the pronoun "which" is supplementary. The meaning clearly is, "So"-that is, so deceitful, so ruinous-" are the ways of him who is greedy of gain; it taketh away the life of its owners"-or, "it taketh away the life of those who are under its power." The verse will thus express-not the murderous conduct which the greed of gain produces in order to its gratification, but the mischievous and destructive effects of the base and criminal passion to the person himself by whom it is indulged,-exposing his bodily life to jeopardy and his soul to perdition. The sentiment of the two verses seems to be-that although the workers of iniquity might elude the vigilance of men, and the avenging visitation of human tribunals, or of the resentments of fellow-creatures, yet they were their own very worst enemies. The certain effect, or inevitable consequence, of any particular course of conduct is sometimes expressed by this figure of speech, and it is full of energy-as if it had been in the intention of the agent, the object he had in view. The idea is-that, had it been so, had he indeed intended it so, he could not have adopted means more appropriate for attaining his end. The expression in the 18th verse is evidently borrowed from the 11th. There the ungodly are represented as saying-"Come with us." But, says the wise man, they are bringing a surer and heavier destruction upon themselves, than any they can ever inflict upon others. They invite you to "lay wait," to "lurk privily," for the "blood" and the "life" of unoffending fellowmen; but in truth "they lay wait for their own blood,-they lurk privily for their own lives." They are themselves their surest and most pitiable victims. The vengeance of offended heaven pursues the evil-doer; secretly, silently, invisibly, but closely, constantly, unswervingly, tracking his steps. It is behind him in all the windings and doublings of iniquity; it finds him out in all the hidden haunts of vice. In a

memory from which nothing escapes, it treasures up against him every act and word and thought of evil. It follows him all the downward road to perdition, and at last, shuts him up in the prison of hell, and there takes up its abode with him for ever. It may not be appointed to overtake him in this world. His schemes of evil may prosper to the end. But overtake him it inevitably will; if not here, hereafter. Will you seek, then, your own destruction? Will you, with frantic infatuation, try what amount of wrong and ruin you can bring upon yourselves? Will you foolishly and recklessly presume, in despite of the warnings both of men and of God? Will you, knowingly and wilfully, consign to damnation your never-dying souls? Will you be, in the very worst and most awful sense of the designation-a SELF-MURDERER?

I conclude with two observations.-First, Let not any imagine, from the nature of the case selected by Solomon, and of the course of illustration suggested by it-that there is no danger, excepting to the openly profligate-to adepts and bravoes in impiety, vice, and violence. That would be a sad mistake indeed. There is danger to all who are living without the fear of God-who are not thus "wise unto salvation." We require not to go to the dens and caves of robbers and assassins, to the cells of bridewells and jails, to the polluted and infernal haunts of abandoned licentiousness, in order to find those who are without this fear, and who are in danger of perishing,-who are perpetrating the fearful suicide just mentioned. They abound around you, even among the sober, plodding, money-making men of the world. All ungodliness exposes to death. You may ruin your souls by worldly-mindedness, as effectually as by profligacy. Whatever it be that keeps you from giving up your hearts to God,-whatever it be that keeps you from being in earnest about the salvation of your souls,-whatever it be that shuts the Saviour out of your hearts, arid prevents you from taking up the cross and following him,-that will be the ruin of your souls.

2. We have in this passage associations for evil. We invite youth to Associations For Good,-to the Church of the living God, the community of the faithful; and to those societies which Christian piety and Christian benevolence have instituted, for the promotion of religion, and for the diffusion of the knowledge of divine truth. Shall Satan have his combinations, and not Christ,-the god of this world, and not the God of heaven? Let Christians associate. Let Christian youth associate. Let them "consider one another, to provoke unto love, and unto good works." Let them "exhort one another daily,"-strengthen each other’s hands, and encourage each other’s hearts in the way of the Lord. Shall Science have its combinations, and not Religion? While Societies are formed for the advancement of general knowledge, or of particular departments of philosophy and the arts,-shall not the heads and hearts and hands of Christians" be brought into united counsel and co-operation, for the promotion of knowledge still better, and blessings still more precious and enduring than those which all human discovery can ever confer? Shall not the experience of age and the energy of youth combine for ends, so glorifying to Christ, so salutary, so eternally salutary, to mankind?-O! if such associations of youth as those we have been contemplating be melancholy and revolting,-how delightful are Associations of youth for religious improvement,-for their own and one another’s spiritual benefit,-bands of young philanthropists, whose object it is, to make inroads on the kingdom of Satan,-to arrest the progress of vice and irreligion,-to do good to all as they have opportunity,-and in the terms in which their divine Master describes the end of his coming into the world-"not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them?"-To the youth of all such Associations we say-Go on, and prosper! And if sinners entice you to quit your own for theirs, consent not. Be it your endeavour to allure them to yours, to win them over to the Lord’s side, drawing them with the

cords of love,-bearing in mind, that "he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

04-Pro_1:20-33

Proverbs 1:20-33

LECTURE IV.

Proverbs 1:20-33.

"Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth m the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."

It has been a question with expositors, whether by Wisdom, in this and subsequent passages, we are to understand a person under this designation-namely, the second Person of the adorable Trinity, "the Word" and "Wisdom of God,"-the medium of divine communications to men,-the "Light of the world;" or simply the instruction of the word of God personified as Wisdom, speaking to the children of men.

It is enough for the present to observe, what every sincere believer in the inspiration of the Bible will at once admit-that in this passage, the address is divine.* The voice of Wisdom is the voice of God. The authority of Wisdom is the authority of God. The invitations and the warnings of Wisdom are the invitations and the warnings of God. The neglect and scorn of Wisdom are the neglect and scorn of God. The blessing of Wisdom is the blessing of God; and the vengeance of Wisdom is the vengeance of God. If it is a personification of instruction, it is not of human but divine instruction; it is not of instruction as coming from the wisdom of Solomon, but from the wisdom of God. And surely when the wisdom of God speaks, it is the wisdom of man to hear and obey. Indifference and scorn are impiety, infatuation, madness.

* For the discussion of the point see Lect. on ch. 8.1-21.

Divine Instruction addressed men of old by the Prophets. Those "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," (2 Peter 1:21) in the name of Jehovah, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom," (Colossians 1:28.) They informed, they invited, they reproved,

they promised, they threatened;-all in the same name;-all with the same authority. There was the solemnity and the weight of Heaven’s truth in every word they uttered. But "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds," (Hebrews 1:1-2.) Following his Son are his inspired "ambassadors," to whom he committed "the word of reconciliation," and who had in all things, whether regarding truth or duty, the "mind of Christ." Since the time when the "vision and the prophecy were sealed" in Patmos, there have been no new revelations, and no inspired teachers. Yet, all the servants of God still, who "speak according to this word"-(and it is very obvious, that no others can be his servants)-may be regarded as speaking with the voice of heavenly wisdom; and, however unworthy of notice or of deference in themselves, demanding audience for their message, as accredited by the Book from which they profess to take their instructions.

There are two things to be marked as characterizing the address of Wisdom. The first is publicity;-Proverbs 1:20-21. "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words."

She thus chooses the most suitable places for giving her instructions all the publicity possible. Now, this has been, and still may be, by the servants of God, done literally. Jesus himself set the example. He uttered his voice in the synagogues, in the courts of the temple, in the streets, in the fields, on mountains, and in plains,-wherever human beings could be assembled to listen. Pursuing, during his official life, the great ends of his ministry, as "a teacher come from God," he acted as the occasions of that ministry required, seizing on every opportunity of proclaiming truth, and publishing the doctrines and admonitions of the Father that sent him. And what the Master did, the servants need not surely be ashamed to do. Street and field preaching have, in many cases, been signally owned and honoured of God, for the great end of all preaching-the bringing of sinners to Christ-the turning of the disobedient unto the wisdom of the just. It has sometimes been brought into disrepute by the conduct of inferior, unworthy, and mercenary characters; but there is the greater reason why it should be redeemed from obloquy, by the countenance of right-principled and right-hearted men; men who can truly say-" We seek not yours but you." And we rejoice that by ministers peculiarly qualified for the work, it has, in our own day, been thus redeemed. If there is a portion of the world’s scorn, and even of the so-called Christian world’s scorn, still attached to it, what is that compared with saving souls from death?-But the general idea of publicity-universal publicity-is that which is intended to be conveyed; just as when our Lord says-"What ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house-tops," (Matthew 10:27,) he simply means-make it known openly and everywhere. The second thing in the address of Wisdom is-affectionate earnestness.-The very publicity of her instructions proves her earnestness. She does not wait in private, till men may find her out, and come to her for her lessons. She goes out to them. She not only embraces opportunities when they present themselves; she seeks them, she makes them. This must ever be the spirit and practice of Christians. The principle of regulating the supply by the demand, will never do in their department. The spirit of Christianity must be the spirit of kind aggression. It must seek men out, to tell them of the way of life. It must find its way to the abodes of those who would never themselves come to the house of God to hear of the things that "belong unto their peace." It must carry the tidings of mercy to the most distant and sequestered

spots of our country, and make "the dwellers in the mountains and the vales" hear its voice. It must carry it "far hence unto the Heathen," bearing thither "the unsearchable riches of Christ,"-the treasures of that wisdom which "cannot be gotten for gold, nor can silver be weighed for the price thereof." It must thus show itself in earnest for the conversion of sinners, and the evangelization of the world.-And in the earnestness of Wisdom, there is affection, dictating all the force and tenderness of persuasive expostulation and entreaty. Such was the example of the "great Teacher;" of his prophets before him and of his apostles after him. Theirs was not the style of cold, dry, formal, didactic statement, but the urgency of persuasion, the force of evidence, the exhibition and recommendation of their lessons by motives addressed to all the hopes and fears and longings of the human soul.* The language in the passage before us, is full of such tender and urgent solicitation:-Proverbs 1:22-23. "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you."

There are three descriptions of characters here addressed;-kindred characters, it is true, in their generic principles, but different in the mode and measure of the development of those principles.

* Luke 13:34; Matthew 11:28-30; 2 Corinthians 5:20.

"Simple ones," are evidently, as explained in Lecture second, the ignorant, thoughtless, inconsiderate, who, lightly regardless of admonition, "pass on and are punished."-"How long," it is said to such, "will ye love simplicity?"-choose, that is, to persist in thoughtless levity and dissipation, loving ease, and not liking to be disturbed and troubled in their course of carelessness; disinclined to give heed to any thing that would at all interfere with the tranquillity or the indulgence of the passing hour. The solemn import of the question, as intimating the duty and the necessity of immediate compliance with Wisdom’s counsels, will appear from what comes after.

"Scorners" go beyond the "simple ones." They are not merely indifferent and regardless: they scoff at the things of God; they ridicule or revile his lessons; they sneer at and mock his servants and people; they make his word their jest-book, and his day their holiday; they disdain alike the restraints of his precepts and the encouragements of his promises; they laugh at his threatenings, make sport of his terrors, and glory in their superiority to vulgar and superstitious fancies. To them, in the same style of faithful and affectionate expostulation, it is said-"How long will you delight in scorning?" In so doing they took pleasure in what they should have hated; they made light of what ought to have made them serious; they gloried in their shame; they acted in opposition to all the plainest dictates of prudence; they were like "maniacs dancing in their chains;" their very delight and merriment were appalling; they joyed in what made all who loved them sorrowful; they courted death; they sported on the verge of hell.

"Fools" who "hate knowledge," may describe still another class:-those who are not ignorant of divine lessons,-the lessons of truth and of duty; to whom they have been imparted, and on whom they have been inculcated, by parental tuition, and during their attendance with their parents in. the house of God. But they have felt all this a restraint. It has been utterly distasteful to them; irksome to their inclinations, and troublesome to their consciences. Determined on following their own ways, "walking after the sight of their eyes and the imagination of their hearts,"-they have hated the knowledge which has interfered with and thwarted their purposes, or made them unhappy in the prosecution of them. The career which such pursue is a career of sin against

light,-in opposition to the convictions of their judgments, and the dictates and remonstrances of the inward monitor.* * Comp. John 3:19-21.

All these are here addressed in the terms of heartfelt compassion and solicitude. The question is that of serious expostulation:-"How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?" It is the address of one who clearly saw, in the conduct of all the three, in whatever diversity of measure, folly, and guilt, and danger. They were all acting unwisely, criminally, recklessly. The longer they persisted, the deeper was their guilt becoming, and the more imminent their danger. While they were thus "loving simplicity," "delighting in scorning," "hating knowledge," the moment might be at hand that should arrest their career and consign them to the woe from which there is no redemption!" How long" will ye act thus?-how long thus "forsake your own mercies?" how long thus provoke the slumbering vengeance of divine Justice? how long thus disregard or brave all that is fearful, and refuse and set at nought all that is exalted in honour and rich in happiness? The spirit of the address appears in the exhortation and the encouragement which are immediately added. The exhortation is-" Turn you at my reproof." The reproof was that of affectionate faithfulness; and the exhortation shows the temper of the reprover, as that of love: "Turn you"-to God, to truth, to holiness, to happiness. And we see from what follows, that the motive is a regard to their own well-being, urged upon them by the compassion of an all-merciful God;-as when he says, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Ezekiel 33:11.

It is a call to repentance:-not to mere indolent regret-a repentance that needs "to be repented of"-the selfish sorrow of the world which "worketh death;" which for the moment admits the justness of the remonstrance, but still loves its old ways; and, carelessly alleging it is too late to think of changing now, resolves on going on as before:-but to a change of mind respecting their modes of thinking and living, feeling and acting; with the manifestation of the sincerity of both, by a decided turning to God and to the ways of faith and obedience. And the most immediate and ample encouragement is held out to compliance. Every conceivable objection is anticipated. There is no obstacle in the way. God stands, with outstretched arms, waiting to receive them; and if they speak of their deficiencies, their own ignorance, their own weakness, their own inability, He takes every excuse out of their mouths, and silences all by the assurance, "Behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." The two things here mentioned are to be taken in connexion with each other. The latter is the result of the former-the former in order to the latter. There can be no plea, therefore, for continued ignorance. The word of God is in possession;-and the Spirit of God is in promise. "What more can be required? What sinners are called to do, is to come to God’s word, and to ask God’s Spirit to enlighten them by means of it. Is there anything unreasonable and hard in this? If unwilling to do this, are they not to blame? Nothing,-nothing but unwillingness prevents them. God is all encouragement to them. It is not he that keeps aloof from them, but they that keep aloof from him. He offers instruction; but they will not have it. He promises his Spirit; but they will not so much as ask it. All the consequences lie with themselves. The promise here is-"I will not only make my words enter your ears, but will open your understandings to a discernment of their truth, and excellence, and suitableness, and glory; and will open your hearts to their gladdening and saving power." This is just what the natural man needs. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Corinthians 2:14. The

inability to know them, in their real spiritual excellence, arises from no want of natural power of intellect, but from the blinding, perverting influence of a depraved heart and a vitiated will. And the Spirit of God "makes known God's word" unto the sinner, not in the mere meaning of its terms, but in the glory and worth of its great truths, their adaptation to His own character, and to the exigencies of the fallen creature for whose salvation they are designed.

These are "exceeding great and precious promises." If sinners are not sensible of their value, and are not induced by them to comply with the invitation which they are given to recommend and enforce, surely the fault is not His by whom they are made,-made in sincerity and kindness.

Such is the divine Invitation. There is then a solemn interval or pause. Wisdom waits to see the result; to witness the reception it meets with from those to whom it is addressed. Alas! Alas! Her hearers "make light of it." They go away, "one to his farm and another to his merchandise,"-each to his worldly and sinful pursuits. The simple ones still love simplicity; the scorners still delight in their scorning; the fools still hate knowledge. They persist in "going astray." Then Wisdom, with awful majesty, proclaims:-verses Proverbs 1:24-27. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." The season of forbearance is gone. The time of expostulation, and warning, and entreaty, could not always last. The voice of invitation is exchanged for the voice of judgment. The God of mercy having waited, and in many instances waited long, to be gracious, in the exercise of his "goodness and forbearance and long-suffering"-the God of righteousness summons to his bar, and pronounces sentence. The sentence is from the throne of justice, against those who refused, when invited, to come to the throne of grace. The description is in harmony with what goes before. The appeal to themselves as to the past is founded in truth. Wisdom appears in it tender, urgent, importunate, calling, and continuing to call even when sinners refuse; "stretching forth her hands, and all day long stretching them forth, to a disobedient and gainsaying people." Her language had been-" Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David," Isaiah 4:1-3. Importunate repetition had been employed; and she had tried it in every possible form, of tenderness and of terror; of drawing with the cords of love, and of awakening by salutary alarm; of "counsel," and of "reproof." But all had been in vain. The heart would neither break nor molt. The ear was closed alike to the voice of mercy and of judgment, of persuasion and of threatening. Then comes the terrific Close:-"I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." This is indeed dreadful! Calamity, fear, desolation, whirlwind, destruction; and No Refuge!-"no ear to pity, no hand to help!"-the only ear to which they could appeal, finally closed; the only hand that had power to save, inflicting the ruin! They prospered in sin; they forgot providence; they laughed at the forewarning of danger, and banished from their hearts and from before their eyes "the fear of the Lord." But now, their day of grace is ended. Their "judgment

lingereth not, their damnation slumbereth not."-"Be not deceived; God is not mocked;-for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "He that soweth the wind, shall reap the whirlwind." Here it is-the whirlwind of divine wrath, the impetuous, sweeping, desolating storm, driving all before it; scattering all their hopes like chaff and stubble; annihilating everything from which they had looked for happiness, and overwhelming themselves in irretrievable ruin! Even as the hurricane and the flood carry devastation and overthrow along the cultured fields, laying prostrate the habitations of men and the replenished stores of wealth, and leave the wretched proprietors, houseless and penniless, to poverty and starvation:-such, (only as much more fearful as eternal destitution of all that can contribute to the happiness of an immortal being is more tremendous than the loss of all that pertains to sense alone, and is limited by the span of human life in the present world), such destitution may well warrant the employment of the strongest terms to express the woe occasioned by it-"distress and anguish." O! Who can form any imagination of the agony of a soul that feels itself lost,-and has, at the same moment, the deep and sure conviction that the loss is irretrievable,-all opportunities of escape gone-gone for ever! What a change from the proud derision of the scorner, and the thoughtless dissipation of the simple! And the bitterest ingredient of their cup-the most envenomed sting of the anguish, yet remains. The God whom they have despised,-to whom they said "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways," will disregard their sufferings and their terrors,-"I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh." These are terms of awful import. If sinners feel the thought rising within them, that such expressions present a harsh and repulsive view of God,-a view of him very unlike a Being who says of himself that he "delighteth in mercy,"-I ask them, What would they have? God does delight in mercy. Is it no sufficient evidence of this that he spares them, and warns them, and invites them, and beseeches them, and stretches out his arms and opens his heart to them, and importunes them to come to him, and assures them-adding his oath to his word-that he "will in nowise cast them out?" Is it not enough, that in order to make way for them to his favour, and to form a ground on which he may receive them to the arms of his love, he "has not spared his own Son," but given Him up to humiliation and expiatory tears and woes and death for them? Are these things not enough, but they must be allowed also, as a proof of his mercy, to break his laws, scorn his invitations, brave his judgments, and, insulting the agonies of a bleeding and dying Saviour, reject with disdain the grace and pardon that are offered them in his name? If they will not be satisfied that God is merciful, unless they are permitted to do all this and more with impunity-woe unto them! We can give them no countenance and no encouragement in such a posture of mind, without compromising the glory of God, and sacrificing the insulted majesty of Heaven to the misconceptions, the pride, the passion, of a worm of the dust! The government of God must be maintained. And impenitent sinners forget, that mercy to the individual might be the very reverse of mercy to the great community of the intelligent creation. They require to be assured, that the time is coming when, as they disregarded Gods voice, He will disregard theirs. The address in these verses is to them; and it amounts to-"Where is now your bravado courage? Where now your haughty scorning? Where now your foolhardy confidence? Where now you’re impious and incredulous taunts and jests, when, ’walking after your own lusts,’ you scoffed at my people, and turned to ridicule both their hopes for themselves and their fears for you?" In what follows, there is a remarkable change in the person; and it is singularly impressive. Ceasing her address to them, Wisdom turns to us, and speaks of them-pointing to their awful end, and converting it into a warning to others to beware of encouraging it:-verses Proverbs 1:28-31. "Then

shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel: they despised all my re proof: therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

Such a scene as that here depicted is sometimes witnessed on a dying bed:-the heart unsubdued, remaining in all its stubborn alienation, but the conscience awakened, and speaking to the agitated and foreboding spirit "terrible things in righteousness;"-and the wretched sinner crying to God, not as the object of love or of hope, but of mere terror,-feeling his irresistible superiority-his "arrows" already "sticking fast within him," and "the poison of them drinking up his spirit:"-yet God still hated; his vengeance only dreaded; all within hard as the nether millstone, abandoned to judicial obduracy; and Hell opening to the vision of the conscience-stricken and terrified culprit! My friends, there is not to be seen under heaven a scene more horrible than such a deathbed! But perhaps "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God," may itself be more especially intended; which will produce a striking correspondence between this passage and several in the New Testament.-See, for instance, Luke 13:23-28, and Matthew 25:10-12. All cries for mercy will then be too late,-all unavailing. The door is shut. The ear of God is shut. The lips of divine Wisdom are shut. There are no more accents of love; no more pressing invitations; no sweet sounds of mercy; no "Ho, every one that thirsteth;" no "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" no "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" but-"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Is not the sentence just-" Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices?" Their miserable end is the fruit-not of God’s way, but of their own. Had they hearkened to Him-had they obeyed His voice, very different had been the issue. His plan, His device for them, was a plan of salvation. It is by "their own devices" they are ruined. Had they, when they might, complied with the gracious counsels of Heaven, they should Lave had "their fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life;"-and, instead of the sentence of banishment and curse, they should still have heard the language of invitation, associated with that of welcome and blessing-"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."

Let me impress upon the mind and conscience of every one the reason, and the only reason, of the issue so fearfully described. There is not a word here of inability; it is all unwillingness. And point me out one passage of the Bible, where it is otherwise; where sinners are represented as condemned for inability,-for not doing what they could not do. The blessed God is no such tantalizer. It is never, "Ye could not"-but "ye would not:"-and when, at any time, inability is spoken of, it is inability all of a moral nature, and resolves itself into unwillingness. And this alone leaves the blameworthiness where it ought to lie-not with God, but with the sinner. It is of infinite importance thus to justify God. Every sinner to whom the voice of heavenly Wisdom is addressed-if he perishes, perishes as the consequence of his own unwillingness to hear and obey that voice. Every such sinner who thus perishes, perishes as one who might have been saved; and whom nothing whatever kept from salvation, but his own want of liking to its nature or to its terms. He would not. Every term here is of this description-"would not"-"refused"-"set at nought"-"hated"-"did not choose"-"despised." "They eat of the fruit of their own way, and are filled with their own devices." And the same is the doctrine in the language which follows:-verse Proverbs 1:32. "For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."

It is the turning away from the warnings and invitations of wisdom that slays them. And this turning of the ear from divine instruction and from all that relates to the soul and salvation, is many a time the result of this world’s prosperity-" the prosperity of fools shall destroy them." (Luke 12:16-21.) The temptation is represented in Scripture as peculiarly strong; and the representation is in harmony with fact. But he is emphatically a fool who allows the prosperity of this world to "destroy" him, for-" "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

How simple, but how beautiful and striking, the contrast:-verse Proverbs 1:33. "But whosoever hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."

He who listens to, and complies with, the counsels of Wisdom-the believer in divine truth-the Christian-shall possess genuine security. "Resting on the Lord," on the wisdom, faithfulness, love, and power of a covenant God and Saviour, his mind will enjoy unmoved tranquillity, amidst all the turmoils and all the vicissitudes of this life. (Php 4:6-7.) And, infinitely more than that, he shall be quiet from the fear of ultimate and final evil-the evil of which the wicked and the careless, the "simple ones," the "scorners," and the "fools," become the victims-the terrors of death and hell. The season of the impenitent sinner’s last alarm shall be to him the season of peace and hope and joy. He shall stand unappalled in the judgment-"quiet from fear of evil" even at the bar of the Eternal-quiet from the fear of a sentence of condemnation and banishment, such as shall drive away God’s enemies. "Accepted in the Beloved," and safe from all evil in virtue of his union to Him, he shall "enter into His joy." And there-in the residence of the redeemed, no "fear of evil" shall ever find admission. There shall be in the very fullest sense of the words, "quietness and assurance for ever." How delightful the representations of the serene tranquillity, the perfect peace and joy-of the everlasting habitations:-"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," Revelation 7:14-17.

05-Pro_2:1-9

Proverbs 2:1-9

LECTURE V.

Proverbs 2:1-9.

"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity, yea, every good path." Is Wisdom here to be considered as the speaker, or Solomon? If Wisdom, she must be understood as addressing herself to her own children; that is, those who receive her counsels and place themselves under her tuition and guidance, her instruction and authority; as she had just finished her solemn admonition of danger and of their final doom to those by whom her words are unheeded and disobeyed. If Solomon, he may be understood as addressing himself either to Rehoboam, or to youth in general, under the designation of paternal affection, as one that felt all a father's interest in their well-being. In the passage, (verses Proverbs 2:1-4,) there is an Exercise recommended, or rather, a Duty enjoined, of the first importance and the most imperative obligation; and it is enforced by the happy results which are represented as arising from it. The exercise-the duty, is a candid, earnest, persevering inquiry after Divine truth.

1. The inquiry must first be candid-sincere. It is said of "fools," that they "despise wisdom and instruction." But the children of Wisdom "receive" her words. They do not shut their ears against them. They do not slight them. They do not hastily and thoughtlessly disregard them. They give them, what they are entitled to, a serious and deliberate attention. They listen, they remember, they meditate, they examine, they accept, they lay up for use.-The words of divine wisdom are now in the Bible. There the voice of Wisdom, or of God, addresses you. In reading the Bible, you should consider yourselves as listening to God. And it is a blessed privilege, to have this Word in your possession,-to have God addressing you in it. It is the most valuable of all deposits that can be committed to you. But it is one of those deposits of which the value to you depends, not on the possession but on the use. It will prove, through neglect and misimprovement, a curse, instead of a blessing. O! How few are duly impressed with the preciousness of a communication from God,-of a record of the mind and will of the Infinite Being "with whom they have to do!"

If you feel the value of this privilege, you will attend to the instructions and counsels, the admonitions, the encouragements, the commands, which in the Bible are set before you. It will be your sincere and cherished desire, as the children of Wisdom, to comprehend her lessons. You

will "apply your heart to understanding."-There are some who refuse to hear at all. This is unreasonable, uncandid, unmanly, and most infatuated: for if the claims of the Bible be well-founded, what can be imagined more important than the knowledge of its contents? There are some who do hear, or rather it should be said, seem to hear. They profess to be all attention; but it is all pretence,-the mere result of politeness and courtesy to the speaker,-the spirit of assentation in which there is no sincerity, no heart:-like the temper of the son in the parable, who said, "I go, Sir; and went not." This is worse than not hearing at all; inasmuch as it is the reality of neglect, with the guilt of hypocrisy superadded to it. You must "apply your hearts to understanding,"-cherishing a true and sincere desire for its attainment. And when there is this sincerity, you will "hide with you" the divine counsels and commands: not hiding the book that contains them, laying it aside and allowing it to lie in safe and secluded custody, under the guardianship of lock and key; but hiding its contents in the memory, in the understanding, in the conscience, in the heart. The father of Solomon expresses in few words what Solomon means-when he says, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee," Psalms 119:11.

2. The inquiry that is thus sincere, will be an earnest inquiry-an inquiry determined on gratification, and that spares no pains for its attainment. This is the spirit of verse third (Proverbs 2:3).

Divine Wisdom, as we have seen, is herself in earnest in imparting and recommending her salutary counsels. And while the instructress is thus in earnest, so should the pupil be in seeking her instructions. That about which we really are in earnest, we cannot satisfy ourselves with asking in a careless and scarcely audible whisper, as if indifferent whether we were heard or not-ah no! Thus will not the awakened soul do with God. "Crying," and "lifting up the voice," are frequently in Scripture the indications of earnestness; and he who is in earnest for the right understanding of the lessons of Wisdom, will "cry mightily to God" for that illumination which he needs, and which it is God’s to bestow. The man who has lost his way, and is wandering in the dark, knowing not which way to turn him, unable to find the right path, will seek a guide. He will cry out for one, exerting all his powers of voice, if, peradventure, he may be within the hearing of any one who can come to his relief, and conduct him to safety. So he who is sensible of his inability to guide himself in the perplexing paths of life, while he feels "pleasures tempting from without, and passions warring within," will be all solicitude for a conductor-a divine guide, who may bring him into the right way, and keep him in it. Nor will he rest till he has secured what he so earnestly seeks. Hence,

3. With earnestness is united importunate perseverance. This is implied in the variety of expressions used in succession to each other. It is implied specially in the repetition of the same thing in different terms in the third verse; where it is not one cry succeeded by silence, but evidently importunate crying that is meant-" If thou criest, and if thou liftest up thy voice"-not ceasing to cry, but crying with augmented vehemence. And the idea of perseverance united with earnestness is strongly brought out in the figure employed in verse fourth,-"If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures." Men discover the value they set on the treasures of this world, by their unrelaxing diligence in seeking them. They do not give up the search immediately, because they do not immediately succeed. So long as any hope remains in one direction, they persist in the search; and if, at length, they find that in that direction it is vain, they try in another; and try, and try again, till they discover the way to what they are in quest of. If any expectation exists of a mine of silver or of gold, or of aught the working of which may yield silver or gold by its merchandise, what earnestness is discovered! What "drilling and boring of the solid

earth!" what excavating toils in all directions, perpendicularly here, and horizontally there! what searching, and washing, and breaking, and testing!-And then, when a vein of precious ore has been discovered, with what patient perseverance and care it is traced and worked, in its main trunk and in all its ramifications; and never relinquished, till the last fibre of it has been explored and exhausted. The application of this appropriate figure is, in every view, obvious. Divine knowledge is fitly compared to treasure, to treasures of gold and silver,-the articles which are held by men in highest estimation. The comparison is natural and common. It occurs repeatedly in the introductory part of this book; and in many other parts of the Scriptures. David says-"The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver," Psalms 119:72. Job says of the excellence of wisdom, "It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls; for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold," Job 28:15-19. Thus, were the mines of all that is precious in the bowels of the earth emptied of their treasures, there would be a treasure still remaining, not only surpassing each, but surpassing all;-the accumulation of the whole, in all their weight, and worth, and lustre, and beauty, and variety, being nothing compared with the treasures of the divine word-the "excellency of the knowledge" which it contains. Paul speaks of "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and of the "unsearchable riches of Christ;" divine knowledge being a mine of precious ore, which we shall be exploring through eternity, without ever exhausting it. Alas! How little of a disposition appears in the world to form, or to act upon, this estimate! How few are thus earnest in the pursuit of divine knowledge-the lessons of heavenly wisdom! How few who "count all things but loss" compared with it; and who would sacrifice all the treasures of earth, rather than not find it, or, having found it, rather than part with it!-How few even of the people of God, who profess to have learned the value of this wisdom and knowledge by a happy experience, discover the longing, the thirsting, the vehement and persevering research, for the attainment of a larger and larger amount of it which might be expected of them! It is the admonition of an inspired apostle-"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly"-laid up in the understanding and in the heart. Now there is no way in which that word can be in us richly without an eager seeking after it; or dwell in us richly, without a careful and jealous keeping of it-"giving the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip," Hebrews 2:1. Do Christians show anything like the anxious, persevering ardour in seeking such knowledge, which the men of the world discover in seeking wealth? Nay, is it not sadly true of some Christians, and of Christians who have no excuse from poverty, and small wages, and the necessity of unceasing toil for themselves and their families, that such is the eagerness with which they allow themselves to be absorbed in the pursuit of the riches of the world, that they can hardly redeem daily time for the reading and the study of the divine word, and for making daily additions, even however small, to their stock of spiritual wealth? It ought not so to be. Among the richest, and among the poorest, if there but exist in the soul such feelings towards the word of God as are in this passage described,-feelings arising from, and maintained by, a right estimate, and settled impression, of its incomparable excellence, there will be the practical result of such feelings-the determined redemption of time for keeping up and increasing the knowledge of that word. And Christians may be assured, that in proportion as they act on this principle, and, while they are "not slothful in business," are, at the same time, "fervent in spirit, serving the

Lord,"-that Lord will bless them, not in their spiritual state alone, but even in their temporal affairs. Whatever else there may be included in our Lord's words, surely this is, when he says to his disciples, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you," Matthew 6:33. Remember, there is no converse of the promise. God will "add" what is good of the blessings of this life to those who place his kingdom first in their desires and pursuit;-but there is no promise that he will add the blessings of the kingdom to those who place the world first. But there are, in the passage before us, powerful spiritual inducements presented to the course which, has thus been recommended:-verse Proverbs 2:5. "Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." The nature of true religion is expressed in similar terms in the preceding chapter. "The fear of the Lord" is the religious principle, and may, without impropriety, or unnatural straining, be regarded as comprehensive of all the variety of holy affections, which are appropriate to the various views and attributes of the divine character, revealed in the divine word. "The fear of the Lord," taken thus comprehensively, is founded, of course, in the "knowledge of God." This knowledge of God is the first lesson of heavenly wisdom. On the right apprehension of this lesson all the rest necessarily depends:- "You cannot be right in the rest, Unless you think rightly of Him."

Wrong views of God will vitiate every other department of your knowledge. Without right views of God, you can have no right views of his law. Without right views of his law, you can have no right views of sin, either in its guilt or in its amount. Without right views of sin, you can have no right views of your own character, and condition, and prospects as sinners. Without right views of these, you can have no right views of your need of a Saviour, or of the person, and righteousness, and atonement of that Saviour. Without right views of these, you can have no right views of your obligations to divine grace, and can be under the influence of no right principles of obedience, and must be insensible to all those impressive appeals on God's behalf, that are founded on the wonders of his mercy in the gift of his Son, or of the grace of the Son in the gift of himself Thus fundamental, in the lessons of Wisdom,-thus fundamental amongst the principles of all religion,-is the "knowledge Of God." And, beyond all question and comparison, this is the noblest and most valuable of all knowledge. The "fear of the Lord," founded in the knowledge of Him, is something, to the right understanding of which experience is indispensable. To a man who had never tasted anything sweet, you would attempt in vain to convey, by description, a right conception of the sensation of sweetness. And what is true of the sensations, is true also of the emotions. To a creature that had never felt fear, you would hardly convey, by description, an idea of its nature; and equally in vain would be the attempt to make love intelligible to one that had never experienced that affection. It is thus to a depraved creature with regard to spiritual and holy affections. "The fear of the Lord"-a fear springing from love, and proportioned to it, such a creature cannot "understand" but by being brought to experience it. He may talk about it, but it will, in general, be very injudiciously and incorrectly; and while he does not live under its influence, the very absence of that influence shows that he does not understand it in one of its most important characteristics as a practical principle. But blessed are they who have the experimental understanding of the principles of true religion! They know the value of the promise contained in this verse. It may be undervalued and slighted-alas! It is, by multitudes; but this only shows that they understand it not. And none are more to be pitied than they who have no relish for the best of all knowledge, and no experience of the best and most divinely blessed of all principles!

We have then the source from which true wisdom is to be obtained:-Psalms 2:6. "For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

"The Lord giveth," or, "will give-wisdom." From the connexion we are naturally led to remark, that God giveth wisdom-"to them that ask him." The admonition is to seek it; and the encouragement to seek is the assurance of finding.*1 He "giveth wisdom" in two ways; by his Word, and by his Spirit:-or rather these two should be conjoined, and considered as one: for he neither gives wisdom by his word without his Spirit, nor by his Spirit without his word. He has given wisdom in his word. He has given it through those "holy men of God" that wrote "as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." It is from that Word that all true knowledge and wisdom in the things of God must be derived. But it is got thence under the illuminating influence of the same Spirit by whom it was supernaturally dictated.*2 *1 Comp. James 1:5-7; *2 1 Corinthians 2:14

We might take the words more comprehensively. "The Lord giveth wisdom," is a declaration of very general import. Of this, Solomon himself was a remarkable exemplification. When he asked of God "a wise and understanding heart," God gave it him; and it was, in consequence, that he not only knew the fear of the Lord, but had so extensive and scientific an acquaintance with all the kingdoms of nature. But without doubt, Solomon’s chief reference here is to the best knowledge and the best wisdom,-that which is contained in those oracles which were "given by inspiration of God," and which he imparts thence to sinners of mankind, when by his Spirit he "opens their understandings that they may understand the scriptures." The assurance is further expanded in verse seventh:-"He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly." The word rendered "sound wisdom" is one of general import, signifying anything real, solid, substantial. It might be understood as meaning in general-substance; and this would suit well with the verb-"he layeth up substance for the righteous." It is rendered in the same way as in this verse, in chap. Proverbs 3:21 and chap. Proverbs 8:14. And in these passages it seems to be the rendering most in harmony with the context. Considering this as its meaning here, the words will signify two things: that for "the righteous"-for those who are justified through the righteousness provided for them in the work of the Redeemer’s mediation-then promised, now come; and who are brought, at the same time, by his regenerating Spirit, under the dominion of the principles of personal righteousness, and are living "soberly, righteously, and godly"-that for them the Lord has stores of wisdom laid up for their present use, to be imparted according to their need, and according to the sense of need, and the measure of faith with which they ask it; so that He will give them larger and larger, clearer and clearer manifestations of himself, of his truths, of his ways, and of his will, out of these inexhaustible stores. And then further, that beyond all that is attainable in the present life, there is still a treasure of this invaluable wisdom and knowledge, in reserve for his people in a future and better world; where all that they had come to know while here will appear to them but as the simplest elements of information in the mind of an infant, compared with the most extensive and varied acquirements of the perfect man. They have here but gone to school; their full instruction is above. This accords well with the view given by Paul-1 Corinthians 13:9-12. It is "sound wisdom" that God bestows and keeps in store. There is a great deal that passes under the name that is not sound-a "science falsely so called." There is a knowledge of the works of God, unassociated with the knowledge of God himself. There is a knowledge that is mere speculation, exerting no influence on the heart and life, inspiring no devotion, no fear, no love, no spirit of dependence and of obedience. There is no "sound wisdom" but that which, coming from God,

leads to God;-none, but that which tells upon character, engendering moral and spiritual principles and affections, fitting the man for the "chief end" of his being-"to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever."

Another blessing to the righteous is-safety. This had been specified in the way of promise before, at the close of the first chapter. Here is the same promise under another form-"He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly." Mark again the character. This is essential, to prevent self-delusion. To "walk uprightly," is to maintain a course of life regulated by right principles, and directed to right ends. He "walks uprightly" who lives with the fear of God as his principle, and the word of God as his rule, and the glory of God as his end; whose "eye is single;" whose "heart is right with God;" whose constant study it is to have a "conscience void of offence toward God and toward men;" to have his conversation in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God;"-who thus "walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" and "in whose spirit," as "an Israelite indeed," "there is no guile." To such, Jehovah is "a buckler." He is their security amidst all the assaults of their enemies, and especially amidst the "fiery darts of the Wicked One," which, when the shield of Jehovah's power is interposed, cannot touch him, but fall, quenched and pointless, to the ground.* * Comp. Psalms 84:11; Psalms 144:2 The same idea is amplified in verse eighth:-"He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints."

"He keepeth the paths of judgment"-or of righteousness, means that He is there, watching over all that walk in them; superintending, guiding, and guarding them. He is not the guardian of the broad way,-the way of the world and of sin. That way Satan superintends,-"the god of this world,"-doing everything in his power, by all his varied acts of enticement and intimidation, to keep his wretched subjects and victims from leaving it. But the saints, in "the way of holiness,"-the way of wisdom,-"the paths of judgment," are ever under the gracious eye of Jehovah; ever under his watchful care and mighty protection. Of the way-the "highway" of holiness, in which they walk, it is said-"No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away," Isaiah 35:9-10.

Those whose "way" Jehovah thus "preserveth," are "His saints." It is a term of reproach in the world, but of high honour and endeared affection with God;-those whom He hath "renewed in the spirit of their minds"-implanting in their hearts the principles of sanctity, and destining them to the perfection of holy conformity to himself The practical character of their religion is further expressed in next verse, "Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path." It is needless to state the import of each of the particular terms here used. We only observe, that they include, as a part of the "sound wisdom" which the Lord giveth,-acquaintance with the great principles of holy living, and with the peculiar duties of the various relations and conditions of life,-the right way in all these in which God would have us to walk. This very Book of Proverbs is itself eminently fitted to supply a means of verifying this promise. And if you, in childlike ingenuousness of spirit, yield yourselves up unreservedly to the dictates of the word of God, you will seldom be at a loss, in any circumstances, for the "right path"-the "good path"-the way of rectitude and of peace. To "understand" must here, as in verse fifth (Psalms 2:5), mean to understand experimentally; to have experience of the tendency of those ways to true happiness;-to know them "as ways of pleasantness" and "peace"-not right only but good. The

ways which the Lord keeps cannot fail to be ways in which a blessing is to be found; "the way of truth;" "the way of peace;" "the way of holiness;" "the way of life."

Sinners!-forget not, O forget not, that the way of sin is the way of Death. Turn from it! Flee from it. God is not there. Peace is not there. Safety is not there. Life is not there. Heaven is not there. Neither happiness for time nor for eternity is there.

06-Pro_2:10-22

Proverbs 2:10-22

LECTURE VI.

Proverbs 2:10-22.

"When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths: to deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which nattereth with her words; which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life: that thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous. For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it."

Solomon here proceeds to show, that true religion,-the wisdom, of which he celebrates the excellence and recommends the cultivation,-not only has a positively, but also a negatively beneficial influence; inasmuch as, while it conducts in every "good path," it at the same time is a preservative from paths that are evil:-verses Proverbs 2:10-11. "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee."

You can never be too frequently reminded of the distinction between the understanding of the meaning of divine discoveries, and the perception of their excellence and truth. The knowledge spoken of in Scripture, with which salvation is connected, must be considered as including the latter. This proceeds upon a sufficiently simple principle. The knowledge of anything means the knowledge of its real and distinctive properties. Thus the knowledge of the natural historian, is the knowledge of the properties of different animals, by which they are distinguished from each other. The knowledge of the botanist, is the knowledge of the properties of the various plants in the vegetable kingdom. The knowledge of the chemist, is the knowledge of the properties of the materials with which he is conversant, considered in their elementary composition and relative affinities. The knowledge of the mental philosopher or metaphysician, is the knowledge of the properties and powers of mind, with their several appropriate uses and functions. None of these could with propriety be said to know the objects of their respective departments of inquiry, if they knew only their existence while they had no acquaintance with their qualities; if they knew only the fact of their being, without knowing what they were, in their distinguishing attributes. The same thing is true with regard to any proposition. You cannot be said to know it, if you merely hear it announced, and understand the meaning of its terms, while you know nothing of its properties,

whether it be true or false, whether it has any important relations to other propositions, or any real use and capability of application to any purpose in moral or intellectual science. If a proposition is true, if truth be one of its properties, then to know it is to know it as true. If a proposition is of real value and excellence, and capability of useful application in the system of truth, to know it is to know it as thus excellent and valuable and suited to important ends. On such principles we at once explain such texts as 1 Corinthians 2:14-"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." It is plain that in order to the "things of the Spirit of God" even appearing "foolishness to the natural man,"-in order to his scorning and rejecting them, he must have some understanding of their meaning. No man can disbelieve or despise a statement, without knowing it, in this sense. But to know the "things of the Spirit," evidently, from the very position which the word holds in the verse, signifies, so knowing them as that they shall no longer appear "foolishness;" it is to know them, that is, as possessing the divine attributes of truth and excellence, and appropriateness to the character of God and to the condition and exigencies of man. This is what the apostle calls spiritual discernment. It includes a spiritual taste for moral and spiritual beauties, just as the mere sight of a rich and varied landscape, or the mere hearing of the most perfect combination of sounds, can impart little or no pleasure, unless there be a taste for the beauties of scenery, and an ear for the charms of harmony. The man who has this taste and the man who lacks it, may both, with equal clearness and precision, so far as the mere picture on the retina of their respective eyes is concerned, see the very same objects, in the very same relative positions and combinations;-and the very same sounds may strike on the tympanum or drum of their respective ears; and the one be entranced in ecstasy, while the other is vacant and unmoved. Thus to the carnal eye-the eye of the "natural man," who is destitute of spiritual discernment, or spiritual taste, the Saviour appears "as a root out of a dry ground, having no form or comeliness, no beauty that he should be desired;" while to the eye of the spiritually enlightened, He stands forth " fairer than the children of men," "the chiefest among ten thousand," the "altogether lovely." The same things may be said of Him in the ears of the one and of the other. In the mind of the one the description awakens no sentiment but one of contempt and aversion, while it draws forth, in the bosom of the other, all the combined and delightfully blending emotions of admiration, reverence, and love. And thus it is with regard to divine truth generally. I need not say that there is much more meant than the mere speculative understanding of divine doctrines in the tenth verse. "Wisdom entering into the heart," is accordingly to be explained from previous statements-chap. Proverbs 1:7; chap. Proverbs 2:5. It clearly implies the spiritual illumination of the mind, and renovation of the heart by divine influence accompanying divine truth. This is the only way in which true wisdom ever finds entrance into the naturally foolish heart of man. And then it is, that "knowledge becomes pleasant unto the soul"-the knowledge before spoken of-the knowledge of God, and of the things of God, as revealed in his word. There are many kinds of knowledge which may be "pleasant unto the soul," while the understanding is darkened as to these things, and the heart enmity against them. What delight the man of science, in whichsoever of its various departments, derives from the knowledge acquired of any additional fact or additional principle, while yet he is stone-blind to the beauties of divine truth, and has no relish for the light and the love of the Godhead, or for the wonders of that gospel,-that scheme of redemption by grace and by blood, which is emphatically "the wisdom of God"-the most truly marvellous of all its displays! But when, by divine illumination, "the eyes of the understanding" are opened to the discernment of divine excellence in the discoveries of God’s

word, that word becomes "sweet unto the taste," "sweeter also than honey to the mouth." Such is the recorded experience-recorded in terms full of emphasis-of all God’s people.*

* Psalms 1:1; Psalms 119:72; Psalms 119:97; Psalms 119:111; Psalms 119:127; Psalms 119:129-131; Psalms 19:7-11; 1 Peter 2:1-3.

Proverbs 2:11. "Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee."

"Discretion" and "understanding," may well be regarded, in such a connection, as meaning especially self-jealousy arising from self-knowledge. The knowledge of ourselves includes the knowledge, theoretical and experimental, of the unlimited deceitfulness of our own hearts. And this, connected with a right knowledge of the sources of temptation as they exist in such abundance and variety around us, will inspire and maintain "discretion." The man whom God has enlightened knows his own remaining corruption, and is deeply conscious of his own weakness to withstand its tendencies. With these impressions he will be ever vigilant. He will "watch unto prayer;" "keep his heart with all diligence, out of which are the issues of life;" and "ponder the path of his feet," in every single step of his walk through life. Nor will he trust to his own discretion; but, while he keeps all the powers and energies of his mind, all his foresight, all his resources of observation and caution, ever on the alert, will still look upward and say-" O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," Jeremiah 10:23. Diffidence of himself and confidence in God may be considered, in combination, as constituting the "discretion" of the spiritual man. It is a part of his prudence to take the best counsel, to have it always at hand, to be ever asking it-" in all his ways acknowledging God, that he may direct his paths." From the twelfth to the nineteenth verse, the wise man dwells, specifically, on two sources of temptation. And he may be considered as addressing himself, with a peculiarity of interest and of emphasis, to Youth. These two sources of temptation are-wicked men, and wicked women:-

Verses Proverbs 2:12-17. "To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things; who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths: to deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God."

Against "the way of the evil man," with the temptations and dangers attending it, he had already affectionately and strongly warned the young-Proverbs 1:10-15. The paths of irreligion, vanity, and vice, while they are all devious and downward, are at the same time exceedingly various; and they have all their peculiar enticements, by which those who themselves walk in them; endeavour to allure others into them. And he who has the "discretion" spoken of in the eleventh verse will, amongst other exercises of it, seek to be duly aware of his own most easily-besetting sin-of the evil desire which he is most prone to indulge, or the evil temper to which he is most apt to give way; and will keep a double guard over that particular point of assault and temptation. The "evil man" is here described as "the man that speaketh froward things:" that is, the words of perverse rebellion,-of a spirit stubborn, refractory, scornful, self-willed.* And such "froward things," having the sound and appearance of freedom and independence, are apt to work with a most seductive and perilous influence on youthful minds of a particular temperament. O the fondness of poor fallen humanity for independence! It extends it even to God and vainly says of Jehovah and his

Anointed-"Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." From the influence of such vain boastings, let "discretion preserve thee;" let "understanding keep thee!"

* Comp. Psalms 12:1-4.

Minute analyses of the different parts of the description are unnecessary, especially after the illustration of former passages.-We may remark on the thirteenth verse, "Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness"-that darkness, as thus set in contrast with uprightness, may be interpreted as descriptive both of the nature of the ways, and of their tendency and end. The man who walks in "uprightness," walks in light. His eye is "single." There is "none occasion of stumbling in him." He has but one principle;-his "eyes look right on, his eyelids look straight before him." He is not always looking this way and that, for devious paths that may suit a present purpose; but presses onward ever in the same course; and thus all is light, all plain, all safe. "The ways of darkness," are the ways of concealment, evasion, cunning, tortuous policy, and deceit. He who walks in them is ever groping; hiding himself among the subtleties of " fleshly wisdom:" and being ways of false principle and sin, they are ways of danger, and shame, and ruin. They are dark; and they lead to darkness-"the blackness of darkness for ever."

"What a wretched kind of "delight" and "joy" is that in verso fourteenth! The happiness of God is his perfect holiness. He "rejoices to do good." He "delights" in true virtue-the virtue that has its basis in godliness-in the fear and love of himself; "and that which He delights in must be happy." What a fearful account, then, of any moral and accountable agents, that they "rejoice to do evil,"-rejoice in that which is the very opposite of all that God is, and of all that God approves and loves!

There is a correspondence between their ways and themselves-"Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths."-"Crooked ways," is a designation, not unusual in Scripture, for the ways of sin and the world; and it is very appropriate.* The ways of sin are not like "the way of holiness." It is a straight and direct way-an even, uniform, unbending course. God has marked it out; and his people have but to follow it, never swerving to the right hand or to the left. The ways of evil are the reverse-"crooked ways," in which sinners, in their frowardness, are ever winding about; turning in every direction; and changing from purpose to purpose, as wayward caprice or shifting inclination, the alternations of evil propensity, happen to ’dictate. O forget not that these ways all terminate at the gates of the eternal prison! "Avoid them; pass not by them; turn from them, and pass away."

* See Psalms 125:5. The same admonition applies, with special emphasis, to the way of "the strange woman," with her seductive wiles. This was one of the principal occasions of Solomon’s own awful departure from God; by which he brought his soul into such jeopardy of perdition. No wonder he dwells upon it so often and so earnestly as he does. He knew the danger of youth, not only from his own experience,-an experience recorded by himself with shame, but from extensive observation, in regard to the prevalence and the fatal results of this sin;-a sin which, I am verily persuaded, if there be another that slays its thousands, may with truth be affirmed to slay its ten thousands. I must not, by a false and overfastidious delicacy, be prevented from faithfully, affectionately, and vehemently warning youth against its awfully seductive blandishments. Of these Solomon here speaks as if they were chiefly on one side,-on the part of the unprincipled female seducer, with her fair and flattering words, her endless arts of allurement, and silken toils of

fascination. But they are on both sides. We are not to forget that that accomplished seducer has herself perhaps been seduced. By "studied, sly, ensnaring art" it may have been, that she has been tempted to "forsake the guide of her youth, and forget the covenant of her God."-The "guide of her youth" may either mean God himself-who by Jeremiah says to his wandering people, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth;"-or her earthly father or mother, the natural guardians and guides of their youthful offspring; or, according to the more general, although I am far from sure of its being the more reasonable interpretation, her husband, whom it was incumbent on her to hear, and love, and obey, as the "guide" assigned her in her youth by a gracious Providence.

"Forgetting the covenant of her God," may either have reference to the marriage compact, made in God's name; or, more generally, to the law and commandments of God: according to a very common phraseology in the Old Testament Scriptures-as in Psalms 103:17-18. The circumstance of the case subsequently detailed by Solomon in its particulars of seduction, being that of a faithless and perfidious wife, gives the greater likelihood; it is admitted, to this interpretation. No matter. It is the general lesson and the general warning we are anxious to impress. Many a time had this wise observer of mankind had occasion to see the havoc wrought among the principles and characters, the rising interests, and the prospects for time and eternity, of the young and the unstable, by this particular sin. "Many strong men "-strong to all appearance in moral and even religious principle-he had seen "cast down by it." From a "heart that had known its own bitterness," he admonishes youth to beware. O let me, young friends, reiterate and urge the admonition. Mark the rocks on which vessels like your own, full of promise, have struck and gone to pieces, and avoid them. Take the warning. Guard against first steps in this path of imminent hazard-nay, according to Solomon, of almost inevitable ruin:-verses Proverbs 2:18-19. "For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.

"Death"-to which her paths "incline "-is the death both of body and soul, but especially "the second death;" and "the dead" are the miserable victims of that never-dying death. Ah! How many a poor infatuated deluded youth has been led on, step by step, the downward road to "the chambers of death!"-led on, by soft and silken bonds,-amidst "the pleasures of sin for a season,"-to "adamantine chains and penal fire!" To every youth, then, now hearing me, I say, with all the earnestness of affection,-the earnestness of a father to his children,-Shut thine ear to the syren voice of pleasure! Escape for thy life!

Opposed to the way of evil men is the way in which Solomon was desirous those with whom he pleads should walk:-verse Proverbs 2:20. "That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous." The "way of good men" is the way of God's commandments,-of faith and love and active obedience;-and "the paths of the righteous" may mean all the varieties of that obedience, in the different departments of life and service. The chapter closes with encouragement on the one hand and repeated warning on the other:-verses Proverbs 2:21-22. "For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it." The continued possession of the land of promise was often by Moses connected with obedience, as in Deuteronomy 4:40. And so also was it by the prophets, Isaiah 1:19-20. This obedience was the obedience of faith. Such obedience was always what Jehovah required of his people; and the promise expressed his

delight in it. It was on account of the true Israelites-the spiritual seed of Abraham-by whom this obedience of faith was rendered, that the land continued to be possessed by the nation at large: but abounding unbelief, and the wickedness produced by, and indicating it, were ultimately to be the cause of entire dispossession:-"Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you. "When ye have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you," Joshua 23:12-13; Joshua 23:16. By such assurances the Israelites were reminded of the original terms of God's covenant with them; of his unceasing, unabating, uncompromising, and universal detestation of all sin, by whomsoever committed, especially by those who called themselves his people, and of his determination to visit it with merited vengeance. He ever, from the beginning, made a difference between the righteous and the wicked. He could not but make this difference. The saying has always been, and must always be, a truth-"The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish," Psalms 1:5-6.

Even in this world, the good man, with the love of God, the pardon of sin, a new heart, and a good hope for eternity-has the best of it,-a goodly heritage. And when he leaves this world, he has the animating anticipation of a better country-"a land of pure delight"-the heavenly Canaan-"the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Whereas, when the wicked are removed from the earth, instead of being taken they are driven-not to God, but from God,-"driven away in their wickedness." They are "rooted out," finally and for ever. The wheat is gathered safely into the barn, while the tares, bundled together, are cast into the "unquenchable fire." Would you escape this fearful end? There is but one way-the way of Faith and Holiness: faith to unite you with Christ; and holiness to prove its reality.

07-Pro_3:1-10

Proverbs 3:1-10

LECTURE VII.

Proverbs 3:1-10.

"My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." The admonition in the first verse, "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments," is substantially the same as that in the eighth verse of the first chapter. The terms, however, are not identical, and there is a shade of corresponding difference in the meaning. Three things may be considered as implied in this verse-

REMEMBRANCE, ATTACHMENT, and OBEDIENCE. First, then, it is an admonition to remembrance:-"forget not my law." Some there are-not a few indeed-who almost put away from themselves every admonition that relates to the exercise of memory. They say they have no memory. It too often happens, however, that the failure in memory is confined to subjects of this nature; that in other matters it is sufficiently ready and sufficiently retentive. Allow me, then, to remark, that the mental faculties have a close relation and a mutual dependence on each other. There are, without doubt, original diversities in the power of memory. But memory depends greatly on attention; and attention depends not less upon the interest which the mind feels in the subject. He who feels no interest will not attend; and he who does not attend will not remember. The admonition not to forget involves, therefore, an admonition to attention-to the giving of "earnest heed"-that so the divine laws and truths might be fixed in the mind.-The words include, secondly, affectionate attachment,-"Let thine heart keep my commandments." It is not enough that we merely remember as we might the laws of the twelve tables, or any other code, in which we feel no farther interest than that which arises from historical curiosity. We must feel our interest in them, as commandments binding on ourselves. They must have more than even the approbation of the conscience; they must have the concurrent affections of the heart, as the commandments of One to whom the love and devotion of our whole souls is supremely due. And wherever there is this consent of heart, there will be the third thing involved in the words, spiritual obedience. The "heart keeping the commandments," must surely be considered as meaning, not external conformity merely to their requirements, but agreement with them in the inward principles, desires, and motives. God’s laws are, in this respect as in others, like himself: they search the heart. They require it to be right with God. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us." "The

thought of wickedness is sin." "The Lord weigheth the spirits." "The law is spiritual." The Heart is what he requires; and it is his, just in proportion as, under the influence of his love, it is conformed to his law. A motive is held out in the second verse to compliance with the admonition of the first:-"For length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add to thee."

Such declarations are frequent. They certainly are not to be interpreted as a promise of long life in this world, in every instance, as the result of obedience to God’s laws. Had this been a promise even then, there would never have boon a case of death among "Israelites indeed," except in old age. But assuredly, in point of fact, it was not so. There are promises to Israel, of their days being prolonged in the land which the Lord their God had given them, which are greatly mistaken when interpreted of the life of individuals; and as pledging in every case its prolongation to all the good. Such passages relate to the continued possession of the land of promise by the people, if they, in their successive generations, continued to serve God in the obedience of faith.-But there is a general tendency in the keeping of the divine precepts to the preservation of health and the prolongation of life, which is all that was then meant, or can now be meant, when the declaration is applied to individuals. The virtues of sobriety, of temperance, and chastity, and industry, and contentment, and control of the tempers and passions, and regularity, and integrity, and kindness,-and others that are included in subjection to the law of God, have all, in various ways, a manifest tendency to such a result. They conduce, eminently, in the ordinary course of things, to the enjoyment of health and long life-to the prevention of the tear and wear of the constitution, and to general prosperity and well-being; for here, as in many other places, "peace" may be understood as meaning more than quietness merely-even general prosperity. Such a tendency forms a quite sufficient ground for general declarations such as that before us. In verse third (Proverbs 3:3) is a specification of certain of the virtues to be cultivated and practised:-" Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart."

"Mercy and truth" are to be maintained in the whole of our intercourse and transactions with our fellow-men.

"Mercy" has two departments of exercise. There is mercy to offenders, and mercy to sufferers. The first is the spirit of gentleness, conciliation, and forgiveness;-a temper often and strongly inculcated on us in the New Testament Scriptures, (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-13.) The second is the spirit of humanity, and sympathy, and compassionate and active tenderness and kindness. This is associated with the other in the passages already quoted, and often urged as indispensable to the Christian character, as it was of old to that of the true Israelite, (1 John 3:16-18.) It was this spirit which the Saviour so beautifully inculcated, even towards enemies, in the parable of the good Samaritan; and of which, in his whole life, he gave so interesting and perfect an exemplification.

Added to this must be "truth"-in all our words-in all our conduct,-for we may lie in look and in act, as well as with the lips. Truth implies that universal and unswerving veracity and integrity which secure the unhesitating confidence of all,-guileless simplicity and godly sincerity in all our ways.

Respecting "mercy and truth," three things are hero enjoined: 1. "Let them not forsake thee:"-that is, let the practice of them be steadfastly and invariably adhered to by thee in all thy course-in all circumstances however trying, how strong soever the temptation to different feelings and an opposite course:-never in any case let them leave thee; keep them by thee constantly and perseveringly, that in no situation in which thou mayest be placed, they may ever fail to prompt

and counsel thee.-Then 2. "Bind them about thy neck:"-that is, let them be at all times the grace and ornament of thy character. That this is the idea appears from chap. Proverbs 1:9, "For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about the neck." And then the command to "bind them about thy neck," seems to imply the wearing of them constantly, as the permanent adorning;-not to be put on at one time and put off at another, like certain ornamental articles of dress that are worn only on special occasions and in particular companies. These are ornaments fit for all times and for all descriptions of society. All will admire "mercy and truth."-And 3. "Write them upon the table of thy heart." Inscribe them deeply there. Let them not be the ornament of thy character merely, but thy treasure too. Let all thy heart's affections and desires be under their control. Be not satisfied with knowing them as what was "written on tables of stone;" but let thy desire be, to have them incorporated with all the dispositions of the inner man,-to possess a heart in entire unison with their dictates,-to have, through prayer, the promise of the new covenant fulfilled in thee.* * Jeremiah 33:3. 2 Corinthians 3:3.

Here too a motive is subjoined-verse Proverbs 3:4. "So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man."

I have already said that the ground of divine favour to sinners is nothing of theirs. The entire tenor of God's word, and many most explicit passages in it, bear testimony to the grace of his covenant, and to the "redemption that is in Christ Jesus," as the ground of reconciliation and forgiveness. But the enjoyment of the favour of God stands in inseparable association with the possession and manifestation of a certain character.* There is no enjoying the smile and blessing of God in any other way than the way of holy obedience. They who would walk with God must walk there; for nowhere else can God be found.

*See Psalms 5:4-6; Psalms 5:12; Psalms 11:7; Psalms 34:15-16. And as to men:-they are of two descriptions-the good and the bad. It is very obvious, that by the character recommended the favour of all the good will be secured. They are of one mind with God. They love what God loves, and hate what God hates. They that " love the Lord hate evil" "Mercy and truth " are the recommendations of all human character; for they are the recommendations of the divine.-But even as to bad men-to mankind in general, favour will be shown to "mercy and truth." The men of the world may hate the principles of the man of God, but the latter will have a testimony in their conscience; and if he maintains a steadfast consistency, will command their respect and good-will. This is the only legitimate way of finding favour with men. Their favour must be foregone, if it cannot be gotten but by conduct inconsistent with right principle. It is but a false and selfish and temporary favour at the best that can thus be obtained; and it is obtained at the expense of what is infinitely more precious, the favour of God. But the Scriptures teach us that "the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." How, then, is steadfast consistency to be maintained?-how is the favour of the Lord to be thus steadfastly enjoyed? The answer is-verses Proverbs 3:5-8. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."

Self-sufficiency and self-dependence, ever since man gave credit to the lie of the tempter, and violated God's law, in the vain hope of thereby exalting himself to the possession of knowledge like his Maker's-has been one of the characteristics of his fallen nature. Instead of "trusting in Jehovah," with the becoming lowliness of a dependent creature, he has all along, from that time, shown an infatuated proneness to rely on himself-on his own might, his own wisdom, his own

resources. "Leaning to our own understanding" is, as far as it prevails, a kind of practical atheism. To form and prosecute our plans in this spirit of self-confidence, entirely forgetting Him "in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways," is to act as if there were no God-as if the fool's thought or the fool's wish were true.

Remember, however, that "trusting in the Lord"-does not mean that we are not to use our "own understanding"-forming our plans with discretion, and with all possible foresight and precaution,-and in pursuing our ends employing all suitable and legitimate means. No. There is a legitimate using of the understanding that is not chargeable with "leaning to it." While we use it, we are to depend on God for success, trust in the promises of his word, and trust in the care and overruling direction of his providence. Many a time has he shown by what trivial circumstances he can disconcert the most carefully arranged and apparently promising human devices. But still-as dependence upon God for strength to resist temptation does not preclude our applying all the energy of our own minds, so dependence upon him for direction in our ways does not set aside the employment of our own prudence and sagacity. It is our duty to acknowledge Him as Sovereign-" doing according to his will--none staying his hand;" as our Creator and Preserver, without whom we cannot draw a breath,-cannot live a moment for the effectuation of our purposes;*1 as the Supreme Director of all events, whose concurrent will is essential to the success of every measure, and without it all the thoughts of men are vain, turning out subversive of their own designs and subservient to God's.*2 *1 See James 4:13-15.

*2 See Psalms 10:5-16.

Verse Proverbs 3:6. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Such acknowledgment of God, implies the careful consultation of God's word for guidance, with a spirit that is disposed to bow implicitly to its authority in regard to the lawfulness or propriety of our ways-undertaking nothing till we have first ascertained this-that there is nothing in what we project and purpose to do that is out of harmony with God's moral precepts. This must always be first. And, in doing this, unless we come to God's word with the spirit mentioned-the spirit of sincere determination to follow the dictates of the oracle-to relinquish whatever we may have designed the moment we perceive any inconsistency between it and his will,-we are not "acknowledging" him. We are mocking him,-seeking to know his will with the secret resolution of following our own;-coming to his directory only in the expectation of finding our will supported by his,-and when we find it otherwise, spurning or compromising his counsel. Then, when we have ascertained our purpose to be lawful, we must look for direction and illumination, in considering its prudence and expediency and probable results, expecting God's counsel and blessing, owning his authority, aiming at his glory, exercising submission to his sovereign pleasure; taking him as friend and counsellor in all our concerns, and leaving no means untried to discover what will be wellpleasing in his sight. He, who, in lowly reliance, and in earnest, acts this part, will not often fall into very erroneous or hurtful measures. God, by his word, and Spirit, and providence, will lead him in a right way;-will "make darkness light before him and crooked things straight." In "acknowledging" God, we are not to trust enthusiastically to impressions, to dreams, to fancied voices and inward suggestions. Far less are we to make a lottery of the Bible-opening it at random, and taking the text that first meets our eye as given us by God, and putting our own meaning upon it. We are to apply our understandings to the blessed volume of inspiration, that we may find its principles and

precepts that bear upon our case, and give our hearts to prayer, for that influence of the Holy Spirit, which is necessary to deliver us from all undue prepossessions and prejudices in examining it. We are not now warranted to look for immediate inspiration,-for any direct intimations of the Spirit in regard to the course which at any time we ought to follow. The Spirit guides by the word-imparting that childlike simplicity-the simplicity and sincere submissiveness of "babes in Christ"-which will seldom leave those who are influenced by it long in the dark. The seventh verse is a continuation of the same admonition:-"Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord and depart from evil." A woe is pronounced by Jehovah against the spirit of self-sufficiency-"Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" Isaiah 5:21. And the injunction of the Lord to Christians is-" Be not wise in your own conceits," Romans 12:16. Such a conceit of our own wisdom as produces the prohibited self-dependence and forgetfulness of God is inconsistent with the proper fear of God. Hence the connexion-" Be not wise in thine own eyes-fear the Lord." Cherish that reverential awe which will induce the constant acknowledgment of Him; and beware of provoking his jealousy of his own glory, for "the proud he knoweth afar off;" and it is "the meek lie guides in judgment, to the meek he teaches his way."

We may remark another connexion. Where there is this self-conceit and self-reliance, there is danger of too little regard being paid to the first and highest of all questions, the question of the divine will,-of too little discrimination as to the morality of either end or means. Hence, in connexion with the condemnation of trust in our own wisdom, the wise man says, "Fear the Lord, and depart from evil"-into which, as if he had said, trust in yourselves and distrust of God will ever be apt to lead you. There is no true "fear of the Lord" unless there is departure from evil; and a genuine, humble, deep-felt fear of God-the constant, steadfast, self-diffident operation of the religious principle-will keep all right. It is a posture of mind that is beneficial alike to body and soul. This is the sentiment of the eighth verse: "It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones." By the influence of this principle the mind is preserved in a state of cheerful tranquillity and peace-as the prophet says-" Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee," Isaiah 26:3. Now this tranquil and cheerful evenness of temper is in a high degree conducive to the health and comfort and vigour of the bodily frame. Every one knows how a state of anxiety and care, by chasing sleep from the eyes, and depriving of appetite, and otherwise affecting the functions of the animal nature, injures the health; and, when long continued and pressing heavily, may waste the vital energies, and even bring to the grave. And while health is thus promoted, the spirit of humble dependence and firm confidence in God contributes eminently to the prosperous growth of all the other graces and virtues of the Christian character. "Faith in God" is the germ of all spiritual growth;-and "the joy of the Lord," springing from the exercise of an undoubting and unceasing dependence upon him in temporal and in spiritual things, "is the strength" of God’s children in all the activity of the divine life.

There was never a grosser slander than that which is thrown on religion when it is represented as tending to injure the body and the mind, by preying upon the spirit and sinking it to the earth. False views of religion may prey upon both mind and body-engendering distress and despondency; but true religion never can. It is cheering as the light of heaven, and healthful and bracing as the mountain breezes. The state of mind from which true religion is designed and fitted to deliver, is sometimes mistaken for religion itself-I mean a state of conviction, alarm, and fear. But this is not religion:-it is that from which religion delivers. The knowledge and faith of God as his own word

reveals him,-confidence in him as he is there made known,-produces peace, and hope, and joy,-expels the fear which hath torment, and settles the soul in the sunshine of divine love. As a large proportion of the speculations, and projects, and plans, and labours of men are directed to the acquisition of wealth, Solomon counsels, in the two following verses, how to use it when it has been obtained:-verses Proverbs 3:9-10. "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

If, under the influence of the fear of the Lord, we consider all as his gift-got under his providential direction, and smile, and blessing-the same spirit will prompt us to consecrate to Him, what through Him has been acquired. Moses admonishes the Israelites of the danger of forgetting God as the author of all their prosperity. (Deuteronomy 8:10-18.) It was in proportion as they kept in mind their obligations to Jehovah for all the blessings of the land of promise, that they consecrated the substance which was his gift to his worship and to his glory; and in proportion as they fell into the sin of self-sufficiency and forgetfulness of him, they alienated his gifts from him, and gave his glory to another. So will it be with us. The more humbly and devoutly we remember God as the author of our prosperity, will we practically honour God in the use of our prosperity. The Israelites "honoured the Lord with their substance," when, at the erection of the tabernacle in the wilderness, so willing and abundant was the contribution, that a proclamation of excess was required to restrain it. And similar had been the disposition manifested in the preparation for the erection of the first temple. They "honoured the Lord with their substance," when they devoted the due proportions of it to the ends of piety and charity which he had enjoined it on them to mind. The law of the first-fruits you find in Deuteronomy 26:1-3; Deuteronomy 26:12-15. They "honoured the Lord," when they followed his law-first, because the act itself was an act of obedience, which is always honouring to him; second, because it was accompanied with a confession of God’s covenant faithfulness in the fulfilment of his promises, and a thank-offering for that faithful accomplishment of his word; and third, because the offering was designed for the support of his worship, and thus for securing the glory of his name. The spirit of the law referred to is here inculcated; and neither in the terms of the duty nor of the motive, on principles at all peculiar to Israel. The duty is a duty still. The motive is a motive still. The injunction before us stands opposed to the selfish use of God’s temporal gifts,-of what we are ever too prone to think and call our own. God’s language to his people now is the same as it was of old-"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts," Haggai 2:8. In the language before us works both of piety and charity are evidently included. By both God is honoured; because both are enjoined by him as parts of the true use of worldly substance. They do not "honour the Lord with their substance" who use it for the gratification of vanity, or pride, or ambition, or covetousness; who squander it on self, or hoard it for self. They honour him with it, who employ it in ways consistent with his will, and calculated to promote his glory-indirectly by the manifestation of the influence of his religion, and directly by promoting the diffusion of the knowledge and influence of its principles. The law of the first-fruits teaches us the important principle, that God, instead of the last place, should have the first in his people’s generous calculations and bestowments. The arrangement of the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer teach us the same lesson: those which relate to God, his name, and his kingdom, preceding those which relate to ourselves. The injunction of the Saviour justly interpreted, is in spirit and letter the same-" Seek ye first the kingdom of God."-Do we then honour the Lord with our substance, when, after bestowing lavishly on self all that self can wish,-not

withholding our heart from any joy,-we give a little driblet of our surplus for him. For his poor, for his cause and kingdom? Does he honour the Lord who, without a grudge, expends ten, twenty, fifty, or a hundred guineas on some article of ornamental elegance, or mere convenience, or at any rate of very questionable necessity, while the smallest pittance can with difficulty be wrung from him for the great interests of the Redeemer’s kingdom?-sums after sums, large and small, for worldly accommodations and enjoyments,-and a pound a-year for the salvation of the world!

Various are the motives held out to encourage the duty of liberality. In the verses before us, you may be tempted to regard the motive as a somewhat selfish and questionable one:-" So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." But second thoughts may give you another view of it. It is a trial of faith. And it is a trial than which few are found more difficult. It is hard to persuade a man that giving away will make him rich. We look with more confidence to bank interest, or the still better interest of a vested loan, than to a return of profit from what is given wholly away. It is difficult to convince a man that scattering will increase his store.

"While, therefore, the motive in itself looks worldly and selfish, he who comes to feel it so as to act liberally upon it, exercises a faith in God that is rare and of the highest order. He walks by faith, not by sight. He who gives to the poor, because God hath said-" He that hath pity on the poor, lendeth to the Lord"-gives in faith. He who bestows of his substance for the cause of God, because God hath said, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine"-bestows in faith. The promise is that the blessing of God shall be upon the substance and upon the industry of the liberal,-of those whose godliness overcomes their selfishness, and who show their faith and love by their liberality especially to God’s own cause.*

* Look at a striking and edifying exemplification of the principle: Haggai 1:3-11; Haggai 2:15-19. Malachi 3:10.-And in the New Testament see Php 4:14-19. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. My brethren, there is too little of proving God in this matter. We can only discover God’s faithfulness by trying it; and without a doubt, if there were more of trial on our part, there would be proportionally more of the manifestation of faithfulness on his. And there is a higher motive, even as it respects the results to ourselves, than earthly prosperity. Compliance with this injunction is not only a means of increasing our temporal good, but of augmenting our blessedness for eternity. For, while all the happiness of the world to come, shall be bestowed and enjoyed on the ground of grace, yet there shall be degrees of blessedness and glory corresponding to the measure in which the principles of faith and love have been practically manifested-a correspondence between the one and the other, as the apostle expresses it, like that between the seed sown and the crop reaped; the reaping corresponding in amount to the sowing. The right use of worldly substance is one of the ways in which the Lord exhorts his disciples to "provide themselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not." But He whom we serve knows the motives by "which we are influenced:-so that, if one is giving either in the spirit of self-righteousness, or of ostentation, or of any other unwarranted principle-" Let not that man think that he shall obtain anything of the Lord."

08-Pro_3:11-12

Proverbs 3:11-12

LECTURE VIII Proverbs 3:11-12.

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

"Ye have forgotten," says the inspired writer to the Hebrews, "the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth," Hebrews 12:5-6. We have thus the highest authority for regarding the address in this passage, as divine-as the address of God to his own children. Is the address, then, to all men? No.-There is a sense indeed, and a very natural one, in which we are God's children, as being the creatures of his hand. We are his children by creation. He gives us being; and by him our being is constantly sustained, and its wants all supplied.-In tracing the genealogy of Jesus, Luke terminates it with "Adam, who was the son of God." All the rest in the enumeration, had their birth by successive parentages; but Adam had no father but God. And in this sense, as having all alike our being from God, it may truly be said, in the terms of the prophet-" Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God begotten us?" But there was a higher sense in which Adam, when created, was a child of God: I mean, by character. In the phraseology of Scripture, one is called the son of another, who bears remarkable resemblance to him in this respect. And indeed we are not unaccustomed to the figure ourselves. We are wont to say of a youth who bears, in various features of his character, a striking likeness to his father, that he is quite his fattens son. It is in this sense that our Lord says to the Jews, in reply to their indignant allegation-"Abraham is our father"-"if ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." This is a very important sense of the designation. And in this sense, Adam ceased to be a child of God, when he fell into sin. He lost the divine image-the moral likeness of his Maker. He was made after that image, but sin effaced it. And in this sense, all his race have ceased to sustain the spiritual relation. As sinners, they are not the children of God, but "children of the Wicked One," the great enemy of God, by whose temptation the seduction and apostasy were effected. And the grand design of God by the scheme of mediation, is to bring men back to this holy and happy relation,-to restore apostate men to the honour and the blessedness of sonship to God. In this reconciliation-this transference from their relation to Satan to the family of God-there are two things essentially implied-they must be pardoned, and they must be purified. A state of sonship is a state of favour; and this necessarily includes forgiveness. No unforgiven sinner is a child of God. He is not in a state of reconciliation and acceptance; and not, therefore, one of his children; paternity involving and being the very imago of love. This is effected by the atonement-by the work of Christ in expiating human guilt by the sacrifice of himself. Sinners who believe in that atonement, as the ground of pardon, are forgiven. God's "anger is turned away" from them. He "receives them graciously," "loves them freely;" and gives them "a name and a place in his house,"

even that of "sons and of daughters." The other requisite to this relation is resemblance. They must be renewed and purified. No sinner continuing under the power any more than in the guilt of his sins, can be a child of God. When God created man, he made him "after his likeness." When God adopts a sinner-he re-instamps this image on his soul: and this new assimilation constitutes him a son. The Scripture expresses the sum of human depravity by the phrase, "the carnal mind is enmity against God." When a sinner becomes a child of God-there is a transition from enmity to love. God loves the renewed sinner; the renewed sinner loves God. This mutual love, paternal and filial, enters into the very essence of the relation. This saving change is effected by the agency of the Holy Spirit:-and it is effected by means of the gospel. The pardon is on the ground of the atonement. The renewal is by means of the atonement-the truth, that reveals the love of God in the provision of the ground of pardon, subduing the alienated heart to surrender itself to God. The very doctrine of pardon is the means of regeneration. There is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared.

Believers, then, are God’s children: such is invariably the statement of his word.*1 And this is the gift of God’s grace, and the work of God’s Spirit.*2 And this, brethren, is no mere empty title-not a title of which the only accompaniment is the honour of it. It is a real relation, with which stand associated the most unspeakably precious privileges-privileges in time and eternity.

*1 See John 1:11-13. Galatians 3:26.

*2 See 1 John 3:1. Romans 8:14-17. Galatians 4:4-7.

One of these privileges is brought before us in the text. It is one of no trivial value. The world in which we five is a place of trial. Many and various are the sufferings to which men in general, and the people of God among the rest, are subjected. The text speaks of the aspect which all these trials and sufferings bear, to those who have been brought into this new relation. The aspect is widely different from that which the same dispensations bear to the men of the world, the children of "the Wicked One." It is very plain, that the same description of events may be viewed in different lights, and may be designed by Him who sends them for different purposes, according to the character of the parties affected by them. To the one they may be judicial, to the other gracious; to the one a fruit and a part of the curse, to the other, though not in themselves yet in their end, a blessing-the curse being extracted from them, and the paternal love of God turning them all to purposes of salutary correction. There is a beautiful amplification of the sentiment in the words of the Apostle, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom ho receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave t-hem reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," Hebrews 12:5-11.

We shall consider-

I. The Admonition. It consists of two parts. The one is an admonition against insensibility; the other against despondency. And both admonitions are founded in the view of the trials of life, as divine visitations or chastisements-paternal corrections. Every one of them is a stroke of the Father's rod:-and the twofold admonition warns us against the two extremes into which we are ever prone to fall.

1. When may we be said to despise the chastening of the Lord? In the following cases. 1: When it is not felt;-when there is a want of natural sensibility to the particular stroke of the rod. This is but rare. Men in general are quite sufficiently alive to the value of temporal things. But the value is comparative. There are cherished and favorite possessions, and others less highly thought of, less fondly held. The Lord, it may be, deals gently. He spares the "gourd." He does not take what is most highly set by. And, instead of humbly owning the kindness,-being lowly and submissive, and seeking a blessing on the gentle stroke that the heavier one may be withheld,-the preservation and safety of the greater produces insensibility to the privation of the less: and the correction is thus disregarded, and proves inefficient.-ii. When it is not duly felt as from God; when God's hand, in the correction, is not duly considered, acknowledged, and submitted to. How much soever an event may be felt in itself; how much soever the feelings of nature may be wounded to the quick, and the heart ready to break under the sad calamity, be what it may,-unless it is felt as coming from God, it is "despised." Every thing depends on this. A child may smart under the rod, or his punishment may vex and distress him greatly, but he may not feel it as from his father. It is not the sense of his displeasure that grieves him. And so with the child of God. If while smarting under his suffering he fails to own his heavenly Father's hand; if it is considered as a mere chance that has befallen him,-as something that forms a part of the common lot of men, the fortune of others as well as his,-it is "despised." That which should be most seen and most regarded, and give most concern, is overlooked or little thought of.-iii. When, although God is seen in it, and his hand is felt, it is not felt humbly and submissively; not bowed to but resisted;-when, in the expressive phrase of the wise man elsewhere, "the heart fretteth against the Lord;" or when the chastisement has the effect that restraint and coercion have, in the expressive figure of the prophet, on the "bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," rendering him stubborn, wayward, refractory. This is the reverse of the admonition of James-" Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." It is the very opposite of all that correction is intended to effect. Job exemplified the proper state of mind under correction. Ho felt God's hand; ho owned it; he bowed to it: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."-"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Job 1:21; Job 2:10. The spirit of Jonah was a mournful exemplification of the opposite, when he fretted impatiently and selfishly at the loss of his gourd, and said, in the heat of a discontented and rebellious heart-" I do well to be angry." Never surely could there be more unseemly and sinful irreverence. It was "doing despite" to the correcting hand of the Lord-treating contemptuously the procedure of Him whose chastisement should have laid him low. All unsubmissiveness is contempt.-iv. When the design or end of correction is not duly laid to heart; is not seriously thought of and sought after. We never treat a fellow-creature with due consideration, when we show no concern about the objects he has in view; and especially when we ourselves are the subjects of his solicitude and his schemes. A child shows no respect for his parents, when, on being corrected by them for a fault, instead of seeking to shun the fault in future, he repeats it. This is practical contempt. So when the Lord tells his children the design of his corrections, and they show no anxiety after the attainment of that design, they "despise" his

"chastening." The design may be more general, or more particular. The general design of all affliction is-"to take away sin." He who receives correction, but discovers no solicitude about being made by it a "partaker of God’s holiness," "despises" it. The particular design may be involved in the nature of the correction. If there is worldly ambition-a commencing or growing prevalence of the "lust of the eyes and the pride of life"-it may be particularly aimed at by the infliction of sweeping losses in earthly substance; the frustration of sanguine hopes, and of painfully concerted schemes of gain and of worldly advancement. If there is the idolatry of the natural affections-any fondly cherished object of these drawing the heart away from God, and absorbing its interest, its solicitude, and its love-that may be rebuked and repressed by the smiting of the husband, or the wife, or the favorite and idolized child. Now if in either case, instead of the heart being weaned from the world and the excesses of its earthly affections-neither is its ambition cured in the one, nor its idolatry in the other; if it continues set, in all its desires, on the objects of which it has been deprived, so that it cannot let go its hold of them, but hankers after them, wastes itself in regrets and lamentations, unreconciled to the divine will, and forgetting the purpose of the privations, in sighing over the privations themselves,-we are then "despising the chastening;" for we are not seeking in earnest the accomplishment in us of the divine intention. We are not of one mind with God. We are treating despitefully his judgment,-for while he considers the end of affliction as well worth the sacrifice involved in the affliction itself-as more really valuable than the objects of earthly attachment and sources of earthly enjoyment which, for the sake of it, he takes away,-we judge otherwise; and mourn over our losses, and would have the objects of our attachment and the sources of our enjoyment back again,-instead of being humbly thankful for our intended benefit, and seeking with anxiety to obtain it.

2. The second of the two extremes against which we are admonished is-"being weary of his correction;" or, as the apostle has it, "fainting when we are rebuked of him." We are chargeable with this-I. When we cherish a spirit similar to that just noticed-dwelling on, and brooding over, the trial itself; indulging fond memory in hanging and weeping over the recollection of it,-the spirit sinking to faintness, or wearying itself to exhaustion, by incessant bemoaning. This is wrong; and it arises, like the last mentioned, from forgetting, in the trial itself, the end for which it has been sent. It is remarkable how precisely opposite to "fainting" and "wearying" is the use which the apostle exhorts the Hebrews to make of their trials-"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed," Hebrews 12:12-13.-ii. This "wearying" and "fainting" may arise from unbelief of the divine promises on two points-as to the design of the trial, and as to strength or grace duly to bear and to improve it. There is nothing so bracing to the spirit, which might otherwise be ready to give way to feebleness and fainting, as the firm conviction of the two important Bible truths-first, that "all things are of God;" and second, that "all things work together for good to them that love God." If the mind loses sight, or loses hold, of such assurances, the spirit will droop and languish. And so too is it, when the suffering saint forgets God’s "precious promises" (As 2 Corinthians 12:9; Isaiah 40:28-30) to the afflicted, and neglects to plead them at the throne of grace." iii "Painting" and "wearying" may take place in two ways. The heart may be overwhelmed by sudden trials-suddenness and heaviness united, giving an effect so stunning and overpowering, that the spirit sinks into a temporary stupefaction, its energies giving way-as the nervous and circulatory systems in the bodily frame are apt to be affected by any very sudden mental shock-going sometimes, with momentary intervals of revival, from one faint to another,

each interval only giving time for the mind to receive a fresh impression of the stunning calamity, ere it has leisure for invigorating reflection. Or, it may become wearied out and exhausted by the long continuance of the same trial, or by the rapid succession of different strokes of the rod-another and another coming, ere the wound of the former has had time to heal. There are cases of both kinds to be met with, which have a strong claim on the sympathy of fellow-Christians. But how long soever the chastening hand of the Lord may be allowed to lie on the subject of his correction, and how numerous and frequent soever may be the successive strokes, there ought to be no "fainting" and no "wearying." One thing alone-the assurance that "It is the Lord"-should be enough to prevent both the one and the other. This naturally leads to-

II. The CONSIDERATION ENFORCING THE ADMONITION-"For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

There is in the words a beautiful and most touching appeal to the very strongest and tenderest of nature’s affections. There is in this much of divine condescension and kindness. Had the infinite God addressed us in terms of divine loftiness, such as befitted only Godhead, expressing what belonged to himself exclusively, and to which there was nothing in our own nature and our own experience to which it bore even a distant analogy-we could not have understood, and therefore we could not have felt it. We might have marvelled at the incomprehensible grandeur of the communication-of which possibly we might, by the straining of our faculties, grasp as much as to make us wish for the mind of an angel, that we might comprehend more. But it would have awed us by its sublimity, more than it could have melted and cheered us by its kindness. But when "the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity," deigns to speak to us "after the manner of men;" to enter into our own hearts, and draw his figures and illustrations thence,-exhibiting himself under relations which we bear to one another,-assuring us of the affections on the one part of that relation, as borne and exercised by himself towards us, and claiming from us in return those which appropriately pertain to the other,-we understand this; we feel this; we have a commentary on its meaning, written on our hearts with the very finger of God. He addresses us in terms of which we have the interpreter within. When we try to form to ourselves the conception of a Being without passions, without emotions, without variableness,-an ocean-depth, whose surface no storm can ruffle, whose unfathomed abysses nothing can agitate,-we are lost in veneration and awe. We can form no conception of what the state of such a mind can be towards any other existing being. "It is high; we cannot attain unto it." But when that infinite Being breaks the dread silence; and his voice comes upon our ear in accents like these-" As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him;"-"I will be a Father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty;"-our bosoms thrill with new and unutterable delight; the smile of ecstasy plays upon our lips; and the starting tear of grateful joy gushes to our eye; and through that tear we look up with the reverential but confiding love and gladness of children. And when, amidst the trials of the world, He reminds us of his paternal relation to us, and assures us that they are of his appointment,-the dictate of his fatherly affection and wisdom; when through the clouds that shroud our sky his eye beams upon us, and his voice, not in thunder but in the whisper of peace, comes upon our ear-" My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth,"-what a comfort in our deepest distresses-what a light of joy in our gloomiest day!

Let us not fail to observe, in order that we may not lose the benefit of our trials, that they are tokens of disapprobation and displeasure. God hates sin. He hates it in all. And if there be any in whom he regards it with special detestation, it is in his own children. He never "afflicts willingly." He has no pleasure in correcting. But in proportion as his children are the objects of his love, sin in his children is the object of his hatred. It mars their character, and interferes with that complacency with which he contemplates his own image in them.

"We must beware of allowing our minds to be so absorbed in contemplating the divine love in trials, as to overlook the divine displeasure in them. All are for sin. There is no suffering in the universe but what is the fruit of sin-all its righteous desert. His children, even the best of them, have ever abundant reason to acknowledge that he corrects them less than their iniquities deserve. But still he corrects. The correction partakes of the nature of punishment; and punishments are expressions of the righteous displeasure of him by whom they are inflicted. And we should seek with all earnestness, that we may be "of one mind with God" in regard to the faults for which he chastens us. If his chastisements produce this effect;-if they transfuse into our minds a portion of the hatred with which he regards the evil corrected-all is well. And tins cannot be the case if we omit to reflect on the displeasure that is in them; if we smile at the thought of God’s unchanging love, so as to fail to mark the frown that darkens his brow. O that frown! How should the thought of it go to our hearts! To have offended our kind and gracious Father! To have deserved his displeasure! To have rendered it necessary for him to assume the rod! If we think thus, and are led by the thought to inquire into the causes of the displeasure, as they exist in our hearts or in our lives,-then may we profit by the stroke; not otherwise. But still, the displeasure is the displeasure of love. The frown is the frown of love. The correction is the correction of love. And a conviction of this also is necessary to its proving salutary, and to the prevention of the two extremes against which the text warns us. We shall not "despise" it, when we are convinced of its being in love; nor, on the other hand, shall we "faint" and be "weary."

Correction, when required, is represented as an essential part of an affectionate and faithful parent’s trust; so that God would relinquish his love, and violate the promises of his faithful covenant, if he did not administer needful chastisement-if he "spared the rod." Thus the apostle represents the case, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" Hebrews 12:6-7. This corresponds with the terms used by Solomon, "even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." The language implies his delighting in him at the very time when necessity is laid upon him to "visit his transgression with the rod, and his iniquity with stripes." The bowels of the fond father yearn over his son-never more tenderly than when thus constrained by affection to put him to pain. On the part of God, there is love in the gracious end of every trial. What is it? It is expressed under no fewer than three forms in the same chapter of Hebrews, verses 9-12. "Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." There is the general idea of profit. And this profit is expressed first in the emphatic phrase-" and live." The end is to maintain and promote the spiritual life in the soul,

and thus to "keep it unto life eternal." The spiritual life is in imminent danger from the world and the things of the world; and even from the overweening excess of affections that are in themselves not only lawful but right and incumbent- Our dearest joys and nearest friends, The partners of our blood- How they divide our wandering minds And leave but half for God!

It may be necessary to wound these affections by removing their objects, in order to quicken anew the affections that are due to God, and which the excess of the others was in danger of deadening:-that we may live! It is further expressed in being "made partakers of his holiness." This is much the same thing in other terms. The spiritual life consists essentially in holiness; and the eternal life in which it ends, or rather, which is its maturity, is just the perfection of holiness. He has the life in perfection, who has the holiness in perfection. (Comp. Isaiah 27:7-9.) There is no end the love of God can pursue-there is nothing whatever the love of God can possibly effect, in behalf of its objects, more precious than making them Partakers Of His Holiness. O! There is nothing which his children should not-and, if they are right-minded, will not cheerfully endure, for the attainment of such a good! What is there that can be taken away, that does not, if this is substituted, make the loss an unspeakable gain?-We have it again in "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." We are all sensible of the truth, that "no affliction for the present seemeth joyous but grievous:"-and it is a comfort that we are not commanded to be in any such state of mind, as that it should seem to us other than we feel it to be:-but oh! what a harvest to reap from the seeds of bitterness and death! if they "yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness!" And while the end is in love, love times and measures every correction. It comes in its proper season-just when He who is infinitely wise and kind sees it to be needed, and when it will be most salutary. And He corrects in measure-never inflicting one stroke beyond the requisite number; never infusing one drop of bitter beyond what, as the Great Physician, he sees will be salutary. In addition to all this, God has, in love, given promise of those influences of the Spirit that are necessary to render his discipline efficacious. And he makes the very same appeal to paternal feeling and sensibility that he does in the text, to give us the full assurance of his readiness to grant them, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke 11:13. What an encouragement! And if, by the influence that comes from our heavenly Father, such are the happy results of the afflictions of life, we may realize the words of Paul, "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us," Romans 5:3-5. Such is the blessed influence on earth; and this ultimately rises still higher; it tells on heaven-"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!" 2 Corinthians 4:17.

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Proverbs 3:13-20

LECTURE IX.

Proverbs 3:13-20.

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her. The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew."

"There be many that say, Who will show us good?" This indeed is the universal inquiry. Wherever men are found, they are found making and pressing it. All the world is astir in seeking an answer to it. In all the conditions of human society, from the lowest to the highest.-from the most barbarous to the most civilized, there is one principle in operation-varying in its manifestations, according to the conceptions of good which, in the different stages of human progression, prevail. That principle is the desire of enjoyment-a desire expressed in this question, "Who Will Show us Good?" The pursuit is the same. The modes and directions in which the object is sought are infinitely diversified. In civilized countries like our own, where the truth of Solomon’s words elsewhere-"Money answereth all things"-is so universally experienced, the acquisition of wealth becomes one of the most general and engrossing of aims and occupations. It fixes more than anything else, the earnestness and constancy of desire and pursuit. He is the nappy man who proves most successful in this chase; whose speculations are most prosperous, and yield the highest return; who strikes the best bargains, and hits the luckiest chances; who accumulates the largest amount in the shortest time, and with the least trouble. That man is called emphatically fortunate, and becomes the object of envy or of ardent emulation to the less successful. And yet-I now speak especially to Christians, to the people of God, whose proper character is, that they are "not of this world," but "renewed in the spirit of their mind"-terms of very opposite import may many a time be applied to such prosperity, when considered in its influence on spiritual character and state. How often has the prosperity of the present world, been the date of commencing declension in prosperity of a far higher and more valuable kind-the prosperity of the soul in the divine life! How often has the gain thus been loss!-and, as the treasure has augmented on earth, has it diminished in heaven! So that, in the highest and best sense, the acquisition has been anything but fortunate-a curse, rather than a blessing. What is the lesson of the Book of God?-verse Proverbs 3:13. "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding."

"The mind’s the standard of the man." Even in the sense of mere mental cultivation, this is true. A well-informed, well-stored mind, is an acquirement greatly superior in real excellence to aught that is merely external,-to wealth, or to all the outward distinction that wealth can procure. It is a source of more rational and richer enjoyment to the person’s self, and a far worthier ground of respectability and honour. There are few objects really more pitiable than an ignorant, senseless rich man,-a man whose mind, in its unfurnished poverty and emptiness, presents a perpetual contrast, which it is impossible not to mark, with his outward pomp and plenitude. Such a man is far from being so truly respectable or happy, as the poorer man who is in possession of a trained and cultivated understanding, and same portion of the treasures of useful knowledge. But in stating the matter thus, we have taken but the lowest ground. The meaning of the words before us is far higher. The wisdom spoken of is not the mere acquaintance with science and literature, with men and things:-it is of a loftier order, and a richer preciousness. It is the knowledge of God-but not knowledge that "plays round the head" without "reaching to the heart." It is the knowledge of God inspiring the fear of God;-the fear that is associated with and proportioned to love... This is heavenly wisdom; and of this alone could such things be affirmed as in the passage before us. The connexion with the eleventh and twelfth verses, justifies the observation here, that this divine wisdom is often effectually learned in adversity. Indeed it is the one grand design of all God’s corrective discipline, to teach wisdom. To this correspond the words of the psalmist-" Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law," Psalms 94:12. The chastening is evidently connected here with the teaching; the former as contributing to the efficacious accomplishment of the latter. With the possession of wisdom, or of true religion, there stands connected what silver and gold, and all the jewels of earth can never possibly procure to their possessor-no, nor "all the things that can be desired," belonging to earth and time. Suppose all the objects of earthly desire and pursuit in the one scale,-riches, with all that riches can command, in the largest variety and abundance,-and true wisdom in the other; the former would "fly up and kick the beam"-lighter than vanity in the comparison Put everything a luxuriating imagination can suggest on the one side, with the exception only of this wisdom; and put this wisdom by itself on the other, stripping the possessor of all else that heart can wish-the latter is, beyond expression, the more eligible. But, in forming such an estimate, it must never be forgotten of what sort of being we speak, when we speak of man. Speak we of a creature whose breath is in his nostrils-a creature whose existence is bounded, at the longest, by a few years, and who then sinks into annihilation, and is as if he never had been? No. We speak of an immortal being; of a being destined by the Author of his existence, to live for ever-to live as long as Himself-through a vast, a boundless eternity; possessing an existence which neither his own nor any created power can terminate, and which, when cycles of unimagined extent shall have passed away, will be no nearer than now to a close, no length of time diminishing eternity! Were the former supposition true, the ground assumed by Solomon might be more than debateable. Reduce man to a child of earth and time, and you render what belongs to earth and time, the only things of real consequence to him:-for what to him are matters that relate to a futurity he is never to reach, but in which he is to have ceased to be? But if man is to exist for ever-O into what comparative nothingness does every thing bounded by the span of his life on earth immediately dwindle! Whatever secures the happiness of his immortal being, it must be an abandonment of reason not to prefer. And yet this preference of eternity to time, is one of the great and distinctive principles of true religion. "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for

the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal," 2 Corinthians 4:18. Is there any enthusiasm in this? Is it not rather obvious common-sense reckoning?-Whenever you admit man's eternity, and regard true religion as providing for the happiness of that eternity, the truth of Solomon's comparison must be felt. The mind cannot be sound that does not feel it-verses Proverbs 3:14-15, "For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her." And that true religion-the "wisdom that cometh from above"-does so provide for man's eternity, appears to me to be the lesson of the verse which follows-" Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour."

I am aware that respectable commentators interpret this as meaning simply long life, and all desirable prosperity and comfort in it. But I am of opinion, that both parts of the verse refer to something higher and better; and for this reason especially-that in the verses proceeding, Solomon affirms the incomparable superiority of wisdom to silver, and gold, and rubies, and all things that can be desired of a similar transitory kind. Now it certainly appears far from likely, that Solomon should bring prominently forward as a reason for this superiority, the tendency of wisdom to procure these very things-the long life, and the riches and honours of the present world. "Length of days," therefore, and "riches and honour," I cannot but regard as meant in the way of contrast to the same things as they are "highly esteemed amongst men." It is true, I freely allow, that wisdom does possess a most favourable tendency as to this life; but still its chief recommendation goes far beyond time and the things of time. The "length of days" is the same with that promised to the Redeemer in reward of his work-" He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever," Psalms 21:4.-It is eternity itself. And the "riches and honour" conferred by divine Wisdom, are riches and honour incomparably more excellent and more lasting than those which the world or which man can bestow. If you compare the verse with chap. Proverbs 8:18, you will be satisfied of this. The epithet here applied to the riches-"durable riches," is evidently intended to make an emphatic distinction between them and the riches of earth. These are ever described in God's word as the very reverse of durable. The riches meant here, then, are such riches as are spoken of elsewhere, as bestowed by the Saviour on all who come to him-the glories and enjoyments of heaven, or rather of the spiritual life begun on earth and consummated in heaven-being represented under the figure of those things which are most highly prized amongst men.* And as to the honour, it is not "the honour that cometh from man," the eager aspiration after which the Saviour represents as one of the greatest obstacles to men's submission to the wisdom of God-" How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" John 5:44-But God hath said-"Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed," 1 Samuel 2:30.-And the Saviour hath said-" If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour," John 12:26.-What an honour is this-bestowed by God himself-a participation in the glory of his exalted Son! And that Son declares-" To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne," Revelation 3:21.

* See Revelation 2:9; Revelation 3:18; 2 Corinthians 8:9; 2 Corinthians 6:10. James 2:5. Matthew 6:20.

How complete the two things in this verse, when put together! With one hand Wisdom bestows length of days; with the other provides for the enjoyment of the life thus bestowed:-or, inverting the order,-with one hand she bestows riches and honour, and with the other eternity to possess and enjoy them! Then follows-verse Proverbs 3:17. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." The ways of Wisdom are the ways of practical piety-of faith, and love, and holy obedience. All the variety of obedience is comprehended in the phrase her ways. These are the ways she marks out. And these ways are "ways of pleasantness, and her paths are paths of peace."

Such has been, and such is the experience of every true child of God. I speak not of him who has "a name to live "-profession without principle-form without power,-whose religion is the dictate more of the conscience than of the heart. I speak of him who has really experienced the renovating power of the gospel, and who "delights in the law of God after the inward man." True religion yields its joys only to the heart that is unreservedly surrendered to its sway. While the heart continues to be parted between God and the world,-while, amidst outward conformity to the claims of religion, the love of the world is still retained and cherished,-it cannot be to the disparagement of religion, that the happiness promised by it to its votaries is not enjoyed. Even in consistency with his own happiness, "no man can serve two masters." Their opposing characters and demands must ever render the attempt irksome and unhappy. But in true religion itself-in the ways and paths-the more open and the more private walks-of heavenly wisdom-there is true blessedness. What, O what is there in true religion to engender gloom? It is light; and it is the property and office of light, not to gather mists, but to dispel them. It turns the shades of night into the morning.-Is a sense of God’s love gloomy?-the thought of having our sins forgiven, and being the objects of the divine favour, the paternal affection of our heavenly Father? Is this melancholy? Is it saddening to have the hope of eternal life? Is it an unhappy thing to have the mind tranquil and serene amid all the trying vicissitudes of life, through firm faith in the wisdom, the faithfulness, and the love of a covenant God? Is it fitted to make a man miserable, to have his appetites, passions, and desires under subordination and control, their restless turbulence and contending demands repressed, and their murmurs and agitations and frettings quieted? Is it an overpowering cause of dejection, to be made like God, and to have the presence, and smile, and aid, and guidance, and blessing of God, as our God, in every season of darkness and distress, and in the valley itself of the shadow of death? Is the anticipation a disheartening one, of being with God for ever, in fullness of joy? Is this a picture of gloom and wretchedness?-a picture from which the mind should shrink with aversion or turn with disdain? Must not the mind be in a strangely unnatural and unreasonable state that thinks so, or feels so? And yet this is true religion. These are its native accompaniments and results! There is not, indeed, here the "laughter of the fool"-the intemperate merriment which is so often but a poor cover to a spirit that is ill at ease; but there is true joy,-substantial delight-the steady sunshine of the soul-"pleasantness and peace." The same train of thought is pursued in verse Proverbs 3:18. "She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her." Whatever is productive of true happiness-or rather, perhaps, whatever has a salutary and life-giving influence on the spiritual condition-is called by Solomon "a tree of life."* The allusion is obvious; and in the words before us, it must be understood in the highest amount of import of which it is susceptible. The tree of life, the sacred symbol and pledge of immortal blessedness to continued obedience, had its place in the centre of the original Eden; and the import of it, as a symbol now, may appear from such passages as

these:-"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."-"In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."-"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city," Revelation 2:7; Revelation 22:2; Revelation 22:14.

* Comp. Proverbs 11:30; Proverbs 13:12; Proverbs 15:4.

Observe the two clauses of the verse-" She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her; and happy is every one that retaineth her." There is a necessity for retaining as well as laying hold. If we retain the instruction of Wisdom, hidden in our hearts-the principle of steadfast practical godliness,-it will then be in us a fountain of perennial joy-a "well of water springing up unto everlasting life." Or, to keep by the figure in the passage-the "tree of life" will continue to yield its pleasant and salutary fruits, not through the present time of sojourning on earth merely, but for ever, in the paradise above.

"Happy is every one that retaineth her." We spoke of man as immortal-destined to an interminable existence. This is one view of his true dignity. There is another. It arises from the amount of his susceptibilities, of enjoyment on the one hand, and of suffering on the other. Think of what man was, of what he is, and of what he is capable’ of again becoming. His capabilities are such, that nothing beneath God himself can satisfy them. To make man truly and permanently happy, he must be "filled with all the fullness of God." God himself must be "the portion of his inheritance and cup." His soul can be filled from no created fountain. And Wisdom provides for him a portion adequate to his most unbounded desires, to his most expanded capacities. God will be the fullness of his joy! The excellence of wisdom is further recommended from its source. It is divine. It comes from Him whose possession of it is infinite, and who, in all his works, has given displays so wonderful of its infinitude:-verses Proverbs 3:19-20. "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew." The entire plan of creation-the mental model of this wonderful universe-in all its vastness and all its variety-was the product of wisdom-of divine wisdom-of Him from whom ice must learn our wisdom. There are some who take Wisdom here to be a personal designation and to have the same import as The Word. The ancient Jewish interpreters give not a little countenance to this principle of interpretation,-explaining it of the Messiah. It is sufficiently evident, however, from the variety of terms in these two verses-"wisdom" "understanding," "his knowledge,"-that it cannot be personally taken here. Wisdom, understanding, knowledge, are all recommended-by this consideration, that they are divine attributes, and were exercised and manifested by their divine possessor in the contrivance and formation of the universe. The spirit of the recommendation seems to be, that, as it is "the Lord that giveth wisdom"-the wisdom which Solomon eulogizes and recommends-that which comes from such a source must be excellent-well worthy the desire and the solicitation. Think of what wisdom, as it exists in Deity, has done-the wonders it has wrought! This will recommend God’s lessons. He is able to give wisdom, who has thus displayed it: "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth." The founding of the earth seems designed simply to convey the idea of the stability of this well-ordered world,-a world still "clothed with beauty," even for rebellious man. And what must it have been in its original perfection, ere marred and blighted by the curse? The earth, in the sublime phrase of another scripture writer, is

"hung upon nothing;" yet is it used as the very emblem of stability-" the firm foundations of the earth"-" the earth abideth for ever." The foundation of every part of the earth's surface is its centre; because by a force whose nature we do not understand, and which may be considered as but another name for the might of the ever-present Creator, all the parts gravitate towards the centre, and by this power are all held together, as steadfastly as if they rested on an immoveable basis; and by the same power, the earth, with unalterable constancy, retains its position in the system-pressed by it equally on every side, as firmly as by the most solid material, never shifting one hand's-breadth from the place assigned it. The "establishing of the heavens," is explained by the account of their creation. (Genesis 1:6-8.) Or by "the heavens" we may understand something more extensive than the firmament of our globe-that atmosphere of superincumbent air that gives its blueness to the concave over our heads. "The heavens" may be interpreted of the visible regions of space-the starry heavens with all their hosts. The reference, in the first clause of the 20th verse (Proverbs 3:20)-"By his knowledge the depths were broken up" seems to be, not to the breaking up of "the fountains of the great deep" at the deluge, but to the account of the first separation of sea and land at the creation. The continuous fluid mass was then broken up and dissevered, being separated thenceforward by the intervening barriers of land-a work to which no less sublime allusion is made in the Book of Job:-" Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? "When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling-band for it, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" chap. Job 38:8-11. In the latter part of the verse, we have a beautiful exemplification of the resources of God's "manifold wisdom"-"by his knowledge-the clouds drop down the dew." From the entire surface of the earth, and more especially from that of seas, and Likes, and brooks, and rivers, there is insensibly effected, by the warmth of the solar rays, a perpetual exhalation of vapours. In the higher and colder regions of the atmosphere, these vapours condense into clouds, and are poured down in return upon the earth in the form of rain,-or distil insensibly, in the coolness of the evening and the night, in refreshing and fructifying dews. There is thus a constant reciprocation of supplies between the earth and the atmosphere-giving and receiving with common benefit,-a kind of circulation of fluids, the water being the life in the vegetable world, as the blood is in the animal. The waters which are above the firmament are supplied from the waters which are beneath the firmament. They again descend, to supply the springs, and streams, and rivers and seas, so as to "water the earth, that it may bring forth and bud, to give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater;" and to clothe it with all the untold variety, and exuberant profusion of vegetable life and loveliness. To this "only wise God," then, his creatures are to come for wisdom. Let them "ask of God, who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not."-And those whom God makes truly wise, he makes like himself. Mark the character of true wisdom, as it appears in Him. His wisdom is not mere speculative, or even mere practical skill-skill of contrivance, skill of execution;-it is skill directed to good ends; skill appropriately and beneficially applied; applied for ends in which are united the glory of his own name and the happiness of his creatures. The entire system of nature demonstrates this. In the same manner, the wisdom that "cometh from above"-that cometh from God-is like his own. It is not mere knowledge. It is knowledge, with the disposition and ability rightly to apply and improve it,-agreeably to the ends of our creation-the glory of God, our own happiness, and the benefit of fellow-creatures. And knowledge-the knowledge which God by his word and Spirit imparts-thus improved, is substantially True Religion. In inviting you from the ways

of the world to the ways of wisdom, we invite you to true happiness, to happiness which will never either pall in the enjoyment, or prove bitterness in the recollection, or terminate in disappointment and eternal loss. We invite you to the best, the purest, the highest, the richest enjoyment of which your ethereal and immortal nature is susceptible; to the enjoyment of the divine favour, the divine image. The divine presence, the divine intercourse!

10-Pro_3:21-35

Proverbs 3:21-35

LECTURE X.

Proverbs 3:21-35.

"My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: so shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken. Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm. Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways. For the froward is abomination to the Lord: but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly. The wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools."

"Sound wisdom," which in the first of these verses we are enjoined to "keep "-to retain in our hearts, and follow in our lives, is the wisdom taught by the word and Spirit of God. It has been already considered; as also the true benefit and honour which it secures; and to which allusion is again made in the words which follow-" They shall be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck." And as it is the part of "sound wisdom and discretion" to renounce confidence in self, and to trust in the Lord, the assurance follows-" Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble." The following verses very beautifully describe the serenity of spirit, the undaunted fortitude, the equanimity, the tranquil satisfaction, which spring from this constant, steadfast reliance on the providence and promises of God; when accompanied by "the testimony of a good conscience"-a conscience unscarred by the remembrance of wilful sins, and that enjoys peace through the blood of atonement:-verses Proverbs 3:24-26. "When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not," rather, thou shalt not be, "afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh, For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken."

We have the truth of these verses finely exemplified in the experience of the pious father of Solomon, in those times when he was encompassed with enemies, on the alert for his apprehension and his life-" I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about," Psalms 3:5-6. And in the form of assurance to others, founded upon his own experience, and amounting to a divine engagement, he says, "Jehovah is thy keeper: Jehovah is thy shade upon thy right hand.

The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. Jehovah shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. Jehovah shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore," Psalms 121:5-8.* * See Psalms 46:1-3; Psalms 91:1-5.

"The desolation of the wicked," (Proverbs 3:25), may be taken in one or other of two senses:-the desolation made by the violence of the wicked; or the fearful and desolating vengeance executed upon them, whether in temporal judgments, or in the infliction of their final sentence. From the terms before used, respecting the final destruction of the wicked, it is most likely that to it the reference is in this verse.* Then the people of God shall be undismayed. When "the heavens being on fire are dissolved, and the elements melt with fervent heat," they shall smile over the ruins of a burning world; for in that last dread day, "the Lord shall be their confidence;" so that they shall say with triumph, "Lo! this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is Jehovah; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation," Isaiah 25:9.

* See Proverbs 1:27. In the verses which follow, we have some of the practical maxims of sound wisdom:-verses Proverbs 3:27-28. "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee." This practical injunction may be applied-

1. To all lawful debts-for articles purchased, or for work performed:-2. It is strongly applied to the wages of labourers and servants; they being inferiors, and therefore in the greater danger of being treated in the manner described. Their case, accordingly, is carefully guarded.*1-3. To Government taxes, which ought to be regarded as debts due to the community; due by every member of it, for value received; namely, for the protection of person, and property, and liberty, and for all the benefits of good government. They should be paid with the same readiness and cheerfulness as other lawful debts.*2-4. To debts of charity and benevolence. For such debts there are. They cannot indeed be claimed; they cannot be made good in law. But they are due-due on the principle of the great rule or principle of right as laid down in this book-the "royal law," (Matthew 7:12.) "Wherever the obligation of this law is felt, it will effectually prevent the conduct reprobated in these verses. The conduct, alas! is too common. It may arise from various sources; as- *1 See Leviticus 19:13. Deuteronomy 24:14-15. James 5:3-4.

*2 See Romans 13:6-7.

1. From an avaricious reluctance to part with the money;-a reluctance which discovers itself even although it is known that the thing must be done, that the payment must be made. The avaricious man is so loath to part with the object of his idolatry, that even a day’s delay pleases him. To-morrow is his day when he has to give; to-day, when he has to receive. In either case he has the pleasure of a day’s longer possession, and a day’s more interest. It may be little, but still it is something.-2. From indolent listlessness, careless, sluggish indifference. The man "has it by him;" but he is not in a mood to be troubled. He is occupied about something else, or he is not disposed to be occupied at all; and if the creditor be an inferior, very slight reasons or excuses will suffice. The man does not think either of the trouble, or the more serious inconvenience, to which he may be putting the claimant; while from mere inertness, mere indolent inconsiderate self-indulgence, he puts him off; and that, it may be, for successive times. This selfish thoughtlessness is very reprehensible.-3. From insolent superciliousness. This is often discovered towards inferiors, or towards persons against whom there exists a grudge. It arises from a pitiful and despicable desire

to show superiority, and make its opposite be felt; to make it appear that the rule of payment to them is, not when they want, but when we choose! It is the vice of little minds-ungenerous, unjust, unchristian, unmanly.

It is a very common case in matters of charity. Great backwardness is frequently shown. There is an inward struggle between the dictates of avarice on the one side, and those of conscience or politeness on the other-"I dare say," exclaims your money-loving professor, "the case is a very deserving one; but really I have not thought of it, and have not time to think now; do please call again in a few days, when I shall have considered it a little." You do call: but in the midst of so many other matters, he really has quite forgotten the matter; he is sorry, truly sorry for it-but could not help it. And again you are put off; and all in the hope, the real but hypocritically dissembled hope, that you surely will not take the trouble of coming a third time. If, trusting to the sincerity of his assurances, you do venture the third call, ten to one but your importunate dunning affords a good apology for a passion, and a consequent fiat and hasty refusal-to which his mind had been made up from the beginning! With regard to debts, which we are aware are to fall due at certain times, the precept clearly involves the duty of "having it by us" when those times come round. That it is not in our power at the time, may be a truth; but it forms no sufficient excuse, when we might have had it in our power had we been duly provident. Every debtor is bound to exert himself to the utmost, in every practicable way, to make provision for meeting the just demands of his creditors at the date of his engagements. This is what we ourselves expect when we are the creditors; and it is what we are bound to do when we are the debtors. The next precept is one against the abuse of confidence:-verse Proverbs 3:29. "Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee." The conduct here condemned is one of the basest of possible crimes. He "dwelleth securely by thee," means he has full confidence in thee, depends on thee, is altogether unsuspicious of thee. How odious, then, the idea of imposing on that unsuspecting confidence. Specially odious must it be, if pains have been previously taken to inspire confidence, by the assumed appearances of friendship and goodwill, for the very purpose of leading into a snare-thus laying the train, studying and devising evil, betraying and disappointing the trust purposely inspired and cherished! In such cases, some selfish end must of course be supposed in view. And the evil may be practised in a very great variety of ways. As for instance:-A man in business does what he can to obtain another’s confidence; or, whether he acts with a view to this end or not, he knows he has that confidence; and he takes advantage of it to obtain large quantities of goods from him, when quite aware that his own affairs are precarious and his credit sinking, and that neither the goods nor the money for which he applies can retrieve them! This is treachery, and treachery of no ordinary turpitude.

Servants too may advance their selfish interests by practising upon the confidence of their masters or mistresses; and by a winning and artful address may insinuate themselves into that confidence, for the very purpose of abusing it. This has been done. It is signally base. On the other hand, there is not a more honourable or a more really valuable character than a trustworthy, faithful servant,-one who fully merits confidence, who never betrays or abuses it, but makes it in every way subservient to his or her employer’s interest. Such a servant is a treasure; and such servants ought all Christians in that station of life to be.

Such, alas! is the depravity of human nature, that there are not wanting cases in which the most nefarious crimes have been perpetrated through the medium of unsuspecting confidence,

previously and studiedly inspired. The wife of a man’s bosom, or the child of his fond paternal love, has been seduced, and his heart wrung with incurable agony, and his family comfort, and happiness, and honour destroyed, by the unwitting confidence he has reposed in a seeming friend, to whom he has given up the fullness of an unsuspicious heart. And the assassin himself has plunged his dagger into the bosom which he had previously succeeded in divesting of all apprehension and even while the smile of security and unsurmising trust has played upon the lips, and sparkled in the eyes, of the betrayed and murdered friend! Far-O far from all who call themselves by the Christian name be everything of the nature of falsehood and treachery! It is, in all circumstances, wrong to "devise evil" against others; but to devise it under the cover of confidence, inspired by us and reposed in us, is infamous-is Satanic. It is the very sin by which "the devil beguiled Eve through his subtilty." The very first thing he did was to insinuate himself into her good graces-to gain her confidence-to inspire a feeling of security. And having brought her mind to this position, he tempted her to the deed by which a world was involved in misery and death. All, therefore, who act such a part as is here condemned, "are of their father the devil." The same spirit that will avoid this evil, will avoid also the next:-verse Proverbs 3:30. "Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm." The spirit here condemned is not seldom discovered when any spite or jealous grudge, on whatever ground, is entertained towards one who is known to be a man of quietness and peace, averse to every thing like contention. There is a special pleasure in vexing and annoying such a person; forcing him into ill-humour and strife,-a most malignant pleasure!-compelling him, by dint of annoyance, to say and do things, which are then converted into charges and grounds of difference and quarrel! There are men of so strange a temper of mind, that they will not allow others to live in peace. Their delight is in teazing, vexing, and plaguing their neighbours. They seem to make a study of the art of strife. They have no rest, but when disturbing the rest of all about them. With such men of contention David had to do, when he said, "My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war," Psalms 120:6-7.

Under this particular must be included a litigious spirit. You find men loud in their protestations against law-the folly and the evil of going to law, who yet, somehow, are ever belying their professions. They can’t help it, they say, it is their neighbour’s fault, not theirs; but they are seldom out of court-ever after some plea or other. They magnify to importance the merest trifles; and suppose, or make, and prosecute injuries, where none were ever either intended or committed. The language before us does not mean that we may indulge a spirit of strife, even when there is cause-even when harm has been done. The man of God will ever be the opposite of a man of strife. He will rather take wrong, than foment discord; he will bear much rather than come to any rupture. Instead of making quarrels, he is ever anxious to compose and to heal them. This is the spirit inculcated by the Lord of Christians, and exemplified in his own character. He did not "strive nor cry." "When "he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not." And all his laws inculcate the spirit of amity and peace. * * See Matthew 5:39-41. Romans 12:18-21. 1 Corinthians 6:6-8. The spirit of strife is allied to the spirit of oppression, or a proud and overbearing spirit. This comes next in order:-Proverbs 3:31. "Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways."

"The oppressor" whether public or private, the man who "grinds the faces of the poor" by severity and extortion, may succeed, may prosper; may, by this means, amass a fortune, and rise to still

higher honour. Suppose this the case. Still, he is not to be envied; not only because envy is in itself wrong, but because there is really nothing in his character and career to produce it. His prosperity is not to be envied even by the poorest and most suffering victim of his oppression. And while he is not to be envied, far less are his ways to be imitated, for the sake of obtaining the envied results-the same wealth, the same greatness, the same power; "Choose none of his ways." The reason is assigned in the next verse, "For the froward is abomination to the Lord: but his secret is with the righteous."

"The froward" is a general denomination, under which the oppressor is evidently here included. It means one who is self-willed; bent on the gratification of his own propensities, the indulgence of his own passions, in spite of the restraints imposed by either divine or human authority. Men of this description are "abomination to the Lord." This is a certain truth, and ought to be held as a firm and fixed conviction, all their success and prosperity notwithstanding. It may seem as if God smiled upon them; but temporal prosperity is a very fallacious measure of divine favour. So the psalmist Asaph was convinced, after being recovered from his temptation, arising from the observation of the troubles of God’s people, in contrast with the abundance and the ease of the wicked. They were still wicked, and the more the objects of God’s wrath that they were the enjoyers and the abusers of his goodness.* * See Psalms 73:18-20. So also Psalms 37:1; Psalms 37:7-9. In contrast with these being an "abomination" to the Lord, it is added-"but his secret is with the righteous."

This, then, must be understood as an expression of special favour-of approbation, delight, and love.* It seems to mean, that the Lord will freely reveal to the righteous what he keeps from others-the truths and promises, the blessings and joys of His covenant of peace-secret to the soul that possesses them, intransferable, "passing all understanding," "unspeakable and full of glory." The secret of the Lord-"the secret of His covenant," had then perhaps a special reference to what was at a future time to be more fully and clearly revealed; that which, to use Paul’s expression, "from the beginning of the world, was hid in God." Thus God did to Abraham his friend, imparting to him, and to some others, in special favour, clearer discoveries than to the generality of believers, of the coming glories of his salvation. Speaking, however, simply after the manner of men, those with whom our "secret" is, are clearly our most intimate and confidential friends. The expression, therefore, may be interpreted of the friendship of God. Our blessed Lord throws light upon it, when he says to his disciples, "Ye are my Mends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you," John 15:14-15. And this may be compared with the assurances of intimate fellowship expressed in the preceding chapter, verses John 2:21; John 2:23. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

* See Psalms 25:14.

Instead of choosing the oppressor’s ways, then, choose the ways of God’s people-of those with whom "his secret" is; in whom He delights; whom He admits to his confidential intimacy, and blesses with the secret intimations of his love. Cast in thy lot with them. The same idea is

expanded in verse Proverbs 3:33. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just." The expression is an affecting and fearful one. There may be in it an allusion to the terms in which the denunciation was delivered to the disobedient and rebellious in Israel, Deuteronomy 28:15-19. Upon the man who departs from God-from his truth and from his ways-" his wrath abideth." His curse rests on him in the house and by the way. It remains in his dwelling-place. It mingles with all his domestic enjoyments; and his family, following his footsteps, entail upon themselves his guilt and his punishment, become inheritors of this curse of Heaven. It is the melancholy portion of the households that " call not upon the name of the Lord;" in which no domestic altar is erected to God's worship, and no incense is offered of morning and evening devotion; where, instead of being trained in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord," the rising inmates are suffered to grow up with "no fear of God before their eyes." How delightful the opposite side of the alternative, "But he blesseth the habitation of the just!" This is exactly the reverse-as in Deuteronomy 28:2-6. The Lord loved of old, and loves still "the dwellings of Jacob." These are among the places where "Jehovah records his name," and where He fulfills the promise-"I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." He is "the God of the families of Israel."-His blessing the habitations of his people, does not imply that affliction shall never be permitted to enter them. It may; it does. Death itself finds his victims there as well as elsewhere. But trials are not curses. Even when they come in heaviest accumulation, the blessing of the Lord is still there. It is not withdrawn. It is many a time bestowed more richly than before. He himself, with the hand of a Father, mingles the cup; and he infuses blessing into it:- "'Tis mix'd with his unchanging love, And not a drop of wrath is there."

And, through divine influence on instruction and example, in answer to believing prayer, the children of God's people succeed to the grace and the blessing of their parents. Grace, indeed, does not "run in the blood;" but it runs in the promise, and in the current of faithful parental tuition.* * See Psalms 103:13-18. The same strain of sentiment continues in the following verse-"Surely he scorneth the scorners; but he giveth grace unto the lowly." "The scorners" are here set in contrast with "the lowly." They are, therefore, the proud; whom the Lord "knoweth afar off." They are those who, in the spirit of lofty self-consequence and arrogance, treat with scoffing disregard the truths and precepts of God; who will not submit themselves to God's humbling terms of reconciliation and favour; who disdain being, as all sinners must be, "debtors to grace;" who refuse to be taught, and to submit their minds to divine dictation, or their consciences to divine authority, or their lives to divine guidance and control.-"The lowly" are those who have learned their true character and situation as sinners, and have taken the position assigned to them and appropriately theirs, as suppliants for mercy. Their representative is before us, in the character and behaviour of the publican in the parable-who, in contrast with the high-minded Pharisee, the prototype of the scorners,-"stood afar off, and would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote on his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." They are sensible of guilt, and willing debtors to mercy. They are sensible of weakness, and dependent on God for promised strength. They are sensible of ignorance, and look upward for divine bight, instruction and guidance. They are humble learners-"the meek," whom the Lord "guides in judgment, and to whom he teaches his way." They are gentle and forgiving to men, as they are abased and lowly before God.

Verse Proverbs 3:35. "The wise shall inherit glory; but shame shall be the promotion of fools."

"The wise" are the same description of persons as the "lowly." This is indicated by the words (Proverbs 11:2) "When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." Nothing indeed is more foolish in a creature than pride; unless it be pride in a sinner: and it is only there that pride is to be found. The wise are those who "fear God;" and all who fear God must be "lowly." They shall "inherit glory." The glory meant can be no mere earthly honour-that which "cometh from man." It is the "glory of God"-the glory of which his people are heirs, which is the object of their steadfast and joyful hope (Romans 5:1-2.); and of which the saints under the old as well as those under the new dispensation were the blessed partakers. They "inherit glory." It is prepared for them from before the foundation of the world. Heirship presupposes sonship. They are God's redeemed and adopted children, and in this relation are heirs, (Romans 8:14-17.) "But shame shall be the promotion of fools." They shall find in the end the very opposite of all that they sought and anticipated. They looked for "promotion." On "the honour that cometh from man" they set their hearts. And "fools," in Solomon's sense of the term, may succeed in obtaining what they seek. But how great soever the amount of honour the forgetters of God acquire; how high soever their worldly exaltation, how splendid soever their establishments, how vast soever their authority and how eagerly soever courted their favour,-they are "fools" after all; fools in the estimate of all holy beings; fools in the estimate of Heaven. And the final result of all their worldly occupations and worldly attainments will be-" shame and everlasting contempt." This shall be their final "promotion;" and the remembrance, and the irretrievableness of their folly shall be their everlasting torment.

There are one or two closing reflections which the passage naturally suggests-

1. If it is wrong to delay fulfilling the just claims of men, how much more criminal must it be to put off the duty we owe to God. But many, alas! who are the very patterns of scrupulous punctuality in the discharge of their obligations to fellow-creatures, never pass a thought on the deep debt of obligation under which they lie to their Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor! They plume themselves on their honest and conscientious regularity in meeting every just demand upon them,-yet never give themselves the slightest concern about the undischarged, nay the unacknowledged obligations to Him, which every day and every hour brings with it. These obligations, indeed, are such as we never can repay; but both in words and in practice it becomes us devoutly to own and to express them.

2. Surely the maxims of the Bible, were they but followed out, are fitted in their operation to make a happy world! The grand end of the discoveries of the Bible is, Salvation. But it has a most important influence on the personal and the social happiness of mankind. Were its dictates obeyed-there would be no avarice, no injustice, no devising of evil, no envy, no strife, no oppression, no frowardness, no scorning, no pride, no evil passions; but the universal prevalence of "whatsoever things are true, just, pure, lovely, and of good report."

3. On both these grounds there rests on every Christian the weighty and solemn obligation to spread the knowledge of God's word-the knowledge of "the glorious gospel." O! if there be one thing more than another to which the injunction "Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it," is applicable with special force-it is the spiritual and eternal welfare of our fellow-men!

4. Again we say-" Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord!" A man "without God in the world" may amass its wealth, may rise to its honours, may revel in its pleasures, may have "more than

heart can wish;" but the saying of the Lord to the Church in Smyrna may as to him be inverted-" I know thy riches-but thou art poor." The mud-walled cottage of the humble peasant, with the blessing of a Father in heaven resting upon it, surpasses infinitely in desirableness the most gorgeous palace of an ungodly prince. The pomp and vanity of the world is but a passing pageant-the gaudy glitter of a day ending in perpetual night!

11-Pro_4:1-13

Proverbs 4:1-13

LECTURE XI.

Proverbs 4:1-13.

"Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments and live. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life."

Solomon, in the introductory portion of this Book, is especially addressing the young; and youth he knew to be naturally volatile, and listless as to the topics to which he was most solicitous to secure their attention. Hence, like a speaker who sees attention drooping-the interest of his hearers becoming languid-the eyelids heavy-the countenance vacant, and indicating an absent and wandering mind-he often rouses by a fresh appeal, in the language of affectionate concern:-Verse Proverbs 4:1. "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding."

"Attention" is necessary to the acquisition of all knowledge, and not least the knowledge of divine truth. And when the instruction is imparted by a parent's lips, earnest and thoughtful attention is specially incumbent on children. The obligation is reciprocal. It lies on parents to teach; it lies on children to learn. Of all knowledge, pious parents will ever be most solicitous to impart to their children the knowledge of God's will. Whatever be second, this must be first. And while it should be that which parents are most anxious to impart, it should be that which children are most eager to gain. Remember, my young friends, Solomon here speaks of the "instruction of a father." And for children to disregard paternal instruction, is ungrateful, cruel, wicked, and infatuated.

It is ungrateful. The obligations, under which children lie to parents, are of a nature never to be fully discharged. My young hearers, your fathers and mothers wept for joy at your birth, and many a time wept for sorrow at the sufferings of your helpless infancy and childhood. In that period of your entire dependence, they protected and cherished you; they fed and clothed you; they fervently prayed for you; they hung over your sickbed with the tenderness of unwearied anxiety-trembling between hope and fear; watching each moment every symptom, and rejoicing in the turn of the ebbing tide, and your restoration to health and life. O! your bosoms are yet

strangers to the indescribable tenderness and force of parental love. To be rightly known, it must be experienced. How ungrateful, then, not to hear the instruction of a father or a mother, (for.the obligation applies alike to both) when, from solicitude about your bodies, they are taking thought for your souls; when, from care for your temporal, they are rising to care for your eternal interests. As this is the department of their highest obligation, so is it of yours. Sad evidence is it of your gratitude for the one, that you disregard and reject the other!

It is cruel. If you but knew it, there is nothing more agonizing to a godly parent's heart. It is incomparably worse than that inspired by your severest bodily ailments. O! were you but aware of the secret anguish that wrings the bosom-that gnaws and consumes the spirit-of a pious father or mother, when instruction is contemned, and carelessly or stubbornly refused, you would not act thus.

It is wicked. It is a violation of God's law. He has made it the duty of parents to instruct their families; and he has enjoined it as the corresponding duty of children, to hear their instructions. In refusing parental counsel, you are disobeying God.

It is infatuated. The young are always in danger of selfsufficiency. They will have their own way, refusing the dictates of superior wisdom and age. But "this their way is their folly." They are their own enemies. They are treasuring up regrets for the close of life, and for eternity. In all that I have thus said, one thing has been assumed. Solomon states it in the second verse (Proverbs 4:2):-" For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law." I am speaking of the instructions of godly parents, and supposing them to be in harmony with the lessons of God. Children and youth are prone to question the goodness of them. Their hearts naturally dislike them. They are too strict, too spiritual, too holy, for their taste. Ever prone to worldly and sinful pleasures, they fret at the rein that holds them in. Even though that rein is of silk, and held by the hand of the kindest affection, they would rather be free. Their deceitful heart blinds and perverts their better judgments, so that they "call good evil, and evil good." The doctrine of God, taught in the Bible, and instilled into the opening mind by godly parents, is, in every sense, "good doctrine." It is good in its own nature-coming as it does from the very mind of God, by the illumination of his Holy Spirit; and it is good in its results, on the present and everlasting happiness of all who receive it. When temptations allure the young to "forsake the law," which God gives them, they will find in their sad experience that it is good they are forsaking, and misery they are pursuing.

Solomon recommends his instructions to his own children,-as having been, not his only, but those of their venerable grandfather to himself. And he herein sets before us at once a filial and a paternal example:-verses Proverbs 4:3-4. "For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live." Solomon, like Isaac, was a child of promise. He was the appointed heir of his father's throne, and type of an infinitely greater successor than himself, (2 Samuel 7:12-13.) He had a name given him, as formerly noticed,* significant of the divine affection and favour towards him. He discovered symptoms of early wisdom and piety, which could not fail greatly to endear him to the heart of his father, and of his mother also. He here shows how he felt the affection of both, and returned it.

* Lecture 1: p. 3.

Solomon was born to a kingdom. Too often has the education of the heirs of thrones been neglected-especially in that department which is incomparably the most important, both for their own sakes, and for the sake of their future subjects. It is of unutterable consequence, that those who are to be entrusted with power-so very dangerous a commission, and one which the temptations to abuse are so strong-should have principle to use it aright; that they to whom the interests of so many others are to be entrusted should be qualified to consult and promote those interests to the most advantage. David manifested his paternal affection for Solomon, in union with patriotic affection for his people, in the instructions he imparted to him, and the counsels and admonitions he addressed to him, in his early years. This example of David as a father, is here recommended to parents; while that of Solomon is recommended to youth.

Ye fathers and mothers, if you love your children, as David did Solomon, you will teach and admonish them as David did Solomon. You will "say unto them,"-and that with all tenderness and importunity, and the tears of solicitude for their well-being, "Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live." You will be anxious for the life of your offspring;-for the true happiness of their life on earth,-of which you know by your own experience, if you are God's people, true religion is the very zest and relish; and more especially for their future life,-their meetness for heaven, and their final attainment of " life everlasting." Nothing short of this will satisfy you. Were you to be assured that all wealth and honour, and every variety of earthly good, in the richest abundance, were to be the lot of your children in the world, your hearts would still ache for them; you would feel that all was nothing, less than nothing, if the assurance was unaccompanied with any intimation of the safety of their souls. You would feel it an infinite relief to you,-a burden lifted off your spirits,-a joy unspeakable infused into your hearts, were all that variety and abundance of earthly good swept away, and the life of the soul and the hope of heaven substituted in its room.

And, my young friends, look at the example of Solomon. See here, how he goes back in recollection to the days of his childhood, with pious thankfulness-thankfulness both to his earthly and his heavenly Father-verse Proverbs 4:4. "He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live." He thus records it with filial reverence and love, to his father's honour. I can conceive his heart, when he wrote these words, swelling in the remembrance of the days of his youth, and his eyes filling with the tears of tenderness. And are there none of us who have cause for similar grateful remembrances? I for one must record mine; and many there are who can look back with delight and gratitude on the same scenes. Well I remember the family group, on the evenings of the "Lord's day," with our Bibles and our catechisms, storing our memories, and receiving, in simple explanations, and comparisons of one scripture with another, the early rudiments of saving knowledge-mingled with affectionate warnings, coming from the very bottom of a fond and devout heart, against "the ways of the destroyer," and all the errors and sins and temptations of the world. The whole circle is before my eye-the eye now of memory and imagination alone, for all who constituted that circle are now gone but he who addresses you. To the Christian faithfulness of a long-departed father I rejoice to bear my renewed testimony, in the very words of Solomon-verse Proverbs 4:4. "He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live." I speak to many who have, through the grace of God, reaped the blessed fruits of such early lessons. Are there any hearing me who can remember scenes of a similar description, but not with sweetness,

not with satisfaction?-none by whom, to this day, both the instructions and the recollection of them have been fruitless of saving benefit? O let such, how far soever advanced in life, yet remember, and yet improve the remembrance. Hear, with the ear of memory, "the instructions of a father," or of a mother, or of both. If your secret convictions tell you that they "gave you good counsel," it will even yet be for your good to improve it, that you may have their happiness in life, their hope in death, and a participation in the blessedness to which they are gone, and the choice of which they were so anxious to induce you to make. Make it yet-make it note. Ere you leave this house today, make it, and keep to it! In the whole passage, from verse fifth to verse thirteenth, there is much that is similar to what has already been under our review.

Mark the urgency of the exhortation to the acquisition of wisdom-verses Proverbs 4:5 and Proverbs 4:7. "Get wisdom, get understanding; forget it not: neither decline from the words of my mouth. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."

If you look at what keeps the world astir, you will at once conclude, that most men around you are under the actuating influence of a very different maxim from that presented in the latter of these verses. You might, without being at all chargeable with a libel, read-"Money is the principal thing; therefore get money; and with all thy getting get a fortune." This, alas! is the world's "one thing needful." All else is postponed to this. The world's advice to the young is, Get money first. Secure a competency (a word of which the limit is never defined); and when that has been done, you will have leisure to think about what good folks call "better things." Mind you the main chance. This world is the one with which we have first to do, as we are placed first in it. This world, then, first, and then the next! Ah! what a delusion! How many thousand times has it been found that, instead of leisure afterwards presenting itself for acquiring a better portion, the attachment of the heart to the world becomes stronger and stronger, and its seductive power the more and the more fascinating, as it is progressively acquired! The meshes of the net become the tougher and the more entangling, and the escape increasingly difficult, every hour. Its miserable victim comes to be held faster and faster in the toils, from which he flattered himself he would at any time set himself free. He is caught, and kept, and ruined, in the very net which he laid, unwittingly it may be, for himself O! when true wisdom is neglected for this-how pitiable! That preferred, which may never be got; and if got, may not be kept even for a day!-and that foregone for its sake, which cannot fail to be got, if in earnest desired and sought, which is the richest and sweetest relish of everything else, and which itself endures for ever-the portion of the soul, sure as eternity! The urgency to "get wisdom," is fully justified by the benefits here enumerated:-verse Proverbs 4:6. "Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee." The "preservation" is from the ways of sin, of folly, of the world, of death. From these true religion is the only safety.* * See chap, 2:10-12. And true religion is the only way to true honour and joy-to ultimate and permanent good:-verse Proverbs 4:8. "Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour when thou dost embrace her." This may be connected with the previous verse; the one being just a carrying out of the conviction of the truth of the other. To "exalt wisdom,"-when we recollect that "the fear of the Lord is wisdom "-is to honour God. It implies the choice of true religion as the chief good-giving it the first and highest place among the objects of desire and pursuit-enthroning it in our hearts, or rather enthroning there Him who is the object of it.-" She shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour," might be interpreted, as before, of the esteem which really consistent

religion is fitted to inspire. It may, by its admirable practical effects, produce confidence, and obtain elevation to offices of trust and consequence and honour amongst men. But something more, something higher and better is intended. This appears from the ninth verse-"She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee."*1 The meaning of the two parts of this verse, when taken together, may be-She shall give thee true dignity here, and confer upon thee glory for ever hereafter. It is impossible, consistently with the ordinary import of the language of the Bible, to interpret the phrase "a crown of glory" of any thing else than the everlasting honours of heaven.*2 *1 See on chap. Proverbs 1:9; Proverbs 3:22.

2 Comp. Hebrews 2:9. 2 Timothy 4:8. 1 Peter 5:4. Revelation 2:10. The blessing mentioned in the tenth verse-" The years of thy life shall be many," has been more than once before us. I dwell not on it now.

* Comp. Proverbs 3:1-2; Proverbs 3:16. The repetition of the same thoughts, in nearly the same words, inclines me to interpret the whole passage as the strain of David’s lessons to Solomon. And then we see the pattern after which, under the influence of the same Spirit which rested so abundantly upon his father, Solomon framed his own lessons. The likelihood of this is strengthened by the eleventh verse-"I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths." This, we say, is probably, though not certainly, the appeal of David to Solomon. If we may regard the language, 1 Chronicles 28:9, "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he mil cast thee off for ever,"-as the sum of the many previous lessons and admonitions of David, we shall have a favourable, and, from what Solomon himself here tells us, a just impression of the tenor of the parental training, of which he had been the subject. Happy, enviably happy the parent who can, with a clear conscience, make this appeal!

We have here set forth the two branches which constitute the sum of parental tuition-instruction and direction; teaching truth and guiding to duty. The one part relates to knowledge-the other to practice. In all rightly-conducted education, the two should never be disjoined. To teach duty without truth, is to teach action without motive-virtue without its principle. To teach truth without duty is to teach motive without the practice to which it should lead. They are both partial-and if kept asunder, both worthless. To act without the only right motive, and to understand the motive, without following it out and realizing it in action-must be alike unacceptable to "Him with whom we have to do." The happy practical results of attention to parental counsel, and imbibing the principles and spirit of true wisdom, are expressed in verse twelfth. "When thou goest"-that is, in thy daily walk-thy course of conduct, "thou shalt not be straitened." The word seems to express the case of one in difficulty and perplexity-contradictory impulses and obstacles pressing and hindering on every side-perpetually producing embarrassment and hesitation, and uneasy apprehension-hedging up the way, and hemming us in, and destroying the freedom and the confidence of advancement. Such is the case of the man who walks according to the maxims of a worldly and carnal policy. He is ever at a loss. As circumstances are ever shifting, he is ever shifting his principles and plans to suit them,-ever tearing and fretting himself with devices for this and the other end. But the "wisdom that is from above" inspires a simplicity and unity of principle, by which a vast amount of this agitating and painful perplexity is taken away, and liberty, delightful liberty, imparted to the steps. This wisdom has one point alone to ascertain-what the will of the

Lord is. That point discovered, the mind is instantly at rest. The path is clear; the step free, bold, fearless.-Then, "when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble." May not this refer to cases of urgency, cases calling for instant decision and prompt action? He whose mind is implicitly subject to the divine authority and direction; who is well-informed in God's word, and familiar with its contents; whose eye is single; whose principle is one; who looks not to the dictates of a crooked policy, but simply to God's will and God's glory-will not be often at a loss, or in great danger of making false steps, even when taken suddenly, and at unawares. He will be ready at all times and in all emergencies for action; and his duty will be done, while another is hesitating and considering, looking to results, and balancing probabilities; and, if necessitated to act on the instant, will be in great danger of stumbling-of hitting on some wrong, and far from advisable expedient. In the character of the former-of the man of principle, there is a firmness, a steadiness, a consistent uniformity of conduct, which appears in all circumstances, however different and opposite. His course does not shift with the wind. He is under no necessity of tacking from side to side, and accommodating to every changing current of air, like the vessel that must reach her point by the dexterous and ever-varying management of sails and rudder; but like the ship that is impelled by the marvellous might of steam-goes forward, direct to his destination, against wind, and tide, and current. The urgency of Solomon's admonitions, implies the existence of temptation and consequent danger-danger, as we have said before, of "letting slip the things which we have heard." Hence the style of the next verse, "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life." The natural giddiness and levity of youth; the allurements, in all their variety and force, of the world and of vice; the seductive enticements of evil company; the power of inward corruption, and the "wiles of the wicked one"-all draw one way-all against the impulse of heavenly principle, of divine wisdom; and they are all aided by the natural resistance to control of pride and self-will. That on which we feel that we depend for safety, or for the attainment and continued enjoyment of something on which our hearts are set, and which is essential to our present or our future well-being or both, we "take fast hold of;" we will not let go; having seized it with avidity, we cling to it with tenacious grasp. Thus is it with a shipwrecked and drowning man within reach of a floating plank. With what eagerness he seizes it!-with what a desperate embrace he maintains his hold of it!-he will not "let it go"-he "keeps it, for it is his life." Thus must it be with the sinner and heavenly wisdom. Thus must you feel your need of it. Thus must you lay hold on it. Thus must you cling to it:-"it is your Life." You are lost without it. Let no buffeting wave of temptation drive you from it. Let nothing that seems to offer greater security induce you to quit your hold. It is your only life. You must lay hold of true religion, even as the trembling and sinking Peter caught at the out-stretched hand of his gracious and omnipotent Lord. Laying hold on Christ is laying hold on wisdom. In conclusion,-.

1. If it be an evil to spurn at the instructions of an earthly father, how much greater an evil must it be to slight the paternal counsels and entreaties of the divine Father Of All! How ungrateful, how wicked, how infatuated! Cruel we cannot with propriety call it; for all the suffering in which such neglect or refusal results must be your own. It cannot affect the blessedness of Deity.

2. The sentiment respecting wisdom in the seventh verse is the same in substance with that of a greater than Solomon, when he says-" One thing is needful," Luke 10:42. Salvation and the means of its attainment must be the "one thing needful" for a sinful creature. He is wise who seeks and finds this. He is emphatically the "fool" who neglects it. This is the pearl of great price, which is "not

to be gotten for gold," and which he is an infinite gainer who parts with all else to find, as his everlasting treasure. How poor and miserable are those who get their desires as to this world, in the gratification of avarice, of ambition, of literary and scientific reputation, of personal and social pleasures, and get them to the full. If they live and die without wisdom-without fitness for the life to come-without Christ, without God, without hope!

3. Christian parents, let no infatuated wish to get your children forward in the world-to put them in the way of wealth or honour-to introduce them to what is reckoned genteel society and good connexions, or any earthly consideration whatever, tempt you to neglect their souls or to expose them to jeopardy. Proceed on the principle, that you are making the best provision for their temporal happiness by securing, in the first instance, that which is eternal. If you do otherwise you may rue it with tears of bitterness in the latter end.

12-Pro_4:14-27

Proverbs 4:14-27

LECTURE XII.

Proverbs 4:14-27

"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the war of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble. My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil." The connexion of the fourteenth verse (Proverbs 4:14) with the thirteenth (Proverbs 4:13) is obvious and important. In the latter, youth are admonished in these terms-"Take fast hold of instruction." But one of the principal sources of temptation to "let instruction go," arises from the influence of evil company and example. Solomon was strongly impressed with this, knowing well the strength of corruption, and of the natural propensity to imitate evil rather than good. All who have, or ever have had, the charge of the young, must be aware of the natural predisposition to evil. Account for it as you will, the fact is beyond question, established by the recorded experience of all the thousands of years of the world’s history. Were the original bent of our nature to good, the difficulty would be to persuade to evil. It would require the arts of temptation to insinuate an evil thought, to suggest an evil wish, to induce to the speaking of an evil word, or to the doing of an evil act. But the difficulty lies all on the other side. How very easy to teach a child to sin! It may be questioned, indeed, if it require teaching at all to lie, to steal, to cheat, to swear; to be proud, and selfish, and vindictive; to pursue the world, and to disregard and forget God. How difficult the reverse! What unremitting vigilance is demanded, in instructing, admonishing, persuading, expostulating, correcting, plying all the arts of fear and love, in "training a child in the way wherein he should go!" Sin is a contagious distemper, of which there is a predisposition in the moral constitution of our fallen nature to catch the infection. Parents are solicitous, and dutifully solicitous, to keep their children from exposure to the contact of bodily disease. O how much more anxiously should they dread their exposure to the contagion of sin, and worldliness, and folly! They may well adopt, with affectionate earnestness, the terms of dissuasive expostulation in these verses-" Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."* The language is strong; but to none who know the amount of the danger, will it appear at all stronger than the case warrants. It implies an intense propensity in youth to be self confident-to

see no danger-to flatter itself with its possessing sufficient powers of resistance-to resolve on showing this, and to please itself with the thought of cheating the grave prognostications, and mortifying the timid wisdom, of its greybeard counsellors. Many a youth has lived to repent his adventurous self-ignorance and fool-hardiness. Sin is like a whirlpool. He who once ventures within the circle of its eddying waters, in the self-sufficient assurance that he may go a certain length, and then turn, at his pleasure, and stem the current back, may feel the fancied strength of the sinews of his moral resolution but weakness in the moment of need, and may-nay almost certainly will, be borne on further and further, till, all power of resistance failing, he is carried round and round with increasing celerity, and sucked into the central gulf of irrecoverable perdition!

* Comp. Proverbs 1:10; Proverbs 1:15; Proverbs 2:10-12. The reason of the previous caution is assigned in verses Proverbs 4:16-17-"For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence."

What a contrast between the good man and the evil! When a good man falls into sin, overcome by temptation, his mind is wretched. He cannot bear himself His crime continues to haunt him by day, and to give him a wakeful and restless couch by night. And when he forms and matures a benevolent plan for the welfare of others, and fails in it, his wishes being frustrated by the slighting of his counsels and the refusal of his aid, he cannot sleep for regret and vexation. He sighs over the folly and infatuation which "forsakes its own mercies." What a shocking and odious character the converse of this, here brought before us! of the bad man-the man who desires and watches for opportunities of evil, who prefers them to the very repose of his weary nature, and even to its necessary sustenance!-who forms schemes of mischief for his fellows, seeks their execution with restless impatience, and, when these schemes are frustrated, can "find no sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids!"-mortified pride, disappointed avarice, unappeased resentment, unsatisfied ambition, and the fretfulness of distracted and conflicting passions, scaring away from them "tired nature’s sweet restorer," and depriving them of their appetite for their daily food! The meaning of the latter of these two verses evidently is, that the bread these "evil men" eat is the product of their wicked practices, and the wine they drink, of their injustice and rapacity. "They make their violence and deceit bear the expenses of their voluptuousness." It is not that the wine produces the violence, any more than that the bread produces the wickedness; but that they live by wrong, getting what they eat and what they drink by wicked and violent dealing. Surely these words teach us the correctness of the psalmist’s estimate, "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked."

Solomon proceeds to place in contrast the present condition and the end of both:-verses Proverbs 4:18-19. "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble." The image in the former verse is a very beautiful one. We have before us the feeble glimmerings of the morning dawn, gradually brightening, dispelling the lingering shadows, tinging the eastern clouds and the mountain tops, till at length the risen sun pours the fullness of his gladdening light upon the earth, and thence mounts the heavens with increasing intensity of brilliance, till he reaches the meridian of his glory. Such is "the path of the just"-the progress of "the good man," from the time of his conversion to the close of his life and his entrance on eternity. Light is emblematic of knowledge, holiness, and joy. The three bear invariable proportion to each other,-holiness

springing from knowledge, and joy from both-joy spiritual and endless. "The entrance of God's word giveth light." The entrance of this light into the mind is often, like the early dawn, feeble, glimmering, uncertain. But when it is the real "light of life" from the Spirit of God, it does not abide so; it increases gradually from the moment of its entrance. He who is "enlightened from above" is eager for more of the blessed light. He thirsts for knowledge, and is on the alert to obtain it. He derives growing information from the works and ways, but most especially from the word of God; and reads all these volumes of divine discovery with new eyes.

Then, with growth in knowledge there is growth in holiness. At the first dawn of spiritual light, some faint desires are felt after God and sanctity. These progressively increase, as the experience increases of the peace of them who love God's law; and they show their influence in the increase of practical godliness. The renewed sinner receives his fight from the "Sun of righteousness," and he reflects the light with a growing purity and brilliance. The "beauty of holiness" thus expands and brightens in the character, "shining more and more." Perfection itself remains as the attainment of a future and higher state of being. There is the zenith of the believer's glory, of the advancing light of his holy conformity to Him who "is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all." From that highest point in his heavenly course he shall never go down, never lose one ray of his splendour. With the progress of knowledge and holiness happiness keeps pace. Every gladdening and delightful association is connected with the image before us-" the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." The sun emerging from the east, is likened to a "bridegroom coming out of his chamber," and to a "strong man rejoicing to run a race."-Joy is both the duty and the privilege of the believer. It is the natural attendant of spiritual illumination and inward purity. This joy too is progressive. Like the sun in every stage of his diurnal course, it may be subject to the overcasting of occasional clouds. But as the sun appears the brighter on his emerging from behind the cloudy veil, so the trials of the just, the darkening shadows that come over them, serve to give lustre to their virtues. They promote their experimental knowledge of God and of themselves, of temporal and spiritual things; and thus they promote their real happiness even on earth. And when they reach their meridian altitude, no cloud shall ever intercept their light. No shadow shall ever for a moment obscure the radiance of their joy. Their felicity shall be perfect, undisturbed, and unending. On the contrary-verse Proverbs 4:19. "The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble." Darkness is, as an image, the opposite of light. It represents ignorance, unholiness, and misery. An awful compound! Yet such is the way of "the wicked," in the eye of God, and of all holy creatures. All is darkness-behind them, around them, before them. There is no light on which they can look back with pleasure; none to which they can look forward with hope. There is a sense, indeed, in which they are lights. But they are false lights-lights that "lead to bewilder"-meteors, that, when pursued, sink in darkness, and add to the gloom in which those who follow them are enveloped, when they have wandered still further astray in the pursuit. And this darkness increases, till, shadow after shadow deepening and accumulating upon it, it terminates at length in "the blackness of darkness for ever!" Thus there is a progress downward as well as upward-a progress to perfect night as well as to perfect day. The way of the wicked being "as darkness," implies at once its cheerlessness and its danger. They "know not at what they stumble." There are obstacles and perils in their path at every step. The very next movement may throw them over a stone or into a pit; and, as every step in life may be the last, they are at every step in peril of sinking into the pit of woe itself, where "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

Such considerations may well enforce attention to what follows in verses Proverbs 4:20-22. "My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh." The terms of the twenty-first verse may be compared, for illustration, with those in Deuteronomy 6:6; Deuteronomy 6:8-" And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes." Amongst the Jews, there was a sad propensity to take the latter injunction literally and externally. Hypocrites and formalists satisfied themselves with having little scraps of the law written on parchment, and actually worn as frontlets upon the forehead. But this was a delusion. The laws of God are never rightly "before the eyes," unless they are "in the heart." The meaning of the former clause of the verse is, that the commandments of God should be kept constantly in view, as the guides of the whole conduct. And this will be the case, when they are "kept in the midst of the heart." The expression implies the cherishing towards them of a cordial attachment-loving them, delighting in them, and ever cultivating a sincere and earnest desire after conformity to them. The motive to compliance with the injunction, in verse Proverbs 4:22, we have had repeatedly before us:-" For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh."

"Health" in the Hebrew means medicine: and beyond question, the tendency of sobriety, temperance, and regularity of behaviour, is to the possession of health in the best definition of it-a sound mind in a sound body. But the phrase seems intended to convey the idea of general prosperity and blessing; comfort and enjoyment.* * Comp. Proverbs 3:8; Proverbs 12:18; Jeremiah 33:6. The next verse contains a most important admonition-"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." In the animal system, the heart is the fountain of life to the whole body. Thence the vital fluid, the red arterial blood, is propelled to the remotest extremities and the minutest parts. In the physical economy, therefore, a great deal must and does depend on the healthy state, and regular and efficient action, of this central organ.-In the moral system, the heart is the term employed for the affections, of which it is regarded, from whatever cause, as the seat. And there is an analogy between the action of the heart in the physical, and the exercise of the affections in the moral economy. As the healthy action of the former affects the vitality and vigour of the entire corporeal frame, so does the well-regulated exercise of the latter, influence the entire character of the moral agent. To the heart, accordingly, all the good or evil in the deportment of the life is ever traced-as to the fountain, whether of sweet waters or bitter-as to the tree, whether bearing good fruit or bad.* The natural character of the heart is given in few but emphatic terms-" Enmity against God," Romans 8:7. This being its character, it needs to be renewed.

* Mark 7:21-33. See Luke 6:43-45. Its leading and comprehensive principles of action must be reversed. Enmity must be changed into love. This is conversion. This is being "born again." It is the work of God’s quickening Spirit.

Even the renewed heart requires the. Exercise of an unceasingly jealous vigilance. Hence the injunction, verse Proverbs 4:24-"Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee." In counteracting the power of the "law of sin in the members," we need the constant aid of the Holy Spirit. But the influence of the Spirit is never to be understood as superseding our own watchfulness and diligence; any more than our "living and moving and having our being in God," renders unnecessary our taking the requisite aliment, and attending to the care of our health. In the animal system, the heart would soon cease its action, and the body decay and die,

unless food were supplied to the organs of digestion, and vital air inhaled into the lungs;-by the former of which the means of secreting the blood are furnished, while by the latter its purity is successively restored as it returns from its nutritive circuit to the fountain whence it issued. So, if we would keep the moral affections in healthy action, we must feed on "the bread of life," and breathe the air of heaven. We must avoid error, and live upon truth. It is thus that the affections are to be kept vigorous and pure. It is thus that the spiritual life is to be maintained in its active vitality-its efficient and influential energy. But the language implies the exercise of an unremitting jealousy over every propensity to sin, and especially the "sin that may most easily beset us." It implies also a close attention to the motives of all our words and actions. The reason assigned for vigilance over the heart is, that "out of it are the issues of life." As the fountain is, so will be the streams. But this is not the only reason. "While the issues of the life indicate the state of the spring from which they proceed, the state of the spring itself is that which constitutes the character, and that to which God looks. As the heart is, so in God’s estimate is the man. It is the state of the heart that with Him decides the character. The true character indeed of every word and every action-of all that is external, depends on the inward impulse; on the principle, the motive, the disposition in the heart.

One description of "the issues of life" is then specified in verse Proverbs 4:24. "Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee."

It is true that vigilance over the heart is vigilance over the tongue, inasmuch as "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." But there is need for particular specification of evils to be sedulously shunned; and of none have we; in general, more need to be reminded than the evils of the tongue. "A froward mouth," is a mouth not subject to control; a mouth that gives utterance, with proud self-will and scorn of restraint, to the dictates of a rebellious spirit-an unsubdued, unsanctified mind.*1 Beware of imagining that there is little evil in mere words. There is no surer index of the state of the "inner man." As is the conversation so is the heart.*2 *1 See Psalms 12:3-4; and compare it with Ephesians 4:29; James 1:26; James 3:2-10.

*2 See Matthew 12:34-37. The admonition that follows is one of first-rate importance-verse Proverbs 4:25. "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee."

What is in these terms specially inculcated is, simplicity of principle and aim; singleness of motive; an upright unswerving regard to duty. The path of duty is one. It is narrow and straight. On it the eye should constantly and steadily be set-looking "right on;" not to any seducing objects that present themselves on the one hand or on the other. Many things may allure-may hold out tempting seductions from the onward path. Many other paths may appear more smooth, more easy, and, in all respects, for the time more desirable; but the one and only question must ever be, What is duty?

Verse Proverbs 4:26. To "ponder the path of the feet," means to consider it well. It should be "pondered," by the word of God-whether it is in accordance with its directions; whether it be in harmony with our obligations to God and to our fellow-creatures. The latter part of the verse may be regarded as expressing the result of the pondering, "All thy ways shall be established;" "all thy ways shall be ordered aright." And such regard implies discretion, inquiry, examination, and prayer.* * See Proverbs 3:5-6. The path "pondered" there must be a subsequent resolute practical adherence to it:-verse Proverbs 4:27. "Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot

from evil."

Nothing must be allowed either to draw or to drive you from the good way; neither prosperity nor adversity, riches nor poverty, love of friends nor fear of enemies, hope of good nor apprehension of evil; or in the terms of the apostle, "neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword,"-"neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature"-any thing else in the universe that may be imagined to possess any power of temptation. The proper improvement of the whole passage is, in the simple but significant words of the Redeemer, "IF YE KNOW THESE THINGS, HAPPY BE YE IF YE DO THEM."

13-Pro_5:1-23

Proverbs 5:1-23

LECTURE XIII.

Proverbs 5:1-23.

"My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding. that thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honey-comb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them. Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house: lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger; and thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly. Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad. and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love. And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray." The whole of this chapter, the latter half of the sixth, and all the seventh, relate to one subject; a subject on which Solomon had before merely touched in general terms. It is a subject which admits not, in a public assembly, of minute illustration, and to which frequent recurrence is not desirable. It is, at the same time, a subject, from which, when I think of the frequency and earnestness of Solomon's warnings respecting it, and the amount of real peril to souls which it involves, I should feel myself chargeable with a criminal abandonment of duty, were I for a moment to shrink.

I take the entire subject at once, as presented in the passages to which I have referred-passages which it is impossible to read without sentiments of deep abhorrence of the sins that are there portrayed in their native deformity and mournful results; and without melting compassion for the wretched victims of profligacy and licentious indulgence. And this, I may here remark in general, is the character of all those passages in the divine word which relate to similar subjects. Were such topics altogether unnoticed, there would be an unaccountable defect of faithfulness in a professed communication from God, and a communication of which the main design is to save souls from death. How strange would it have been-how contrary to every conception we can form of divine

fidelity and kindness-had warning been withheld where most it was needed; had the rocks which exposed to the most imminent hazard in the voyage of life been left without a beacon-light; and the eternal destinies of immortal beings sacrificed to any principle of false and misnamed delicacy!

"Thy word is very pure" says the Psalmist, "therefore thy servant loveth it." That word is like the God from whom it comes. It is light of Light. In itself pure, it is the detecter and exposer of all impurity; and, while detecting and exposing it, it condemns it by its authority, and by its influence cleanses it away. I am aware that infidels have attempted to fasten on this blessed book-the Bible, a charge of a very contrary tendency. They have selected particular portions of it, and, with light-hearted sportiveness or with sarcastic bitterness, have made them the grounds of this most calumnious charge. I call it so without the slightest hesitation. First of all, who are the men who thus object? If they are in earnest, they ought to be persons of singularly pure and holy character; evidently and deeply concerned for the interests of religion and virtue; shrinking with sensitive dread from all that is immoral, and solicitous to preserve all others from the taint. And is the reason why they do not come to the Bible really an apprehension of having their moral principles contaminated, and their spiritual sensibilities impaired? Their consciences tell them the contrary. The passages, moreover, which they are fond of selecting, are all of them, as every one must be sensible, of a complexion totally different from that of voluptuous writing, with its sly inuendoes, its covert insinuations, its artfully studied refinements, its enticing and passion-stirring scenes. And their effect is the very opposite. They are, throughout, so manifestly and strongly marked with the very contrary design-to set forth impressively the evil and the danger of all sin; with the divine abhorrence of it, and the revealed and threatened indignation of God against it;-or, it may be, from the chaste and cheerful endearments of connubial life, to unfold the happiness of communion with God, and His condescension and kindness in admitting his sinful creatures to the enjoyment of it. Who, O who ever had recourse to the Bible for the stimulation of sinful passion, or the encouragement of licentious indulgence? Is it not the book from which the licentious ever shrink? which they cannot bear? which opposes, and thwarts, and condemns, and torments them? which they are glad to keep out of their thoughts, and which they are fain to laugh at because they feel it wounds them, and are too proud and bent on their vices to acknowledge the wound? If the contrary were true-if the charge of infidelity were well-founded, we might expect to find the Bible on the table of the man of pleasure,-the favourite vade-mecum of the gay and voluptuous libertine. But the very hatred with which bad men regard it; the very care with which they shun it, shows that it is not really to their mind; that it bears witness against them, shows them no countenance, but consigns them and their ways to reprobation and destruction. And while they pretend to speak against it, their conduct belies their words. If they spoke the truth, they would say-what, after all, most of them do say-that it is too pure for them, too strict, too damnatory of all evil. Were it not pure, the impure would like it. Were it not the uncompromising enemy of sin, it would not find an enemy, as it does, in the sinner. And when, as has sometimes happened, a youth who has had a Bible education, who has been trained in the knowledge of its contents, and has, for a time, conformed to its instructions, imbibes the principles of scepticism, lays it by, and betakes himself, instead of the apostles of the Lamb, to the apostles of infidelity-what is the result? Is it a sterner virtue? Is it a more pious deportment? Is it a purer chastity? Is it a more uncompromising integrity-a more home-loving sobriety-a more consistent and selfdenying devotedness to God? Alas! is not the answer written in the bitter tears of many a parent and of many a friend-of many a brother, and of many a "wife of youth?" Beware, my young friends, of all those flimsy reasonings

by which the deceitful heart so often imposes on the judgment, and, though it cannot satisfy, silences the conscience. And beware of all that might tempt you to think lightly of the sins here denounced. They may not, nay, they do not, exclude from what is called the best society. You may hear them without their being directly named, spoken of as juvenile indiscretions and irregularities. You may hear many a time, with an affected compassion, but with very gentle terms of condemnation, of good-natured, good-hearted, good-dispositioned, fine, honest, open fellows, that are nobody's enemies but their own: and from the tone of leniency and indulgence in which their vices are spoken of, it seems as if it were scarcely believed that they were even their own! But indeed they are their own; and they are more-they are the very worst enemies of all about them. They are only the more dangerous on account of the very qualities for which they are commended, and which produce the palliation of their vices. Let me warn you against such palliation, and every thing that tends to it. Take, I pray you, the Bible account of these vices. It will, in the end, be found the true one. Conscience even now more than whispers that it will. O let not the truth be left to be discovered when it is too late!

What was said of evil company in general in Proverbs 4:14-15, is here applied to this kind of company in particular, verses Proverbs 5:5-8. "Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them. Hear me now therefore, O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth. Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house." The meaning, as before, is-Flee temptation. He that "trusteth to his own heart," and fancies he may go certain lengths with evil-doers, and retreat with safety, "is a fool." He has yet to learn the heaven-taught lesson, "know Thyself." Thoughts are the germs of actions: "guard well your thoughts." Words cherish thoughts and quicken evil desires. Speak them not. Hear them not. Stop your ear like the deaf adder. Listen not to the "voice of the charmer." To open your ear is to have your memory, your imagination, your heart polluted, and thus your stability undermined. In the passages before us, the consequences of sinful indulgence-of a course of libertinism, are very vividly depicted. Thus, verses Proverbs 5:9-10. "Lest thou give thine honour unto others, and thy years unto the cruel: lest strangers be filled with thy wealth; and thy labours be in the house of a stranger." These are some of the temporal consequences. A life of profligacy exposes him who enters upon it, to merciless unrelenting avarice; makes him the pitiable dupe of those whose sole object it is to fleece him,-to make the most of him, and then, with a sneer, to abandon him. It transfers his substance to the vilest, the most odious and worthless of human beings; to the most indifferent, selfish, hard-hearted strangers; who are all friendship while profit can be made, but are alienated the moment it ceases. The temporal effects are still more fearful, when the wicked voluptuary is himself the head of a family-a husband and a father; or when the wretched partner of his guilt is such-a wife and a mother. Oh! of what unutterable domestic misery has this sin been the prolific parent! How many hearts has it broken-of wives, and husbands, and children! What anguish, and resentment, and alienation, and discord, and blood, has it caused! What scorpions has it thrown into the family circle!-what infuriated and vengeful pride, or what heart-sinking melancholy that refuses to be comforted and hastens to the grave! And to what poverty, and desolation, and squalid wretchedness has it reduced its victims!" For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life," Proverbs 6:26. The manner in which this crime is treated by the laws of our country is a disgrace to our jurisprudence. Solomon says-"Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when ho is hungry,"

Proverbs 6:30. Yet this thief may be tried, convicted, imprisoned, transported; and, till the recent happy improvements in our sanguinary criminal code, I might have said executed. And what is done to the wretch who has torn the hearts, ruined the reputation, and annihilated the peace, and comfort, and joy of individuals and of families, in a way where to talk of reparation is only to add insult to injury! The wretch escapes with a pecuniary mulct under the execrable designation of damages! Can there any thing be imagined more base and sordid?-any thing more fitted to hold out temptations to worthless husbands to set a price on female honour; to encourage the wealthy profligate; and-by converting a crime of the most atrocious moral turpitude into a mere civil offence, for which compensation may be made in a certain amount of pounds, shillings, and pence-to pervert all the moral feelings of the community? Such a mode of viewing and treating the crime has, beyond question, contributed to diminish its turpitude, to augment its melancholy frequency among the higher circles of society, and in a great degree to obliterate its infamy: so that cases of this nature come to be read and spoken of, not with the feelings of indignant and unutterable loathing, as they ever ought to be, but with the coolness of commercial calculation, and the inquiry, What damages?-what laid, and what granted? It is disgusting and sickening to think of it!

Further, dissipation tends to the ruin of both body and soul:-verses Proverbs 5:11-14. "And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly." The apostle Paul says, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body: but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body," 1 Corinthians 6:18. This is one of those evils to which a just God, in his righteous providence, has affixed, in its temporal consequences, the brand of his reprobation and abhorrence. How many a healthy and robust frame has a life of profligacy and dissipation wasted away and brought to a premature grave!

How inexpressibly pitiable the scene here described-"Lest thou mourn at the last!" It is a scene that has many a time been realized on the deathbed of the wasted debauchee. The fixed and sunken eye, the parched, pale, and quivering lip, the cold and dewy brow, the livid countenance, and all the ghastly appearances of death-O! these are nothing, compared with the torture of an awakened conscience, with the anguish of a "wounded spirit" preying upon his vitals! Often is this agony of regret experienced, when there is no repentance-no true sorrow for sin, or wish to forsake it; when there is mere concern that the time of indulgence is past, and that the time of recompense is come. Then the poor sinner curses his irreparable folly, and amidst the present pangs of dissolution, anticipates, with a tortured and desperate spirit, the future and the worse torments of hell!-for the Soul is the ruined victim of such a life, as well as the body. It ruins both. "Her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell." "Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul." "He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life."-Proverbs 5:4-5; Proverbs 6:32; Proverbs 7:22-23. From this ruin there is no escape. Sin may have been committed in secresy. No human eye may have seen it. But there is an eye from which it cannot be concealed-"For the ways of man are

before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings." "There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." God is no inattentive or unconcerned spectator of your actions. "He pondereth all your goings." He weighs every word, every deed, every thought of the mind, every imagination and every desire of the heart, in the balance of that law which is "holy, and just, and good." The Lord will "bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing." The sinner is as certain of being brought to trial and to punishment, as if his sins themselves were cords and chains, that reserved him in awful safe-keeping to the day of wrath-the "day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God:" "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray," verses Proverbs 5:22-23. The certainty of a result corresponding to the course of sin, is strongly expressed by the figures in Proverbs 6:27-28: "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt?" This is fearfully true in regard to divine retribution. He who persists in sin, and expects impunity, acts as unreasonably as the man who should expose his body to the scorching flame, or walk over burning fire, and expect to escape uninjured!

It is an affecting and alarming fact, that despisers of the counsels of heavenly wisdom most generally, after persisting for a length of time, die as they have lived. This is the sentiment in verse twenty-third-"They die without instruction." Mistake me not. I say not that there is any season when repentance toward God is impossible, or when, if genuine, it can come too late. No; blessed be God- "While the lamp holds on to burn, The vilest sinner may return."

I speak of matter of fact. Generally, such persons go on in sin, refuse instruction, and put away from them to the end, whether in scorn or in sad despair, all the invitations, assurances, and promises of the gospel. This sounds an awful warning to dissipated youth. Some of them (for there are not many so hardened and daring as to determine they will never repent and never change) may be flattering themselves, that at some future day they will take thought and amend. But alas! for the infatuated anticipation. By persistence in sin they are every day fastening its cords about them with increasing firmness, and rendering change the more unlikely. The indisposition to good grows. The conscience hardens. The heart becomes more and more callous; and they go astray to the last in "the greatness of their folly;"-a folly, of which the end shows the amount. The lesson is read-the tremendous lesson-by the flames of Hell! There the regret, so vividly depicted, in the verses already under review, as characterizing the close of even this life, shall be experienced in its most agonizing form; and shall constitute no small portion of the torture inflicted by "the worm that never dies!"

O then, my hearers-my youthful hearers in a special manner-listen, and beware. I have spoken to young men. But on both sides, the ruin is equal: and the number of those wretched corrupters of the morals of our youth who live by the wages of iniquity is, in great cities and towns, unspeakably deplorable. He must have the heart of a monster; he must be one from whose heart the obduracy of vice has wrung out the very last warm drops of humanity, who can contemplate the evil in all the extent of its consequences, without horror and self-loathing at the part he may himself have had in producing it. And such considerations should recommend to liberal support every legitimate means of mitigating its amount, and of rescuing any of its miserable victims from the fatal effects of sin in time and eternity-"plucking them as brands from the burning!" As a preventive of evil, and as

a means of true happiness, Solomon recommends early marriage, and the experience of the comforts and joys of connubial and domestic life:-verses Proverbs 5:15-18. "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth."

It is evident, that this must be understood with reservation. It requires the application of prudence, and the prospective consideration of the question, how a family is to be supported. Much unhappiness often arises from overlooking and disregarding this. The most virtuous and ardent affection must not be encouraged to set at nought entirely the dictates of discretion. But in general, and with a proper degree of attention to this, early unions are, in many respects, of eminent advantage. Virtuous love operates with a most salutary restraint on the vicious principles of our fallen nature. The marriage union, formed and maintained on right principles, has ever been found a fountain of the purest and richest joy on this side the grave-joy unmingled with guilty shame, and that leaves behind it no tormenting sting. There are few things more pleasing than to see youth joined to youth in virtuous and honourable and hallowed union,-living together in all the faithfulness and all the tenderness of a first love. O! with what delight does the eye rest on such a scene, when disgusted with the loathsomeness, and distressed by the misery of vice!

It is a circumstance deserving notice, that, although Solomon himself had fearfully trespassed against the original law of marriage-the constitution authoritatively fixed when God made a male and a female, and said, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife,"-he here proceeds, in his admonitions and counsels, according to the provisions of that constitution. It was the law from the first, and is the law under the Christian economy, that "every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband." Solomon had himself reaped the bitter fruits of departure from that law; and so, though not to the same degree, had many before him.

I conclude by reminding every one that all sin tends to ruin. The indulgence of one sin cannot be compensated by abstinence from another. There is no such principle of compensation in the Bible. And yet, nothing is more frequent in regard to sinful indulgences, than for men to- "Compound for those they are inclined to, By cursing those they have no mind to."

Such is the delusion which men, in this respect, are accustomed to practise on themselves, that, even in regard to propensities that are absolutely opposites, in the nature of things incapable of being indulged together, they may be found, while giving themselves up to the one, pluming themselves on the absence of the other!

Again: mere external sobriety and chastity and general decency of character, is not enough. There is still remaining the all-important question-What is the principle of it? The only sound principle is-"the fear of God." In all schemes that have for their object the outward reformation of men-their restoration from the habits of outward vicious indulgence-it were well that this be kept in mind; for if you succeed in making men externally sober, while they do not become internally godly, and if they are encouraged to rely upon their outward reformation and to make a righteousness of it, you may essentially benefit them in their corporeal and temporal well-being, but you fail of saving their souls. They may have a fair reputation amongst their fellowmen; but in God's balance they must be found wanting.

14-Pro_6:1-11

Proverbs 6:1-11

LECTURE XIV.

Proverbs 6:1-11.

"My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger, thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend. Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler. Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." A Surety is one who becomes security for a debt due by another, in case of the insolvency of the original debtor. In different countries, the customary or legal forms have been different, by which such suretiships are undertaken, and are rendered valid. In the first verse, allusion is made to the practice of the surety confirming his engagement by giving his hand to the creditor, in presence of witnesses-" My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger."

Solomon, on different occasions, condemns the practice of suretiship (See Proverbs 11:15. and Proverbs 22:26). The condemnation is general. It does not follow, however, that what he says is to be taken as an absolute unqualified prohibition, to which there are no circumstances that can constitute an exception. There are cases in which it is unavoidable; and there are cases in which the law requires it; and there are cases in which it is not only in consistency with law, but required by all the claims of prudence, and justice, and charity. These, however, are rare. And it may be laid down as a maxim regarding the transactions of business, and all the mutual dealings of man with man, that the less of it the better. In such cases as the following, it is manifestly inadmissible, and may even, in some instances, involve a large amount of moral turpitude:-

1. It is wrong for a man to come under engagements that are beyond his actually existing means-beyond his ability to pay, in case of need. Such a course is not one merely of imprudence! There is in it a threefold injustice. First, to the creditor for whom he becomes surety; inasmuch as the security is fallacious, not covering the extent of the risk. Secondly, to his family, if he has one, to whom, in case of the security being required, and the payment called for, the requisition must bring distress and ruin. And thirdly, to those who give him credit in his own transactions, with the risks of his own trade: for in thus undertaking suretiships, he involves himself, without their knowledge, in the risks of other trades besides his own, and thus exposes them to hazards of which, in the outset, they were not aware.

It may be thought that a person may always be justified in becoming a surety, provided he retains as much clear as is sufficient for the payment of his own obligations, and, at the same time, do justice to his family. But it ought not to be forgotten amidst what uncertainties we live-the incessant liability to fluctuations and reverses. We "know not what shall be on the morrow." In trusting to what we now have, we may be "setting our eyes on that which is not." All may be quite square, and to every appearance prosperous, to-day; and to-morrow all may be ruin. So that, if in giving his security, a man goes to the limit of his means, without taking into account the risks of his own business, he does wrong; and his own calamity, and that of others associated with him, may come speedily.

2. The same observations are applicable to the making of engagements with inconsideration and rashness. The case here supposed, is evidently that of suretiship for a friend to a stranger. And the rashness and haste may be viewed in relation either to the person or to the case.

First, as to the person. The partiality and warmth of friendship, may be a temptation to agree precipitately and without reflection to what both prudence and equity forbid: and especially when the friend presents and presses his suit on the very ground of friendship. That is very trying. How can we refuse an old, attached, and valued friend, or one, it may be, to whose kindness we have been more than once indebted! If a man stands alone, out of business, and without a dependent family, and has, at the same time, abundance of which to dispose, he may be quite at liberty to make such sacrifices to friendship as he pleases. But suppose the reverse of all this-then the claims of justice to others must take precedence of the claims of kindness to the friend. The friend, in such cases, must be regarded, not merely in his capacity as a friend, but in his capacity as a man of business. If, for example, he is known to us as a man who is indolent and careless, incorrect and improvident, profuse and extravagant; then, whatever may be our feelings, they must on no account be allowed to supersede, in the slightest, the demands of justice. These demands lie against their indulgence, on the part of family and of creditors; whose rights, in such a case, would be clearly and egregiously violated. In such circumstances, it is very wrong in your friend to urge you; but, let the urgency be ever so great, and the pain to which you are put ever so excruciating, right ought to prevail, even if the forfeiture of friendship should be the penalty. Men, when they feel the generous impulse of friendly emotion, and say at once while under it, "I'll be his surety," are exceedingly apt to think at the moment only of themselves, as if the risk were all their own; and to forget, that in thus hastily "striking hands," they are making creditors and family securities, without asking their consent, or making them aware of their risks. In the case of the person in whose behalf we bring ourselves under the obligation being "a stranger," the culpability is indefinitely augmented. The young, naturally warm, inexperienced, unsuspecting, and credulous, are very apt to allow themselves to be drawn away by their juvenile ardour, and to commit themselves fast and fondly to new and open-hearted companions. Suretiships "for strangers" are accordingly laid under special condemnation:-" He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure." "Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman," Proverbs 11:15; Proverbs 20:16. The force of the latter passage is, "If he is your debtor who has come under suretiship for a stranger, you had better see sharply to payment.'Take his garment' for your debt. He will soon come to it; will soon have nothing more to pay; take in pledge whatever you can get." In the verses before us the case is different. It is the case of becoming surety, not for a stranger, but, as was formerly noticed, to a

stranger for a friend. In regard to all such cases, it should be recollected, that, although we may have a confidence in our friend that is in the main well-founded, we can never be sure in what speculations he may be tempted to embark, or what new courses in business he may be induced to pursue. The practice is elsewhere condemned as that of indiscretion and folly:-" A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend," Proverbs 17:18. The words, "in the presence of his friend," may mean, being swayed and overcome by the influence of friendship-his friend being before him in distress, needing and seeking his aid: a situation which every man of sensibility will feel it very difficult to withstand. Or, it may mean, complying with the request hastily, on the instant, ere the friend who pleads for the favour has left his presence.

It is very far wrong in any man to avail himself of the claims of friendship to bring another into a situation which, his conscience tells him, is one into which he would not like himself to be drawn; or to induce the friend to do what he knows is either in principle faulty, or in tendency and possible results injurious. This is the very opposite of friendship. It is selfishness betraying friendship, and making it available for its own ends. He who, in business, makes such a use of friendship, exposes himself to just suspicion that all is not right; that he is trying unwarrantable means to prop up a false credit, and to gratify a haste to be rich. It is very natural for us, no doubt, to wish to make our own bargains as secure as possible. But does any man like to be security for the bargains of others? If this is what none like, should any tempt others to do it? Should any one, for the sake of making all sure for himself, seek to place others in circumstances by which their security may be affected? Here, as in every case, comes in the golden rule, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." If we cannot trust a man ourselves, so as to transact business with him, would it not be better to forego our bargain, even though it may seem a tempting one, and to decline dealings with him, than to accomplish our purpose by bringing others into a situation we ourselves dislike?

I may further ask, whether, in the spirit, and to no small extent in the letter of it, what has just been said does not bear application to the whole system of what is known, in modern business, under the term Accommodation. Is not that a system which, on the principles stated, ought to be denounced and put down? Some say it is impossible to transact business without it. It may be well, however, to inquire how far this alleged impossibility does not arise from the very modes of transacting business which modern usage has introduced? I allude to the unrighteous, lying, ruinous method of speculation without capital; of extensive risks on a baseless credit; of what may be called the lottery plan of business, where wealth to ourselves, or ruin both to ourselves and others, are put upon the cast of a die. If the credit is baseless, the business is base. All are, in theory, of one mind, that the accommodation system, as it has been carried on, is a false, treacherous, hollow, ruinous system; a system of utter delusion, stamped throughout with lies. Christian men of business should set their faces decidedly against it, doing what they can to fix on it the stigma of dishonour, and to oust it from the mercantile world. But while Solomon condemns suretiship, he at the same time intimates that when an engagement has once been made, it is binding. Such seems the import of the second verse-"Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth." This is one of the very considerations by which previous caution and forethought are rendered necessary. You may wish, after the thing has been done, that it had not been done, or that it could be undone. But truth and honour may now tie you

down to your promise. The case may come under that feature of the acceptable worshipper in God's courts-" He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." You have brought yourself into a snare, and by your own word, in speech or in writing, have placed yourself in the power of others. What, then, is to be done? Solomon's counsel is-Extricate yourself, if you can; that is, if by any means consistent with the principles of truth and honour, it is at all in your power. He exhorts you to the very humblest concessions:-verse Proverbs 6:3. "Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend." The closing words seem to mean, as in the margin, "Humble thyself that thou mayest prevail with thy friend." The object is, to induce him, by all equitable and self-denying concessions, to pay the money himself, or to prevail with the creditor to dispense with the security,-to discharge your obligation. There is a pride sometimes which, after a man has committed himself, even how strongly soever he may see and feel afterwards his error, both as it affects himself and others, will not allow him to stoop to any means whatever of disentangling himself. The principle, to a certain extent, is one which we cannot but admire. But it may be carried too far; especially when we find that we have been implicating others as well as ourselves. What will it profit to add pride and pertinacity to folly and wrong?

Solomon, observe, treats it as a matter of most urgent exigency:-verses Proverbs 6:4-5. "Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler." The urgency of the case will of course correspond in degree with the extent of the obligation and the risk. It is here supposed to be one of magnitude and importance. But the principle comprehends all cases, though applicable with various measures of force. There is a correspondence between the figure in these verses and that which had been used in the second: "Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth,"-" Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler." The hunter and the fowler catch their prey for their own purposes, not for the benefit of the roe or the bird. So you have suffered yourself to be snared and caught by others, not for your profit, but for theirs. If they, then, have caught you for theirs, for your own you should seek escape.

It is evident, however, that the language implies, If, with all your efforts, you are unsuccessful in obtaining your discharge, you must stand to your engagement. Treachery would be a much greater loss in character, than would be compensated by evading, or attempting to evade, the loss of property; and, even were you able to keep your money, while you would lose caste in the world, you would lose "peace with God" and "the answer of a good conscience."

This, then, is one of the ways in which a man may bring himself into straits, and even reduce himself to beggary. It is not the first nor the second time that a man has beggared himself by suretiships. We may commend his generous and accommodating kindness; but we cannot praise the prudence with which it has been exercised: and if others are connected with him, and involved in his downfall, the error has been one of principle as well as of prudence. In the verses which follow, Solomon brings before us another way in which straits and poverty may be induced. It is Sloth. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." The indolent and improvident are addressed; and they are sent to the inferior creation for a lesson: and not to the greatest and the noblest of animals, but to one of the least and most insignificant of insects. Of the Ant there are various species even in the same country; and some that are peculiar

to their respective climates and regions of the earth. They differ in size, in colour, and in some particulars both of their structure and of their instinctive habits. All are remarkable for their industry. It is indeed astonishing; and the results of their united labours are no less so, when the diminutiveness of the agents is considered. Of some of the species the abodes-the ant-hills as they are usually termed-are of great size, exceeding the height of a man; and they are constructed with wonderful regularity and skill, the result of labours that would seem incredible were they not thus ascertained in their effects. They are in the form of a conical mount, with roads winding through every part of the settlement; and all their granaries for food, and their depositories for their young (in their care of which they are most singularly assiduous and exemplary) are arranged in suitable positions, and in due order. Their travels and exertions in procuring provisions are not less amazing than their habitations, and the order of their community. These expeditions in quest of food are sometimes made solitarily, and sometimes in bands; and it would appear as if individuals, when they fall in with any article of public utility, but too bulky for their unaided efforts to remove, have methods of communicating the intelligence, and leading off swarms of assistants, to accomplish by numbers what could not be done by strength. They go in these troops to very considerable distances, and repeat their journeys till they have got all secured. Ants may be seen pushing on before them grains of corn which they are unable to carry. It is further said (and it is previously likely, and seems to be sufficiently authenticated) that, to prevent the grain in their deposits from growing, they instinctively gnaw off the germ from the extremity. The little white substances, resembling very small peas, which appear in such numbers at times on the surface or when the surface is at all displaced, are not their food; nor are they their eggs, but their young at a particular stage of their progress. These are the first objects of their attention; and when the settlement is disturbed and thrown into alarm by any foreign invasion, whether from the foot of man or otherwise, the eagerness, the toil, and the rapidity with which all instantly set about and effect their removal, are not less instructive than they are surprising. On the subject of the other particular, the providence of the ant, it has, by some naturalists, been questioned. It has been alleged that during winter they are, like some other insects, in a state of torpidity, and therefore need not the precaution ascribed to them in the eighth verse, of "providing their meat in the summer, and gathering their food in the harvest." On this we may observe-

1. If the fact of their laying up provisions be ascertained, all analogy more than warrants the conclusion that it is for some end. We do not find these extraordinary instincts operating to no purpose. Nature, or more properly, the God of nature, does nothing of this kind in vain.

2. "Whereas it has been said, the stock thus laid up is not for winter, but for the sustenance and nourishment of the community, at a period when the young come to need the almost undivided attention of the whole, and when, consequently, they have not leisure for their predatory excursions;-I need not say that, as a proof of providence, even were it admitted, this comes to the very same thing. But observe-

3. The assertion that the laying up of provisions is a mistake, is, even by those who make it, confined to the ants with which we are acquainted in England or in Europe, while it does not extend with certainty even to all of them. It is granted by these sceptical naturalists themselves, to be more than probable in regard to the ants of other and warmer climates. "What has been said with exaggeration" says one of them, "of the European ant, is, however, true if asserted of those of the tropical climates. They build an ant-hill with great contrivance and regularity; they lay up

provisions; and, as they probably live the whole year, they submit themselves to regulations entirely unknown among the ants of Europe." * There is often no little amount of uncertainty respecting the instinctive customs of these minute creatures. Such uncertainty is apparent even in the terms used in this extract-"exaggeration" and "probably." But the admission it contains is itself quite enough. If there were ants of the kind described, known in the time and country of Solomon, we need not carry our inquiries further. Not a few fabulous extravagances, as might be expected, have been asserted, both respecting this and other creatures of a similar description; but when all that is fabulous has been deducted, there remains enough, in the well-ascertained facts, to excite our astonishment and call forth our praise.

* Buffon. But the lesson for which these little wonders of sensitive creation are here introduced is of a different kind. It is a lesson of reproof and shame to the slothful, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard." The language of the seventh verse is far from being intended to convey the idea that these creatures have no regular subordination among themselves in their little settlements. For although here, in a special manner,-under the influence of a fancy enamoured of the subject, and addicted to the marvellous, fond itself of wondering and making others wonder,-fabulous things have been imagined to have been observed and have been recorded among the facts of their natural history; yet, as in the case of the Bee and other insects, there is no reason to doubt, but good ground for believing, that they have a government-a regular system of subdivision into castes, or peculiar occupations, and of rule and subjection and social operation. But the ants, as a community, are here spoken of; and the meaning is, that they have no creature of superior intelligence to teach them what to do and how to do it; to inform them of their future necessities, and direct them in what way to provide against them. It is in their nature,-impressed there in a way that is full indeed of mystery, yet full of the wisdom of Him, all whose works are perfect. The lesson is, that Industry is the duty of man, as it is the practice of the ant. Even in paradise, man was not to be idle, though his occupation was to have nothing in it of toil fatigue, or disappointment. He was placed in the garden "to dress it and to keep it." And on men now, numerous are the inculcations of this duty in the Word of God.* * See, for example, Romans 12:11. 1 Timothy 5:8. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14.

We may mention three grounds of the duty, as indicated in Scripture. The first is, that persons may not be a burden on society, or on the church. On this point, indeed, the apostle’s language is strong even to seeming harshness; but it is the language of God’s Spirit, and shows the light of severe reprehension in which He regards the idle. He interdicts support to them--prohibits charity, "If any will not work, neither should he eat." A further reason is, that they may be out of the way of temptation; there being many temptations in idle habits, and in the want to which they lead, from which the industrious are free; temptations to dishonesty, and pilfering, and extorting by false pretexts, living by lying.* The third is, that they may have wherewith to assist others, whose need, from unavoidable causes, may be greater than their own. This motive is strongly inculcated by the apostle, "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth," Ephesians 4:28.

* Comp. 1 Thessalonians 4:12.

It is characteristic of sloth, as of some other dispositions, that it is ever growing. Give it any measure of indulgence, and it demands more. The indolent man is ever seeking apologies for

keeping his bed or his easy chair. When these fail, he still pleads for a little-were it but ever so little-just another half-hour-just one minute more! Solomon in the next verses sounds the alarm, "How long wilt thou sleep O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." How graphically descriptive of the yawning sloth; the useless piece of lazy lumber in society!- "Like the door on its hinges, so he on his bed, Moves his sides and his shoulders, and his heavy head." And how forcibly is he warned of the natural tendency, and the inevitable consequence! Poverty may make slow, but they are sure, advances. "It comes as a traveller." And when it arrives, the habit of inaction has become so powerful and inveterate, that it proves "as an armed man." All resistance is vain. The very effort of prevention, if it can be called such, is that of indolence, and proves fruitless; and the poor sluggard, thoroughly mastered by arms which himself has furnished, becomes a prey to all the wretchedness of pinching penury; and is doomed to endure it without any portion of that soothing sympathy which is ever extended to the diligent but unfortunate-or let us rather say providentially unsuccessful labourer; who will always find a place in the compassion and the practical charity of others. The passage suggests the following among other important reflections:-

1. The great importance of Christians exemplifying in all their transactions with the world, what may be denominated business virtues,-integrity, prudence, and diligence. Remember, fellow-Christians, the men of the world, while they may scorn, or affect to scorn, your piety,-in regard to the business of life, and the principles by which it ought to be reciprocally regulated, are, in many respects, acute and discriminating judges. T’s; and they have the eyes of lynxes upon Christian professors, to detect whatever is inconsistent with uprightness and honour, and even with industry and discretion. Oh! it is a sad thing when those who "name the name of Christ,"-who profess the faith of his truth and subjection to his will, and from whom all that is exemplary is naturally and justly expected, are found failing in these palpable and every-day duties of life; when they not only give occasion to the world to say of them, What do ye more than others?-but even to point to them as falling short of the world’s standard! The Christian does not look for spirituality and devotion in the man of the world; but the man of the world looks, and justly looks, for uprightness and diligence and honour in the Christian. It is melancholy when devotion is divorced from. practical righteousness; when a man appears affecting unwonted sanctity; makes long prayers and long faces; talks much about religion, and takes a prominent part in all Bible, and Missionary, and Tract, and Sabbath-School Societies; and by his transactions in business, by his hardness, by his chicanery, by his false credit and mean shifts, gives the world reason for its favourite nicknames, the utterance at once of contempt and indignation, of a canting, psalm-singing hypocrite!

2. Let Christian parents in every station train their children to habits of industry as well as of incorruptible honesty. It is said to have been the rule and practice of the Jews to teach all their children some handicraft employment, to which they might be able to have recourse in all circumstances. The principle of the rule was excellent. Idleness not only tends to "clothe a man with rags," but as before noticed, is the inlet to numberless temptations. It is one of the Highways To Vice. Young friends, if you would be virtuous, be busy. If you would be vicious, be idle.

3. Spiritual service,-all that regards religion and the divine life in the soul, no less than the interests of the present world, requires, in order to prosperity, "all diligence." Without it there can be no

spiritual acquisitions any more than temporal; no riches in the things of God, any more than in the things of the world.

Thus we apply the admonition to the cultivation of personal godliness. We apply it also to the duties of parents in the instruction of their families. We apply it to the labours of pastors and deacons in the church. We apply it to the whole course of Christian duty, in zeal for God, and benevolence to men. In regard to all, "whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." The first thing to which the ungodly are called is faith in Christ. If you are expecting or attempting to get pardon and heaven in any other way-never was there a more hopeless undertaking. Many an airy speculation has been gone into in this world’s business, and gone into with a confidence in the direct ratio of its unsubstantiality and unsoundness. But never was there a speculation surer of failure than this. You are trading without a capital. You are trying to force credit, where you have none, and where you never can get it. You are not merely bankrupt. Bankrupts may make a composition, paying a smaller or a larger proportion of their debts. But yours is a case-as is that of every sinner on earth-of absolute destitution. You have nothing to pay. The question-"What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" is a question which admits but of one answer, what can he give who has nothing? O my friends, there is but One Surety who, in this exigency, can stand between you and ruin, Jesus will answer for you; and none else in heaven or earth can. If you come to Him, with a sense of your own destitution, He will undertake for you. If you believe in Him, you will find the full amount of your debt to God paid in the ransom of his precious blood. Whatever you have owed, it will be frankly and for ever cancelled. And then you will set out anew, "working the works of God," on a new principle and new credit; with a stock, not of fancied merit, but of real grace. Receiving from Christ’s fullness, while you rely upon his mercy, you will trade with the talents committed to you for the interests of his kingdom and the glory of his name, and he will say to you at last with the smile of approving love-" Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make the ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

15-Pro_6:12-19

Proverbs 6:12-19

LECTURE XV.

Proverbs 6:12-19.

"A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward month. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually, he soweth discord. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy. These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination until him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." The description with which this passage commences, of the character and end of unprincipled men, might possibly be suggested by what had just been said, of the tendency of idleness to lead into their society, and thus to vice, profligacy, and ruin; and it is introduced for the obvious purpose of warning all against such, and especially the young. Of the "naughty person," "the wicked man," it is here said first, in general terms-he "walketh with a froward mouth." Walking is the Bible word for a man’s daily course of conduct. A froward mouth is, as already noticed, a mouth under the influence of a froward, that is, a self-willed, rebellious spirit. It is a mouth that gives fearless and unrestrained utterance to the suggestions of such a spirit; that speaks its own words without regard to God or man. In human nature, as in every other, there is an innate love of freedom. But alas! in human nature, as fallen, this principle, good in itself, has taken" a sadly perverse direction. It is too often the mere love of following, without restraint, our own inclinations. And while aversion to restraint is common to all, it is peculiarly strong in the bosoms of youth. They spurn at it. They wince and fret; are restive and turbulent; feel, when the rein of authority is imposed upon them, as if their proper liberty were abridged, and are envious of those who can indulge themselves in all they set their hearts upon, without coercion and without fear. They cherish a secret wish that the precepts of God’s word were somewhat less rigid, or its denunciations against evil less awful, that so they might gratify their sinful inclinations in a similar way. There is, in the fearless indulgence of the libertine, an appearance of spirit and independence, of their want of which, when laughed at for their stiffness and precision, they are ashamed, and sigh impatiently for the breaking of the yoke. Ah! young friends, this is a mournful kind of shame. The freedom, not the want of it, is that for which the shame ought to be felt. It is that fearful liberty of which the Apostle speaks, when he says-" "When ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness!" Romans 6:20.

Allow me to remind you, that the mouth is by no means always a true index of the heart. It is such an index indeed, as to the wickedness that is in it; but it is far from being so in regard to its happiness and peace. Ah! no. The mouth is many a time the cover, rather than the index, of what is in the heart. While the mouth pours out its arrogant and boastful impiety, as if the spirit were a stranger to fear and foreboding, let but some sudden accident, or disease, or danger, bring death

and judgment and eternity near, and you may see the countenance of the braggadocio assume an ashy paleness, his lips quiver, and his fearless vauntings give way to silent trembling, or to the stifled groans or the loud exclamations of agony. The greatest boasters have often proved the greatest dastards. Look to Belshazzar.* "Wherefore all his perturbation? He knew not the meaning of the mysterious writing. For aught he knew, it might be an intimation of good. It was conscience, that sternly though silently, told him the contrary. It was conscience that made the mirthful and heaven-daring reveller a quaking coward,-turning in a moment his jovial festivity to consternation, and the laughter of profanity to the awe-struck silence of amazement and dread. It was this that made his eyes start from their sockets, and his knees to smite together. Was he then to be envied?-Ah! it is a dreadful liberty-the liberty to sin. It is a desperate, an ill-named and ill-omened courage that sets at defiance the God of heaven-that turns to scorn His restraints and His intimations of vengeance!

* Daniel 5:5-6. The next verse adds to the description of the "naughty person," the "wicked man:"-verse Proverbs 6:13. "He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers."

Different interpretations may be put upon these words-which are all allied to each other, and may be all found in real existence together. They may refer, first, to the clubs and cabals of the ungodly-with their slang language, and their secret signs, or, secondly, to the fact of all the members and all the powers of such men being made, jointly and severally, the instruments of evil, and that in every form and mode of their exercise, or, thirdly, to the multiform artfulness and duplicity-the "cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive." This last is probably the true purport of the verse:-that they convey their meanings, and carry on their schemes, and promote their ends, in every sly, covert, unsuspected way. If at any time there is a risk in committing themselves by words, they keep to signs; "they wink with their eyes, they speak with their feet, they teach with their fingers." What an amount of evil may be thus communicated, and thus effected! Who can tell what mischief may be done by a wink of the eye? In that simplest and least perceived of motions, accompanied by a certain expression of the countenance, there may lurk falsehood, treachery, slander, suspicion, jealousy, alienation, revenge, murder, covetousness, lasciviousness, and a host more of the worst passions and purposes of the human heart. And there may fairly be included in the description all the signs and attitudes of hypocritical devotion; of sanctity assumed for selfish and secular ends-the bended knee, the lifted hand, the closed or the turned-up eye, the sanctimoniously shaken head, the ejaculated Amen!-with all the affected grimace of ostentatious and worldly-minded pharisaism. The source of this evil is in the heart:-verse Proverbs 6:14. "Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord." Frowardness, as explained, is the spirit of scornful insubordination, and a pride in expressing and showing it. The devising of mischief may be against various descriptions of persons, and may be modified accordingly, in regard to the principles or passions by which it is dictated. It may be against the pious and the good, and may spring from malignity-from the innate hatred of God and holiness, dictating the wish to injure their reputation; to make them ridiculous; or otherwise to gratify, at their expense, the spirit of impiety. It may be against the prosperous, and may be dictated by envy. It may be against their enemies, real or imagined, and may be the effect of pique, resentment, avarice, or possibly mere sport; for, as the wise man elsewhere says, "It is a sport to a fool to do mischief." Devising mischief is a step beyond the doing of it, as opportunities

may present themselves. It implies the setting of the wits to work in inventing and studying plans of evil, and the means of carrying them into effect. Of similar characters it is said by the Psalmist, "He deviseth mischief upon his bed"-devises by night, and executes by day. The last of the particulars in this verse is that of having pleasure in the Satanic employment of fomenting alienation and strife: "He soweth discord." He delights in the horrid success of his artful insinuations, in the miserable harvest springing from his busy and often unsuspected seed-time: for he is "sowing discord" even when the seed he is scattering seems, to the credulous and ignorant, the seed of "righteousness and peace." It is not unlikely that to the arts of such mischiefmakers there may be an allusion in the thirteenth verse. And while by such means their envy is gratified, that is not always the limit of their aim. They sometimes have purposes of more substantial benefit to their selfish spirits. They fish in troubled waters:-first troubling them themselves, and then taking advantage of the disagreements they have stirred up from the muddy bottom of the heart's corruptions, to promote their own profit. But these disturbers of peace; these subverters of the delights and blessings of mutual love; these distillers of venom for the darts of the Wicked One; these froward inventors and workers of mischief-these "naughty persons," these "wicked men," are ultimately the authors of their own ruin-

Verse Proverbs 6:15. "Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy." Their calamity often comes, and comes suddenly, from men. When those who have unsuspiciously listened to their poisonous insinuations, and by means of them, have been led to suspect, and have come to be suspected by, their former associates and friends, happen to discover the malignity that has severed intimacy, and robbed them of mutual enjoyment, when they have got a clue by which to trace the mischief to its origin in the centre of the labyrinth of the intricate mazes of malice,-indignation is roused, and the author of the evils justly suffers by abandonment, or even by merited infliction of punishment, the due desert of his odious acts. And even should the mischiefs never be mended, and the source of them never be discovered so as to suffer at the hand of man, Gods displeasure is awake against him; and he shall experience the sudden lighting-down of the arm of divine vengeance. God may bear long with the wicked. But though the transgressor be tempted by His very forbearance to take encouragement in what is wrong-in the end, "suddenly shall he be broken, and that without remedy "-reaping from the seed he has sown a harvest of irremediable misery to his own soul.* * Comp. 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Psalms 73:18-20. Ecclesiastes 8:11-13. The "seven, things" enumerated in the following verses as the special objects of divine abhorrence, are naturally introduced in connexion with the general character of such men, in its leading features:-verses Proverbs 6:16-19. "These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." The language of the first of these verses is strong. The reduplication of the assertion is intended to impress the fearfulness of the evils. Let all lay the terms of reprobation to heart. There cannot but be unspeakable danger in indulging in aught that is "abomination to the Lord."

1. The first of the seven is pride-"a proud look." I have said pride. You must at once be sensible, that it is not the look merely that is meant, but the temper of mind which the look expresses-not the mere indication of the principle, but the principle itself. There may be much pride in the heart that is not indicated by haughtiness in the look, but covered from observation by the assumed air of

humility and lowliness of spirit. In this case, the look is absent, but the thing is there; and is there in a doubly odious form. The "proud look" is to be interpreted as including pride of all kinds. There is, first of all, if I may use an expression that is really, in its terms, contradictory, religious pride. I have called it contradictory; because there never has been, never is, never can be, any pride in religion. Its very essence is humility. The pride of religion is of all things the most irreligious. You know what I mean-the pride of the Pharisee, when he stood in God's sanctuary before the very "beauty of holiness" and prayed, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." That this pride of self-righteousness is an abomination in God's sight, his whole word tells us; and the verdict of Jesus, in the parable referred to, testifies in the plainest terms. There is the pride of high station and wealth, with its look of lofty supercilious disdain upon its inferiors. There is the pride of high spirit and false honour, of quick touchy resentment, that cannot brook an injurious act, word, or even glance, however passing and slight; whose eye of kindling and impetuous fire flashes on the offender, and whose revenge sighs for his prostration, and even, it may be, thirsts for his blood. The face of God is set against this high-mindedness. He "resisteth the proud." He "knoweth them afar off." He "hath respect unto the lowly." And the lowliness which He respects must begin with Himself-with the acceptance of mercy, in the spirit of self-renunciation. There is no true humility in a sinner's spirit, till it is brought to this.

2. We have next in order, "a lying tongue." God is the God of truth. He "desireth truth in the inward parts." As in the former case, so here, a "lying tongue" must be understood as comprehensive of all the modes of wilfully conveying a false impression. This is the essence of a He; and it may be done in many ways. There are lying looks, and lying motions, as well as lying words. The "naughty person" who "winketh with his eyes, speaketh with his feet, teacheth with his fingers," may by the eye, by the feet, by the fingers, tell lies-tell them as really, as effectually, as guiltily, as if he uttered them with his tongue. The declarations of the divine displeasure against this sin are specially frequent and strong;* and in the outset of the Christian church, there was read to both believers and the world, a solemn and awful lesson of God's opposition to all deception and lying, in His judicially visiting Ananias and Sapphira with death for their selfish dissembling-a dissembling in which they sought the gratification of covetousness, and the desire of eclat for their liberality, by the sin of falsehood.

* See Psalms 5:6; Psalms 120:3-4; Hosea 4:1-3; John 8:44; Revelation 21:8; Revelation 21:27.

3. Then we have-"hands that shed innocent blood." The first innocent blood shed on earth was the blood of a brother. At the second commencement of the human race, Jehovah, with obvious reference to this first murder, set a guard of threatened vengeance around the life of man. (Genesis 9:5-6.)

Life may be taken-" innocent blood shed"-otherwise than directly by the armed hand. It is not the assassin alone, with his murderous knife that is intended. The judge is guilty who gives sentence against the innocent. The executioner, whose hands actually shed the blood, is not, in that case, the culprit, but he by whom the sentence was pronounced. The promoters of persecution are guilty, whether acting with legal form or without it:-if with it, only so much the worse. He, who, by cruel treatment, breaks another's heart, is guilty. When the broken heart brings its victim, by pining atrophy, to the grave, there can be no question to whose account that "innocent blood" must be placed. Remember, the Lord is the righteous "avenger of blood." He "maketh inquisition" for it. He

will allow no blood-guiltiness to escape. The murderer was even to be dragged from His altar unto death.

4. The fourth in order, is one in which divine omniscience is implied for its detection-"a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations." "The thought of wickedness is sin." You may form, and even cherish, desires which it is not in your power to execute. Or even those which are in your power, so far as ability is concerned, you may, by uncontrollable circumstances, be prevented from executing. But God knows them all; and He will judge and avenge them, as if actually done. This leads to the general reflection, that "the law is spiritual." The reflection applies to the immediately preceding particular, and indeed to them all.* * Compare Matthew 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15.

5. The fifth is "feet that are swift in running to mischief." "Running to mischief" may mean, either running to do it, or running to see it. In either case we are supposed to enjoy it. "Feet that are swift" in carrying us to do it, are supposed to be the agents of a heart that has a relish for it. The one will be proportioned to the other. And the feet that are swift in "running to mischief," will be slow to works of benevolence, slow to the abodes of distress, slow to the house of God, slow to whatever is good.

6. "A false witness that speaketh lies," may be considered as having been already included in a former particular-the "lying tongue." But there is a peculiarity of guilt in falsehood when it is committed in witness-bearing-when it assumes the form of perjury. The cause of others is thus injuriously affected: it leads to a false decision; and therefore adds injustice to untruth: the judges, or the arbiters are deceived, troubled, wronged, by being frustrated in their solicitude to give a fair and equitable verdict. And, when an oath has actually been taken, there is the superadded guilt of blasphemy-the "taking of God’s name," in the most heinous sense, "in vain."

There is a species of witness-bearing, in which a deep criminality is involved, that is too often little thought of-being "found false witnesses of God," 1 Corinthians 15:15. O! this is a fearful description of false-witnessing!-setting the seal of the God of truth to falsehood!-forging upon heaven! God keep from such guilt all his professed servants! It is at once the guilt of blood, and the guilt of making God a bar.

7. The last in this enumeration is, "he that soweth discord among brethren." There is here an emphatic addition to the language of verse fourteenth-"among brethren." In proportion to the loveliness of any scene, even in external nature, and the degree in which we are captivated by its beauties, are we offended by the man who defaces it-despoils it of its chief attractions, and spreads disorder and desolation where before every sense found its richest and sweetest gratification. So is it in the moral world. There is not on the face of the earth a scene of more engaging interest and delight, than a family all united in the bonds of nature’s love, making each other’s joys and sorrows their own; every heart beating in unison; every eye and every hand eager to anticipate each other’s wants and wishes. And what is beautiful as a specimen of the affections of nature, is no less beautiful when the bond of union is "the love of the Spirit," the spiritual love by which the children of God are bound together in "the household of faith." The disturber of the harmony of a united family, or of a united church, is incomparably worse than the man who desolates the face of any earthly paradise. God is the God of love and peace. He delighteth in them. The prevalence of them among his people is honourable to his truth in the eyes of the world; and his eye rests on the scene with divine satisfaction.* Hateful, then, diabolical the man who

seeks to introduce discord into such a scene of harmony-to embitter its joys, to destroy its benefits!

* Comp. Ps.133.

There are cases in which we cannot be responsible for the discord to which we give rise;-in which we are only its innocent occasion, not its guilty cause. The Saviour himself anticipates such discord, (Matthew 10:34-36.) But neither he nor his truth is answerable for it. It arises from the opposition of the carnal minds of men to the principles of his kingdom. For this, these principles are not to blame. It is not the end Jesus or his servants had in view. "What they teach is fitted, when received, to knit all mankind in one blessed bond of peace, and purity, and joy. The Gospel alone can extirpate the evils here enumerated, and other evils of kindred nature. It produces humility, sincerity, regard for human life and happiness, holiness of heart, reverence for God’s name, and that love which is "the bond of perfectness."

16-Pro_8:1-21

Proverbs 8:1-21

LECTURE XVI.

Proverbs 8:1-21.

"Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge. Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it. I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions. The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength. By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me. Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. 1 lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." The majority, if I mistake not, of those regarded as evangelical expositors, interpret what is said in this chapter by Wisdom as the words of the Second Person of the ever-blessed Trinity; by whom, in his character of Mediator, all divine communications have, from the beginning, been made to mankind,-THE ETERNAL UNCREATED WORD, ordained to his mediatorial office "before the foundation of the world." In this view, indeed, the passage has even been adduced in evidence of the pre-existence and eternity of the Son of God. One nighly venerates the piety that seeks to find Christ everywhere; and would bear more readily with the mistake that finds him where he is not, than with the indifference, or the learned apathy, that finds him not where he is. At the same time, the only correct principle for guiding us in our exposition of the word of God, is the principle of being satisfied with no view of any part of it but that which there is reason to regard as the mind of the Spirit; by which I mean, not merely what is consistent with the general and pervading doctrine of the inspired volume, but what the Spirit intended to express in the particular passage. An interpretation may be quite in accordance with what is usually called "the analogy of faith," and may even, in the spirit and substance and terms of it, be fitted to excite the emotions of piety, and yet may not be the true one. Nay, persons, by long-continued associations and habits of thought, may have a certain sense so attached to a particular passage, as to be in the habit of referring to it in proof of some important doctrine; and, every time they quote it, they may experience the

excitement of devout affections, of a kind and in a degree such as to afford the sweetest satisfaction to their minds; and thus they may have become greatly disinclined to listen to any interpretation at all fitted to disturb those associations, and deprive them of their spiritual feast. But if the doctrines from which their holy pleasure has arisen, are to be found in other parts of the sacred volume, the source of that pleasure remains in reality untouched. And, at all events, we cannot relinquish the position, that the only emotions which are legitimate, when excited by any particular portion of God’s word, are those excited by its true sense-that is, by the sentiment in it which the Holy Spirit intended to convey.

Whatever, therefore, may have been the satisfaction experienced by many devout minds in reading this ch-apter, especially the latter part of it, as if it contained the words of Christ and evidence of his pre-existent divinity, and of his love from eternity, and his eternal purposes of mercy towards our fallen world, I dare not, on this account, withhold what I believe to be the true principle of interpretation. The objections to its meaning Christ, or the Word, ere he became flesh, when "in the beginning he was with God and was God," are to my mind quite insuperable. For example:-

1. It should be noticed that the passage is not so applied in any part of the New Testament. You will misunderstand me, if you imagine that I adduce this consideration as any direct objection to the interpretation in question. It certainly does not follow, from the circumstance of a passage not being actually explained of Christ in the New Testament that it must not be so explained. What I mean is no more than this-that from its not being so explained there, we are relieved from any necessity of so explaining it. Had any New Testament writer expressly applied any part of the chapter to the Son of God, this would have been a key which we could not have been at liberty to refuse. Such necessity, then, being thus precluded, the direct objections may be allowed to have their full force. Observe, then-

2. Wisdom here is a female personage. All along this is the case.* Now under such a view the Scriptures nowhere else, in any of their figurative representations of "the Christ," ever thus describe or introduce Him. The application, on this account, appears to me exceedingly unnatural.

* Proverbs 1:20-21; Proverbs 8:1-3; Proverbs 9:1-3.

3. Wisdom does not appear intended as a personal designation, inasmuch as it is associated with various other terms, of synonymous, or at least of corresponding import.* Were it meant for a personal designation, like the Logos or Word in the beginning of John’s Gospel, this would hardly have been admissible.

* Proverbs 8:1 , Proverbs 3:19-20.

4. That the whole is a bold and striking personification of the attribute of wisdom, as subsisting in Deity, appears further from what she is represented as saying in verse twelfth-" I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions." Here wisdom is associated with prudence; and the import of the association is, that wisdom "directs to the best ends, and to the choice of the best means for their attainment;" and prudence, or discretion, teaches to shun whatever might, in any way or degree, interfere with and impede or mar their accomplishment. This is precisely what wisdom, as an attribute or quality, does. And it is worthy of remark, that this association of wisdom with prudence, is introduced by the Apostle as characterizing the greatest

of the divine inventions and works,-that of our redemption. Wisdom was associated with prudence in framing and perfecting that wonderful scheme.* * Ephesians 1:7-8.

5. It is very true, that there are many things here, especially in the latter part of the chapter-indeed through the whole-that are, in a very interesting and striking manner, applicable to the divine Messiah. But this is no more than might have been anticipated-that things which are true of a divine attribute should be susceptible of application to a divine person. This is not at all wonderful. And the question is, not whether particular expressions and representations are capable of being applied, and applied naturally and emphatically to the Eternal Word; but simply,-since they also admit of equally easy interpretation when applied to Wisdom as a personified attribute of Deity,-which, on other grounds, appears to have the strongest claims to preference? And in settling the question, we must be determined by such considerations as have been mentioned, and by the general scope of the passage and style of the Book.

Instead, however, of showing the application of this principle to the contents of the entire chapter, in which there are various things that stand in the predicament mentioned,-capable of application either in the one way or the other,-we shall rather leave these parts of the chapter to be explained on the principle of personification, when we come to them.

Verses Proverbs 8:1-5. "Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths: she crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors: Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart." The words correspond with those of chapter first, verses Proverbs 1:20-22. Wisdom’s address here, as there, is universal,-"Unto you, O men, I call." Her counsels are suited to men of all nations, ranks, and characters. By All alike are they needed; and to All alike are they addressed. And her language is urgent, importunate, tender, persuasive; full of deep and anxious concern about the best interests of those to whom she speaks,-embracing every opportunity to warn, instruct, and entreat, with a pitying heart and a tearful eye. And by whomsoever divine Wisdom addresses men, this is the style and spirit of her address: whether it be in the person of Jehovah himself, of his Son, or of his servants.* * Psalms 49:1-2; Romans 1:14-15; Colossians 3:11; Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 23:37; Jeremiah 25:4-6; 2 Corinthians 5:20. The characters of the simple and the foolish, we have before had occasion to describe:-the former meaning the inconsiderate, the thoughtless; the latter, (since folly is the reverse of wisdom) those who do not choose "the fear of the Lord,"-that fear which is here, and throughout the Bible, pronounced true wisdom. Remember, it is not mental incapacity that prevents men from receiving the instructions of heavenly wisdom. That, as a natural obstacle, constituting a natural inability, would stand as a valid excuse, and acquit them of guilt. This was the sentiment of Jesus to the Pharisees, when he said, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin." And in the great day, many will there be by whom the veriest idiot, from whom it pleased God to withhold the capacity of understanding, will be envied. The guilt of men lies in their indisposition of heart to attend to divine counsels. It is this that warps, and prejudices, and blinds, and dupes the understanding. The heart, as I have had occasion before to notice, is frequently used simply for the mind or seat of intellect, as well as for the affections; so that "an understanding heart" might mean nothing different from an intelligent mind. At the same time, since the state of the heart affects, to such a degree, the exercise of the judgment, "an understanding heart" may signify a heart freed from the influence of those corrupt

affections and passions, by which the understanding is perverted and its vision marred and destroyed. This "understanding heart" you must have. Let not pride; let not worldliness; let not corrupt affections blind and mislead you to your ruin. That is "folly" to which there is no other comparable.

Readily, and with all attention will men listen, on any subject that has relation to their interests in the present world. And even as to the merest trifles, unworthy of a moment’s consideration, their ear and their interest may be gained, and gained without difficulty. But oh! the difficulty of obtaining any thing like a really earnest attention in regard to matters of everlasting and infinite moment! To such things Divine Wisdom bespeaks attention:-verses Proverbs 8:6-7. "Hear, for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips." The discoveries of Wisdom relate to things of the highest possible excellence; such as the existence, character, works, and ways of God; the soul; eternity; the way of salvation-the means of eternal life. And they are, on all subjects, "right." They could not, indeed, be excellent themselves, how excellent soever in dignity and importance the subjects to which they related, unless they were "right." But all her instructions are so. They are true in what regards doctrine; and "holy, just, and good," in what regards conduct or duty. There is truth without any mixture of error, and rectitude without any alloy of evil. The seventh and eighth verses are an amplification of the more general position in the sixth. They contain the same general sentiment; and are fitted and designed to impress it the more strongly,-the truth, the purity, the righteousness, the beneficial tendency, of all without exception that comes from the lips of Divine Wisdom. And the terms may be applied, in all their emphasis and amount of meaning, to this blessed Book-the Bible. Here it is that Wisdom speaks; speaks in every part; and in every part with the same authority. And her words, coming as they do from the Infinite Reason, the Mind of the Universe, have nothing "froward or perverse in them."

We have hinted at what keeps men from the clear apprehension of divine truths. The wise man says in verse Proverbs 8:9. "They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge." The first part of this verse wears very much the aspect of a truism. But it is not said, "They are all plain to him that understandeth them;" but simply to him that "understandeth." It seems to signify, who has the understanding necessary to the apprehension of divine truth-spiritual discernment. "He who is spiritual discerneth all things." "They are all plain" to him who thus understandeth.

It may further be observed, how very much depends, in the prosecution of any science, for correct and easy apprehension of its progressive development to the mind, on the clear comprehension of its elementary principles. The very clearest and plainest demonstrations, in any department of philosophy, will fail to be followed and to carry conviction,-will leave the mind only in wonder and bewildering confusion, unless there is a correct and full acquaintance with principles or elements, or a willingness to apply the mind to its attainment. So it is in divine science. There are, in regard to the discoveries of the divine word, certain primary principles, which all who are taught of God know, and which they hold as principles of explanation for all that that word reveals. They who are thus "taught of God," perceive with increasing clearness and fulness, the truth, the rectitude, the unalloyed excellence of all the dictates of divine wisdom.

All is "plain"-all "right." The darkness that before brooded over the mind is dissipated. They "see all things clearly." They "have an unction from the Holy One, and know all things," 1 John 2:20.

Wisdom then goes on to recommend her instructions, in terms very similar to those she had before used:-verses Proverbs 8:10-11.* "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it."

* Compare Proverbs 3:13-15. The first and second parts of the tenth verse are the same in meaning. The two things are supposed to be brought into competition. A choice is offered; a decision between them is to be made. And the instructions of wisdom are pronounced incomparably superior in real value to the most choice treasures of earth.

Wisdom next recommends herself and her instructions, by representing herself as the source of all useful and happy discoveries:-verse Proverbs 8:12. "I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions."

We have already adverted to the following verse, as indicating that Wisdom is to be understood of a personified attribute-"I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions."

Wisdom, in the most comprehensive aspect, is to be regarded as giving origin to all arts and sciences, by which human life is improved and adorned; as by her inventive skill developing all the varied appliances for the external comfort and well-being of mankind; as planning the "wondrous frame" of universal creation, which, with all its varied beauty, fills us, in the view, with astonishment and delight; and conceiving, in the depths of eternity, the glorious scheme-a scheme "dark with brightness all along"-which secures the happiness of man for ever, and in which she appears in her noblest and most attractive display-the whole, from first to last, discovering "the manifold wisdom of God."

Verse Proverbs 8:13. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate."-" Hating evil," is the practical result of "the fear of the Lord." This is the sentiment; only by identifying the two,*-the principle with the practice,-the idea is more emphatically conveyed, that the one cannot subsist without the other. If evil is not hated, God is not feared. It is equally true, that if God is not feared evil is not hated: for, indeed, the absence of the fear of God is the greatest of all evil. It is "desperate wickedness;"-"enmity against God," evinced in the neglect of those duties which men owe directly to God,-being necessarily a greater crime than any violation of the claims of fellow-creatures,-greater in the proportion in which the object of the one class of duties is greater than the object of the other.

* So in 1 John 5:3, Job 28:28.

It is not only divine Holiness, observe, that "hates evil;" it is divine Wisdom. This conveys to us the important lesson, that the will of God, along with His abhorrence of all that is opposed to it, is founded in the best of reasons. All that is evil is contrary to His own necessary perfection, and, consequently, to "the eternal fitness of things."

{eS module note: not sure why, but the rest of the chapter was set off by brackets "[]" in Wardlaw's original work. They are not misprints.}

[Wisdom continues to assert her exalted claims, verse Proverbs 8:14:-" Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding; I have strength."-Her "counsel" is ever good. There is always "sound wisdom" in it-the wisdom which guides to right conclusions, both as to the course to be taken, and the means by which it is to be followed out. To appreciate "sound wisdom," "understanding" is essential-a distinct apprehension of the truth and will of God. In "understanding and wisdom" there is "strength." (Ecclesiastes 7:10). "Knowledge is power;" and knowledge in union with wisdom-the ability to use knowledge aright-multiplies the power. In proportion as there is "understanding" and "wisdom," is there "strength"-moral and spiritual strength-strength to act and to suffer-to do and to bear. To divine Wisdom, these spiritual treasures peculiarly belong. She alone is their centre and their source. The structure of the sentence is not uniform; but the language expresses this idea in the most absolute manner.

"Counsel" and "wisdom;" "understanding" and "strength" are needed by all; but to no class are they so indispensable as to those who hold the reins of authority, or occupy the seat of judgment. Hence the following verses-"By me kings reign and princes decree justice; by me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth."-Are all then who wield the sceptre or exercise judicial functions, guided by the dictates of wisdom? Alas! the history of the Church and of the world alike tell a very different tale. Too often among "kings and princes and judges of the earth," Las there been but a slender measure of even ordinary wisdom-worldly discretion-and less by far of "the wisdom that cometh from above." Full many a time have their deeds of oppression and wrong testified of their folly, and discovered their godless spirit-wringing tears of bitterness from many an eye, and groans of anguish from many a heart. The language may be considered as implying, First,-that human government, in all its branches, is the appointment of Divine wisdom;-that, as the Apostle expresses it, "there is no power but of God;" that "the powers that be are ordained of God."-Secondly, that all who sustain positions of authority and power, should act habitually under the influence of divine Wisdom-" the fear of God" being the regulating principle of their entire procedure.-Thirdly, that no authority can be rightly exercised, and no judicial process successfully carried out,-so carried out as to promote the well-being of man, and the glory of God,-without the direction of Wisdom.-Fourthly, that divine Wisdom exercises control over all human agents in the administration of public affairs-from the monarch on the throne to the humblest official-all being alike "ministers of God"-and all their dealings being overruled for the ends which divine Wisdom has to accomplish, so that every act shall tend to further the purposes of Him whose prerogative it is to say, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." In the verse which follows, Wisdom gives the gracious assurance of her tender regard for those in whose hearts sincere affection towards herself has a place. She reciprocates their love-"I love them that love me" is her solemn declaration: and none ever "seek her face in vain." "They" says she, "who seek me early shall find me." She loves not any for their rank or station:-not the great for their greatness; not the rich for their riches; not the noble for their nobility; not the mighty for their might; not the learned for their learning; not the prince more than the peasant; not the king on the throne more than "the beggar" in his rags: but all alike-"high and low, rich and poor together"-who love her-"them that love Me"-them that discern her beauty, that seek her favour, that court her presence, that submit to her will, that learn from her lips, that look to her for guidance, that rejoice in her smile and blessing. And by ALL her smile and blessing may be "found." From none does she hide herself. She waits to welcome all who come. She bids none from her presence. She proffers to all the hand of kindness. She extends to all the sceptre of her love. She "receives them graciously, and

loves them freely:"-" They that seek me shall find me:" such is her promise. That promise must stand. It is sure as the word of eternal truth. But she must be "sought"-sought "early"-earnestly, and now.

How striking the contrast between the language of Wisdom here, and her utterance in the close of the opening chapter of this Book! Here her voice is that of mild benignity; there it is the voice of stern, unrelenting judgment. Here we have the voice of mercy; there the voice of insulted and offended majesty; here the breathing of tenderness and love, there the dread denunciations of destructive wrath. This is her language now, as she stands, in the attitude of condescending kindness, ready to welcome to her embrace the wayward and wandering-the guilty and perishing children of men; that is her language in the view of love rejected, of favour despised, of invitations scorned, of blessing proffered, but trampled in the dust by the spirit of ingratitude and pride. Then will cease for ever "the still small voice; of Mercy’s tender pleadings, and the ear be greeted only with the startling, thrilling accents of awakened justice. Then there are no more invitations, no more gracious promises, no kind assurances, no words of encouragement, no smile of benignity, no proffered hand of help. They "call on her" but she "hears not." They "seek her"-seek her with the agonizing effort of despair-but they do not find her."

While we cannot regard Wisdom as the Eternal Word, yet no language could be more in harmony with His utterances when, in "the days of his flesh," as incarnate God, He addressed himself to perishing men-to "the lost" whom He came from heaven to earth to "seek and to save." In these words, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me," we seem to hear the voice of Him "who spake as never man spake,"-of Him "into whose lips grace was poured,"-of Hun who said, with all the deep affection and tender solicitude of a heart glowing with divine compassion, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest:" "him That Cometh Unto Me I Will In No Wise Cast Out."-And in the contrasted declaration-" They shall call on me, but I will not hear; they shall seek me earnestly, but shall not find me," we hear, as it were, the voice of the same Jesus, when, as the Judge of all, He shall sit upon "the throne of his glory," and having "separated the righteous from the wicked," shall say to the latter, in these words of awful import-filling their trembling spirits with hopeless agony, "Depart From Me, Ye Cursed, Into Everlasting Fire. To induce all to "seek" her, Wisdom anew unfolds the blessings she has to bestow-blessings of unequalled excellence and unending duration. Hear her words once more-"Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver. I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures."]

17-Pro_8:22-36

Proverbs 8:22-36

LECTURE XVII.

Proverbs 8:22-36.

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death." On the principles already explained, I consider the verses which follow to the thirty-first, as a beautiful and impressive amplification of the sentiment of the Psalmist, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all," Psalms 104:24.

Verse Proverbs 8:22. "The Lord possessed* me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." There is no difficulty here. The attribute of infinite wisdom was possessed by Jehovah from everlasting. The "beginning of his way" evidently means the commencement of creation, when he set out in his course of creative and consequently of providential manifestation of his eternal perfections. When this was we cannot tell. We may know the age of our own world, at least according to its present constitution. But when the universe was brought into being, and whether by one omnipotent fiat, or at successive and widely varying periods, it is beyond our power to ascertain. One thing we know, for a certainly revealed fact, that there were angelic creatures in existence previously to the reduction of our globe to order, and to the creation of man upon it. These holy intelligences contemplated the six days' work of divine wisdom and power in this part of the universe with devout and benevolent transport-"The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." How many other creatures, and of what descriptions-how many other worlds, and how peopled, might have existed before man and his earthly residence, we are unable to affirm.-When men, indeed, begin to talk of its being absurd to suppose the universe so recent as to have been only coeval with our own globe or our own system, they forget themselves. They do not speak considerately nor philosophically. There is no lapse of ages, nor any points of measurement, in eternity. The very same absurdity, therefore, remains, how far back soever you

carry your conception of the first exercise of creative power. The intelligent beings who lived a few thousand years after the commencement of creation,-supposing that commencement millions of ages remote,-would have stood in the very same predicament as ourselves: seeing there was then a preceding eternity, as there is now, to the beginning of which we never get any nearer, beginning being as inconsistent with the very idea of eternity, as termination is. Go as far back, therefore, as imagination, or as numbers heaped on numbers, can carry you, there still remains the previous eternity, during which our speculating and presumptuous minds may wonder that divine power had not been put forth. Sooner and later are terms of no meaning in eternity. The unsearchable depths of the divine mind it is not ours to fathom. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for us: it is high; we cannot attain unto it." The probability seems to be, that creation, whensoever it began, was progressive; nay even that it still continues so; that the will of omnipotence gives birth to new worlds, and new systems, and new orders and modes of being, from the exhaustless resources of what the apostle denominates "the manifold wisdom of God."

* Others render created. So the Septuagint, εχτισε, the Chaldee and Syriac. This seems more in harmony with the Hebrew ôáä. The next verse-'" I was set up * from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was," is usually explained of the pre-ordination from eternity of the Second Person in the Trinity to the mediatorial office, to be assumed and sustained by Him, at the needed juncture, in future time. But according to the view Ave take of wisdom as not a person but a personification, the meaning seems rather to be, that infinite wisdom directed all the divine counsels,-all the prospective plans of the Godhead being devised by it from everlasting, with unerring, with infinite skill. We are accustomed to speak of a man consulting Ids understanding, his judgment, his good sense and discretion. In the spirit of the figure employed, God, in like manner, is represented as, in the whole of his purposes and plans, "setting up" infinite wisdom to be consulted in every step.

* Or, I was anointed.

Amplifying still further, and the figure advancing in boldness, Wisdom proceeds-verses Proverbs 8:24-25. "When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth." This is one of the very few passages adduced in support of their doctrine by the advocates of the eternal generation of the Son of God; that is, of his having been the Son of the Father from eternity, according to his divine nature alone-mysteriously and eternally begotten in the essence of Deity. But in the first place, there is evidently a previous question,-the question, namely, whether the Son of God in person be the speaker. Till this has been clearly and fully established, the words ought not to be quoted in evidence. And in my judgment, the considerations assigned in last lecture render this much more than doubtful. On the authority of the Holy Scriptures, I do firmly believe, that in the divine essence there has subsisted from eternity a threefold personal distinction; but how,-according to what mode, this distinction subsists, I do not think the Bible at all informs us. All that has been said and written, about the Father being the Fountain of deity, about the Son as "begotten but not proceeding," and the Holy Spirit as "proceeding but not begotten," has long appeared to me only as showing the eagerness of men to pry into the mysterious beyond the limits of revelation. Such expressions, there is ground to fear, convey no ideas. And yet-as not seldom happens,-the more remote the subject from all human comprehension, the more fiery has been the dogmatism of the different parties, by whom the most hair-splitting niceties of distinction,

(distinction often without perceptible difference,) have been maintained and vindicated, as if each of them for himself had succeeded in "finding out God," in "finding out the Almighty unto perfection." Holding firmly the belief I have already stated, I do not believe it to be the doctrine of Scripture that any one of the Divine Three possesses divinity by communication. I am not for divesting our holy religion of any of the mysteries belonging to it, which have clear Bible authority to support them; but I am very hostile to making mysteries beyond what that authority evidently affirms. And I am strongly inclined to think that the doctrine now referred to is more than a mystery-that it is self-contradictory. I am unable to think of communication without the idea of previousness and posteriority, of supremacy and dependence, of inferiority as connected with derivation; nor can I think of such communication, or generation, as eternal, without a feeling of contradiction. It was anxiety to maintain the true, underived, independent divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, that first led me to doubt the prevalent systematic doctrine about "generation and procession from eternity;" and the more I searched, the more I became convinced, that for the latter, the "eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son," there is not one atom of Scripture evidence-the only text adduced in its support having no relation whatever to any such subject;*1 and that of the former the proofs are far from satisfactory. The proper Deity of the Son of God, eternal, underived, independent, is incomparably better sustained, and the mind freed of all its feelings of impossibility and contradiction, by regarding the title Son Of God as belonging to Christ according to the complex constitution of his mediatorial person, as "God manifest in the flesh,"-a sense quite peculiar to Himself, and of which the Scriptures abound in proofs.*2 *1 The passage alluded to is John 15:26.

*2 For further discussion of this question the reader may consult Lects. 2, 3, and 4, Vol. 2 of Dr. Wardlaw’s "Systematic Theology." When a personification is introduced, and is with any degree of boldness and freedom maintained, we need not be surprised at the appearance, according to the different aspects under which the same thing may be viewed, of incongruity. Divine wisdom, belonging essentially to the nature of God, was from eternity. But as a person she here speaks of herself as "brought forth" previously to the commencement of creation and providence, with obvious reference to the application of her counsels in the purposes and plans of the Godhead. The language of figure is not, of course, to be interpreted literally and strictly. At the period referred to here, creation was not yet actually framed and executed. It was only planned;-the whole being at once, in all its magnificence and in all its minuteness, before the eye of the omniscient Mind, in its almost infinite complexity, extent and variety-yet without the slightest approach to confusion! All there, in one vast and complicated, yet simple idea! The phrase, "the highest part of the dust of the world," is in the margin "the chief part;" and by some the phrase has been explained of man-whom God made of the "dust" of the earth, and who was the "chief" of his works in our world. This seems rather a straining. It does not hold its place naturally in the connexion in which it occurs, when so understood. The terms probably describe the loftiest parts of the "dry land," when it had been separated from the waters, by their retiring, at the Creator’s word, to the beds of their future rest, as the vast and mighty ocean. And, in general, the objects selected appear to be those with which, as emblems, are associated the ideas of the greatest antiquity and the most stable permanence-"the depths;" "the everlasting mountains;" "the perpetual hills."

And, according to verses Proverbs 8:27-30, the same Wisdom that planned, superintended the execution of the whole, "When he prepared the heavens I was there: when he set a compass upon

the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him."

We stop not to inquire whether by "the heavens" we should understand simply the circumambient atmosphere, producing the appearance of the blue concave by which the earth is surrounded-called in the account of the creation, the firmament, and forming the work of "the second day;" or that blue concave, considered as inclusive of the stars, with which it appears to be studded-the starry heavens. From a comparison with other passages, this is probably the meaning;*1 and the work is often connected with wisdom, as one of its most magnificent displays.*2

*1 Psalms 33:6.

*2 Jeremiah 10:12 , Psalms 136:5.

God’s "setting a compass on the face of the deep," seems to refer to His circumscribing the earth when in its fluid state, assigning to it its spherical form, and fixing the laws by which that form should be constantly maintained.-I think it probable that this refers to the earth in the state in which it is described previously to the beginning of the six days’ work, by which it was reduced to order, and fitted for and stocked with inhabitants.* * Genesis 1:1-2.

How was the fluid element held together in the spherical form? The answer is, God "set a compass upon the face of the deep," saying, "This be thy just circumference, O world!" By the power of gravitation, affecting every particle, drawing it to the common centre, the equilibrium was maintained, the globular form effected and kept; which may here be meant by the poetical conception of sweeping a circle from this centre, and defining the spherical limits of the world of waters. It is the same principle of gravity that pervades the universe, retaining all its movements in unerring harmony, without the deviation of a hair’s-breadth, or the error of a second in a millennium!

"When he established the clouds above:"-a most important part of the system; by which, through the medium of the solar influence, and the laws of evaporation, condensation, and gravity combined, the ocean is made to supply the land; and without which wonderful and beautiful arrangement, the world would soon become a desolate wilderness. "Establishing the clouds," seems an incongruous expression, there being nothing lighter or more unstable than these collections of atmospheric vapour. They are the very emblems of instability and evanescence. But it is the law by which the clouds are produced that is established: and that law, like every other, is a proof of "the manifold wisdom of God."* * Comp. Proverbs 3:20.

"When he strengthened the fountains of the deep." This seems to mean, that God so ordered the internal structure of the earth (of which, after the most unremitting efforts of scientific research, reaching necessarily but a short way into the mere crust, we are so extremely ignorant), and the springs and reservoirs on its surface, as to provide a constant supply of waters for the great deep maintaining its regular complement; and, at the same time, preventing its internal reservoirs from bursting their confinement to overflow and deluge the earth.

Connected with this stands verse Proverbs 8:29:-"When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth." The sea is often, with much sublimity, alluded to in descriptions both of the power and wisdom of God-"Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling-band for it, and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" Job 38:8-11.* The ocean in a storm, rolling and tossing its proud waves on high, presents one of the most impressive views of the omnipotence of Him who "measures the waters in the hollow of his hand." And the wonderful operation of that law, by which its swelling waters are restrained within their rocky boundary, (a law which may, perhaps, be most reasonably explained of the ever and everywhere present operation of his immediate and almighty energy,) brings before us both his wisdom and his goodness, preventing them from ever again overflowing the earth. "The waters could not pass his commandment," while he laid his restraining charge upon them; and neither could they resist his commandment, when he gave them an order of judgment against an ungodly world. And now that we have God’s promise that they "shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh," we are as sure as that God "cannot lie," as sure as that there is no power that can counteract omnipotence, that they shall never pass their prescribed limits again.

* See also Psalms 33:7; Psalms 104:9; Jeremiah 5:22.

"He appointed the foundations of the earth," may be explained in two ways, according to the sense in which the word earth is understood. If it means the land as here distinguished from the waters, then it may refer to the appearance presented by the land, when it was separated from the seas-as if it had its basis in the floods from out of which it seemed to arise: as the Psalmist says in similar terms, "He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods," Psalms 24:2. If again the earth means the globe, the planet itself made for the residence of man and the inferior creatures, then its foundations may mean its centre, towards which all parts of its surface and substance directly gravitate,-all thus resting upon it, and held firmly together by their attraction towards it, as all the superior parts of a building, by the very same principle, when adjusted to the perpendicular by the plumb-line, rest on the foundation on which it is reared.

All these things were done by the power of God; and the power of God, in all its operations, was directed by God’s infinite wisdom; and all the results were a source of satisfaction to the mind of God, as we cannot but conceive the successful putting-forth of His infinite perfections ever to be. Such seems to be the general sentiment of verse Proverbs 8:30-"Then I was by him as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." "Wisdom was the constant companion or associate of all God’s plans and all their execution,-inseparable from God in all he purposed and in all he did; and "was daily his delight." I cannot but consider the word daily here, in the connexion in which it occurs, as having immediate reference to the successive days of the world’s creation. As the products of divine power and wisdom successively appeared on each of these days, the almighty and all-wise Creator delighted in the manifestation of his own perfections. Even God’s intelligent creatures have pleasure in putting forth their faculties, and in witnessing their successful results. God’s work is perfect, and His satisfaction correspondingly perfect. And what but this divine satisfaction can be meant when it is said-" God saw every thing that he had made; and behold it was very good?"-and afterwards that "God rested from all his

work and was refreshed?" The personification gets still bolder-"rejoicing always before him." Wisdom, by her counsels, when carried into execution, advances the glory of God. And she is, in the figure, strikingly represented as rejoicing or exulting in this; rejoicing in His very presence,-there being nothing in the results of her counsels of which she has any reason to be ashamed. This amounts, in effect, to only a stronger expression of the same sentiment as in the preceding clause,-the satisfaction of Deity in all the products of His united wisdom and power. It corresponds with the brief but beautiful expression of the psalmist, "The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works," Psalms 104:31. It is added, as the consummation of Wisdom's joy:-verse Proverbs 8:31. "Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." There can be no doubt that Divine Wisdom delighted, more than in all that had preceded it, in the last creative effort of the sixth day- "In man the last, in him the best. His Maker's image stood confest." In the creation of this wonderful combination of matter and spirit-of matter in its finest and most exquisite mould, and its most beautiful, delicate, complicated and perfect adjustments; and of spirit, ethereal, intelligent, pure, and active, to control all the movements of the wonderful mechanism, in subserviency to the glory of the Maker and the advancement of the happiness of His creation, was a work fitted to impart the highest satisfaction of all to the Infinitely Wise. And when Eden was planted, and fitted up in every way that could render it a suitable habitation for the holy and happy creature, and man was placed in this "habitable part of the earth," the joy of Divine Wisdom might naturally be regarded as perfect. And so it was. Yet, when I recollect how constantly the Bible, in speaking of the manifestation of the wisdom of God in reference to man, points to another work, the work of man's recovery when fallen, I cannot help regarding the language of this verse as prospective: as intimating joy in anticipation of a still more glorious display of the wisdom and other perfections of God, of which this world was to be the theatre.

Wisdom was displayed in man's creation; but wisdom was to be magnified still more in man's redemption. The scheme by which this was to be effected should contain in it a display of wisdom unparalleled in any of the wonders of creative power and skill. It was to be a scheme of mercy to the last, in which all the perfections of the divine character should be shown-shining forth in blessed harmony, all equally glorified, all mutually illustrating each other,-providing for the honour, the unsullied honour of justice in the exercise of mercy; and saving the fallen creature, without the slightest infringement of the rights of Jehovah's holy government, or the slightest abatement or sacrifice of the claims of His eternally righteous law:-nay more, not merely without infringement of the divine glory, but with such an augmentation of it as should fill eternity with the adoring homage of an intelligent universe. It was, we apprehend, especially on this account that Wisdom delighted here: not indeed with any complacency in the character of fallen man, but with joy in the anticipation of a temple being reared on the ruins of his apostate nature, in which higher notes of praise should sound to God, to the glory of his love and mercy, and justice "and purity, and truth and wisdom and power, than had ascended to him from Eden itself Jehovah as the God of man's creation was glorious: Jehovah as the God of man's salvation was to be still more glorious; and the delight of divine Wisdom was to be proportionally more elevated and exquisite.

Let the man of mere natural religion think of this. His thoughts are not in harmony with those of divine wisdom, when he is trying to discover the character of God in man as he now is. The two states in which man furnishes a true testimony to the character of God, are-as he was when

created, and as he is when redeemed. The remaining verses of the chapter may be considered as the practical improvement of the preceding statements:-verse Proverbs 8:32. "Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways."

"Therefore." The word includes much. It associates with it, both what precedes and what follows it. Consider the dignity of Wisdom. Not only does she say, "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice;" but she appears as the directress of all the purposes, and plans, and works, and ways of the infinite God. Consider also the interest which Wisdom expresses in the "sons of men;" her very delight lying in the union of the glory of God with their present and eternal happiness. And consider further, the blessedness of those who do hearken to her counsels:-verses Proverbs 8:34-35. "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord."-Shall "find life"-life eternal! and "obtain favour of the Lord!" The latter secures the former. "In His favour is life." O what an acquisition-the smile and love of God! Without these, there is, there can be nothing for man that deserves the name of happiness. With these, there can be no misery in time or in eternity. Well might heavenly Wisdom say, "Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not." Let no tempting Siren voice of the world draw your ear away from the voice of Wisdom. Mark her solemn and touching conclusion-" He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death."

They that resist her entreaties and warnings, "wrong"-do violence to, "their own souls." They are guilty-ah! how often-of self-destruction! They "love Death!" They wilfully take the sure way of making it their final portion. They wilfully render themselves obnoxious to it; so that were it their great aim they could not more effectually insure it; could not take a more certain road to perdition were they making it the great object of their search to find one!

18-Pro_9:1-18

Proverbs 9:1-18

LECTURE XVIII.

Proverbs 9:1-18.

"Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding. He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it. A foolish woman is clamorous; she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, to call passengers who go right on their ways: Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell." In this chapter Wisdom appears under an aspect entirely new. In the style of Eastern imagery, she is here brought before us, as erecting a house for the reception and entertainment of strangers, and inviting all to become her guests, and freely to partake of her royal provision-" Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars." The frequency with which the number seven occurs, in special connexions, in Scripture, and the variety of the circumstances of its occurrence-from the seven days of the week, in the first recorded division of time in the beginning of Genesis, to the seven living creatures, the seven spirits of God, the seven candlesticks, the seven churches, the seven vials, the seven trumpets, the seven last plagues, of the Book of Revelation, have procured for it the common designation of the number of perfection. Of what, or whether of anything, the number may be specially symbolical, it would be quite out of place at present to inquire. All we need say is, that it is frequently used as a definite for an indefinite, conveying the notion of excellence and completeness. Thus it is evidently used here. Of the "house" reared by wisdom, the "seven pillars, hewn out" arid decorated, evidently represent spaciousness, elegance, grandeur, stability. I have no doubt, that those who are fond of the system of spiritualizing, would find the distinct mystic symbol of something spiritual in each one of the pillars, and bring out of the seven a whole body of divinity. This, however, would not be exposition, but the mere play of a conjecturing fancy; and how excellent soever the truths exhibited, they would be educed from that which the Holy Spirit never meant to contain them. In which case, if the ingenuity that elicited them made hearers or

readers marvel, the wonder should be, not at the wisdom but the folly of the discovery:-for ingenuity and wisdom are far from being always synonymous. The house is evidently not a temple, (a common image for the Church, taken naturally from the temple at Jerusalem,) but a place of entertainment or festivity. This is clear. The second verse shows it-"She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table." The blessings of religion-the great and precious blessings to which divine Wisdom specially invites,-are frequently sot forth under the image of a feast, of which God himself is the free provider.* These blessings of religion-or, if you will, (for it is the same thing in effect) the blessings of God’s salvation, have been, in all ages, substantially the same,-the same in nature, the same in excellence, the same in enjoyment to the renewed and spiritual mind; they have, therefore, been always, with equal propriety, represented under the same emblems. That by the feast which divine Wisdom provides, these blessings are here intended, will not admit of a doubt in the minds of any accustomed to "compare spiritual things with spiritual." They are blessings comprehending all that sinners of mankind can need to make them truly and for ever happy. What are they?-Pardon of sin; "a new heart;" acceptance with God; peace of conscience; "joy in the Holy Ghost;" "good hope through grace;" all requisite supplies of divine influence; victory over death; resurrection from the grave; acquittal in judgment; and the full fruition of God for ever in knowledge, holiness, love, and joy;-these are the blessings to which men are by divine Wisdom invited.

* Isaiah 25:6; Matthew 17:1-3; Luke 14:16-17; Revelation 19:9. In the words which follow, Wisdom is represented as joining her own inviting voice with that of her servants; just as God and Christ are represented as doing in other parts of Scripture:-verses Proverbs 9:3-5. "She hath sent forth her maidens; she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled." As before, "the simple"-the inconsiderate, thoughtless, foolish, infatuated children of men are addressed. The invitation is free. So it is throughout the Bible. The blessings of salvation are the gift of God. They are offered to sinners with the freeness of divine munificence. Not only may they be had without a price, but, if they are had at all, it must be without a price. This is one of their special peculiarities. In treating with our fellow-men, in the communication of good, we make distinctions. From some, who can afford it, we take an equivalent; from others, who cannot, we take none. We sell to the rich, we give to the poor. In the present case, there is no distinction. All are poor, All are alike poor; and he who presumes to bring what he imagines a price, of whatever kind, forfeits the blessings, and is "sent empty away." He who should come to the House of divine Wisdom, and refuse to enter and to partake of her feast unless some remuneration should be accepted, must be turned from the gate. The truth is, what men fancy a price is none. No sinner on earth has, or can have, any to give. And it is the very freeness with which divine blessings are offered, that constitutes their suitableness to our circumstances. If we vainly imagine that we can buy, there is nothing for us, but exclusion, starvation, and death. The invitation too is universal; for all men, in regard to divine and spiritual things, are naturally inconsiderate and foolish; negligent and improvident of their best and highest interests. And it is earnest, repeated, importunate. Is not this wonderful? Ought not the earnestness and the importunity to be all on the other side? Should not we find men entreating God to bestow the blessings, not God entreating men to accept them? Wonderful? "No," we may answer, in the terms of the poor negro woman to the missionary, when he was magnifying the love of God in the gift of his Son, and naturally put the question, "Is not this wonderful?"-"No, Massa, it

be just like him." It is in the true style of infinite benevolence. But is it not wonderful that sinners should refuse the invitation? It is not in one view, and it is in another. It is not, when we consider their depravity, and alienation from God. It is, when we think of their natural desire for happiness, and the manifest impossibility of the object of their desire being ever found, otherwise than by their acceptance of them.

Some do conceive that there is in the passage an allusion at least to the temple-the place where God, as the God of grace, dwelt between the cherubim; waited to be gracious; and dispensed, in virtue of the typical blood and incense, the blessings of His goodness.

We take the allusion more generally,-to the Church of God, which is often represented under the image of a spiritual building; by the erection of which, of its "living stones," and His whole procedure of founding, rearing, stablishing, and completing it, God’s infinite wisdom is specially represented as made manifest:-" That now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."* * Ephesians 3:10-11. The foundation of this glorious structure may be said to have been laid by the hand of divine Wisdom in the first promise-which is the same thing as its being laid in Christ. Our penitent first parents, we have every reason to believe, together with their son the "righteous Abel," were the first "living stones" laid upon the divine foundation. And the building advanced gradually in succeeding ages, is still advancing, and in due time shall be perfected. It is into this "spiritual house" that sinners are graciously invited, to partake the blessings of salvation. I shrink not from the use of this mixed metaphor, which makes sinners at once the stones that compose the building and the guests that are invited into it; for the Apostle Peter has exemplified a similar anomaly, in making them at once the living stones and the officiating priests.* It is in the spiritual Church of God that the blessings of salvation are enjoyed. They who refuse to enter on divine invitation, can have "neither part nor lot" in them.

* 1 Peter 2:4-5. But a participation in the blessings to which Wisdom invites must be accompanied with the practical renunciation of sin and folly:-verse Proverbs 9:6. "Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding."

"Forsake the foolish;" that is, former associates, companions in thoughtlessness and sin. Ah! this is often one of a young man’s chief difficulties. I need not indeed have restricted the observation to youth; for it is a difficulty to the ungodly at every period of life. And, when men have lived long, and have long maintained intimacies in irreligion, and profligacy, and in scorn of what is good, it may be questioned, in some cases at least, whether the difficulty lessens by age. How to leave such associates! How to bear their laugh, their sneer, their ridicule, their sarcastic insinuations, their alternate coaxing and bantering! How ever to look them in the face again!-The only difference between youth and age, in this respect, may be found perhaps in the circumstance, that youth is open, ingenuous, confiding, sanguine; while the old have had time to discover more of the heartlessness of those intimacies which have not their basis and their bond in right principle. Still, in both the one and the other, it requires a resolution such as divine grace alone can inspire and maintain. It is one of the cases to which our Lord refers, when, adverting to the difficulties to be overcome in entering on a religious life and profession, he says-" Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut too the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at

the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are.*1 Mark, however, my dear young friends, the connexion in the words before us-"Forsake the foolish, and live." It must be done, if you would live;-not only (although this also is true) if you would enjoy the present life, but if you would secure the life that never ends. The company in the house of Wisdom is of a different and opposite stamp. You cannot have a relish for both. The society, the pursuits, the practices of the foolish, will not at all amalgamate with those of the guests of Wisdom; of those who have been "made wise unto salvation"-the saints-the "excellent of the earth." It is here, in His spiritual Zion, that God delights to dwell; and he who enters must, in partaking of the provided blessings, delight to dwell with God.*2 *1 Luke 13:24-25.

*2 Psalms 132:13-16. When the foolish are forsaken, their ways are of course forsaken. It follows, "And go in the way of understanding"-the way of faith and love and holy obedience to God; the way which every man of sound understanding will choose, because the only way of present happiness, and the only way to unending bliss.

There appears a singular abruptness in the introduction here of verses Proverbs 9:7-9. "He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame; and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." By some, these words are interpreted as cautions to the ministers of God’s word and others, who, as the servants of heavenly Wisdom, may be employed in inviting sinners to the feast. They are conceived to signify that, in this important duty, prudence and discrimination require to be used, according to the varieties of character with which they have to deal. To address personal rebukes to the obstinate scoffer, and to repeat and urge them, may, in some cases, serve no other end than that of their being provoked to repay your zeal with abuse and insult, and, it may be, with calumny and slander; or you may even yourself be provoked, in the irritation and haste of an unguarded moment, to utter things of which they may take an ungenerous hold, and turn to their advantage in the most malicious and unmerciful way, to blast your character and mar your usefulness.

Perhaps, with still greater propriety, the verses may be expounded, as containing a similar caution to those who themselves comply with the admonition to "forsake the foolish." One of the most natural and powerful feelings in the bosoms of such persons, is a deep concern for their former associates, and intense heart-burdening solicitude to do them good. When they have themselves experienced the true and exquisite delight-a delight to which before their bosoms had been strangers,-which religion has introduced there, they are apt to feel as the youthful Reformer did, when, having found the truth, and the peace and joy imparted by it, he went forth to promulgate it, in the sanguine assurance that what was so self-evidently divine and excellent could not be resisted, but soon discovered to his mortification and sorrow, that "Old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon." Their experience may be like his, as their fond anticipations were. They may therefore, perhaps, be here warned to exercise discretion, lest their love should only he repaid with hatred, and their zeal with such injury as may prove, not distressing merely to their feelings, but prejudicial to their reputation and a hindrance in their efforts to do good. But the verses may be, after all, but a simple statement of the way in which instruction and admonition do actually affect different persons. There are just two ways of it. They may have received wisely, with thankful affection to the reprover, and compliance with his counsel, on the one hand; or, on the other,

foolishly, with scorn, resentment, and stubborn refusal. And in that cusp, verses eighth and ninth may be, not so much a direction or advice, as a particular mode of stating the fact, that the scorner does hate his reprover, while the wise man loves him. In which sense, the words connect beautifully-with the closing terms of the address in verse Proverbs 9:12-"If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it." That is, Since my counsels must be treated in the one or the other of two ways, mark the results of each: "If thou be wise"-that is, if thou act the part of wisdom, as here described^-" thou shalt be wise for thyself;" it shall turn out for thy good; it shall be for thine eternal benefit: "But if thou scornest"-that is, if thou act the part of the scorner, as here described, rejecting instruction and admonition, and repaying with despite and hatred the good intentions of your monitor,-"thou alone shalt bear it;" the fearful consequences will be thine own; thine own the loss, thine own the suffering, thine own the ruin. You have been warned; and your blood will be upon your own heads. Thus is it with all in whose ears the warnings and invitations of wisdom have been faithfully sounded. They must "bear their iniquity," in the forfeiture of good and the endurance of merited evil. In the tenth and eleventh verses (Proverbs 9:10-11), we have the primary lesson of Wisdom repeated; and what is thus repeated is intended to be impressed, as of special importance-" The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased." * * Comp. Proverbs 1:7, &c. In the tenth verse (Proverbs 9:10), the word in the original rendered "the Holy" is in the plural number-"the Holies." Thus, in numerous other passages, plural terms are used in application to the one God. You may take another example,-Ecclesiastes 12:1, "Remember now thy Creator;" literally, "thy Creators." This use of plural terms, and that in union with verbs and adjectives in the singular, has been regarded, and justly, as arising from and indicating the doctrine of the Trinity. And to this correspond the threefold ascriptions of praise to Jehovah, and the threefold repetition of blessing in His name. An instance of the former we have in Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory:"-and of the latter in Numbers 6:24-26, "Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee: Jehovah make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

Opposed to Wisdom (who, as formerly observed, is a female personage,) is "the foolish woman," described in verses Proverbs 9:13-15. "A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, to call passengers who go right on their ways." The "foolish woman" might be understood, in all truth, of the "strange woman," with her enticements; against whom youth are so frequently and so earnestly warned in former passages of this book.

I am strongly inclined to interpret the passage of Folly as an allegorical personage set in contrast with Wisdom:-folly, under all the forms and phases which it assumes in the world; all being included under this personification that entices from the gates of that house where Wisdom receives and entertains her guests. The characteristics of this second personage are the reverse of those of Wisdom. They are ignorance, and thoughtless emptiness: what is wanting in solid and substantial ideas is made up by loud clamour and noisy importunity. She too hath builded her house. She too hath provided her entertainment. She too invites her guests. The houses are over against each other-on opposite sides of the way. Wisdom’s is on the right hand; Folly’s on the left.*1 They are thus in the vicinity of each other; it being the very purpose of Folly to prevent by

her allurements those who pass by from entering the doors of Wisdom. Each addresses her invitations; and uses, but from very different motives, every art of persuasion. Folly presents all her captivating allurements to the lusts and passions of corrupt nature; and she shows her skill in seduction by holding out, in promise, the secret enjoyment of fm-bidden sweets:-verses Proverbs 9:16-17. "Whoso is simple let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." Alas! since the entrance of sin into the world, there has been amongst mankind a sadly strong and perverse propensity to aught that is forbidden-to taste what is laid under an interdict. The very interdiction draws towards it the wistful desires, and looks, and longings of the perverse and rebellious heart.*2 *1 Comp. Proverbs 9:1; Proverbs 9:3, with verse Proverbs 9:14. rr *2 Comp. Romans 7:5; Romans 7:8.

There are pleasures in sin. It is from these that its temptations arise. And, alas! Folly has the heart of fallen man wholly on her side. No wonder that her guests are numerous. "Many there be who go in" by the gates of her voluptuous abode; stored as it is with all the variety and all the plenitude of vanity and sin. There are all the pleasures of the sensualist, and all the vanities of the giddy and the gay.-There are the pollutions of the libertine, and the dainties, and the wines, and the pastimes of those whose chosen end in life is to "eat, and drink, and be merry." There are the glittering honours of the ambitious, and the tempting wealth of the covetous. There is all that captivates the senses, all that fills the imagination, all that draws the desires, all that stirs the passions of the human heart unrenewed by converting grace. But O my friends, my young friends especially, hear once more the accompanying caution. Hear once more the monitory voice of Wisdom; which is the voice of "the only wise God himself," and of all the wise and good among men. Mark it. He who does comply with the enticements of folly, "knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell."

"The dead are there." It is a truth that the guests in the house of Folly consist of the "dead in trespasses and sins "-the spiritually dead. But this does not seem to be the meaning of the expression here. The meaning is rather that the guests of Folly are murdered by her. She puts them all to death, and to the worst of deaths. She invites them to her house with witching and seductive smiles, and importunate eagerness. She holds out luring promises of unknown and untried but exquisite gratifications-"the stolen waters," and the "bread eaten in secret." But in those stolen waters there is deadly poison,-poison for which, in all her stores, she has no antidote; and her "pleasant bread" has its pleasantness only to the taste; it is bitterness and death within-"the dead are there!" She allures, that she may murder; and that both body and soul-for "Her guests are in the depths of hell." This is the end to which she brings them. Her house is the vestibule of Hell. The pleasures she offers are "but for a season." Behind her mansion of vice and vanity is the prison of everlasting despair. Her guests pass through the one into the other!

Reflect, then, ye reckless votaries of folly and sin; and pause, ye who may be under temptation to join them. Listen not to the voice of the seducer. Stop your ears. Turn away your eyes. Set not a foot upon the steps of her gateway. You would not willingly follow a man whom you knew, or even suspected, to be decoying you to shed your blood. You would not swallow poison for its sweetness, if you knew it to be poison, and were warned that, if you took it, you must soon expire in horrible convulsions. Yet in hearkening to the voice of Folly you are doing infinitely worse.

We invite you to the house and to the feast of Divine Wisdom. "The living are there." Her guests are instinct with a life that never dies. "They shall not be hurt of the second death:"-and while the votaries of Folly "are in the depths of hell," their place is in the "house of many mansions" above, amid "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore!"-"Forsake the foolish, then, and live." Linger not a moment. Come to the decision. Halt not between two opinions. Stand not irresolute, midway between the abode of Wisdom and that of Folly. Turn in to the right, not to the left. And even if you have turned to the left; if your foot is on the step; if you have entered the porch; if you have even reached the innermost apartment of the mansion of Folly, and are revelling in the very loosest and wildest of her orgies;-we follow you with the words of Heavenly Wisdom. We shout in your ear-" The dead are there!" We call upon you still to escape for your life. Of the other house the door is still open; and "yet there is room!" Flee then from the one, and take refuge in the other. Think not that we speak to you only officially. We speak to you as your friends, in the full conviction of the truth of what we say-the truth of all that is alarming, and of all that is encouraging, of all that is damning, and of all that is saving in the word of God:-and we remind you again, in the words before us, "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it."

19-Pro_10:1-5

Proverbs 10:1-5

LECTURE XIX.

Proverbs 10:1-5.

"The Proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death. The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked. He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich. He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame."

It is here, strictly speaking, that the Proverbs begin. The general nature of these proverbs, or sententious maxims, was explained when we entered on the exposition of the Book. I shall not now resume the subject. The preceding part of the Book having been, to a great degree, addressed to youth, nothing can be more natural than the position of the first of these maxims; and indeed, independently of any such connexion, its place is most appropriate. The education of the young, the early training of the rising hopes of society and of the church, must begin at home, in the bosom of the family, under the parental roof and the parental eye, and the parental care and culture. In saying so, I cannot withhold my anathema from a system, which, if it has gained any ground at all, has gained all that more than enough;-a system which, under the specious and fascinating name of Socialism, and holding out promises at which men are ever prone to catch, without giving mature thought, if any at all, to the means of their fulfilment, avows principles subversive of the first, most hallowed, most blessed, and most useful of all social ties;-a system which, independently of its atheistical dreariness and impiety, ought to be scouted and scowled out of existence by every man of virtue and every woman of chastity, by every friend to the blessings and the benefits of domestic life, and every lover of social order;-a system which, with an imbecility of argument that is only equalled by its unblushing effrontery, ventures, in the middle of the nineteenth century, amidst the advance of all descriptions of knowledge, to propose, as the sovereign panacea for all the disorder, crime, and misery of human life, a compound of which the worthily associated ingredients are-no God, no marriage, and no property-universal atheism, universal prostitution, and the universal overthrow of the incentives to personal and domestic industry; with the introduction of all the encouragements to idleness and plunder, by a state of things which, were it possible to bring it into being even for an hour, could not beyond that hour be continued! My present plea is for Domestic Life;-for all the sweets of connubial intercourse, and all the "charities of father, son, and brother," which such a system would, at one fell sweep of its loathsome principles, annihilate. We must take things on a large scale. It will not do to argue from exceptions. If it must be called benevolence that does so, it is the benevolence of a distempered brain. Every rightly thinking man will admit, as the result of all reason and of all experience, that if the sacred distinctions of domestic society were once destroyed, the order and the benefits of all

society would quickly perish with them.-But I must return from this digression.

Solomon speaks, in the first verse (Proverbs 10:1), his own observation and his own experience. He had witnessed the gladness, and he had witnessed the grief of his father David; and for his own offspring he had felt all the racking solicitudes of a pious heart, and wept many a bitter tear for their follies. Yes, brethren; and if his own example, in what lie terms "the days of his vanity," had served, as it would not fail to do, to encourage in evil those who were "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh," and whom it was his duty to train in the fear of Jehovah, the bitterest of all his tears would be those with which. He lamented, on their account, his own criminal folly. And both in the introductory warnings of this Book, and in the solemn and affecting text, with its illustrative and impressive lessons, of the Book of Ecclesiastes, I discern the bitterness of spirit, that would fondly remedy the mischief which his example of misconduct so grievous had occasioned. the symptoms of it, they are beyond measure distressed and alarmed; they are vexed, fretted, mortified, as if something had occurred quite dishonourable to their family, and which, of all things, they must studiously conceal, if they cannot avert it; which, however, they do all in their power, with a cruel and criminal assiduity of varied means, to accomplish. They mourn over their poor child, as having got its head turned; and they curse in their hearts the methodists and fanatics by whom such notions have been instilled into his mind. And all this, just at the time when, in the estimate of the God of heaven, their child is beginning to be wise! This is an awful case. How unnatural in one sense! In another how sadly natural! It is quite what might be expected. They who are unimpressed by the words of the Redeemer, in reference to themselves, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"-cannot reasonably be expected to feel their application to others. They who love and seek for themselves, as their own portion, the wealth, and honours, and pleasures of the world-how can it be supposed that they should adopt another standard of desire and enjoyment for their children! The father whom "a wise son makes glad," must be a pious father-a fearer of God. Parents who are themselves religious, can alone rejoice in the true spiritual religion of their children.

He begins at the beginning;-with maxims for youth relative to their entrance into life:-verse Proverbs 10:1. "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." What does Solomon mean by "a wise son?" Is it a child of precocious intellect 1-taking up, quickly and largely, the various branches of his education?-a superior scholar? Or is it one who learns aptly how to manage for this world?-shrewd, sagacious, prudent, smart, in all temporal concerns?-holding out every fair promise of a good man of business-the buds and blossoms of future earthly well-doing and prosperity? Do not suppose that by asking such questions, it is my purpose to make light of indications like these. They are in themselves good, and where they are discovered cannot fail to be gratifying to parents. But every one who attends to the previous lessons of this Book, and to the general tenor of the Bible, will be satisfied that such qualifications are far from being those chiefly meant. Thus in the immediately preceding verses, we have the maxim which repeats and embodies the lessons of all the nine chapters, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding."-" A wise son," then, is one who early discovers this "fear of the Lord" as having taken possession, and assumed the dominion, of his heart; who loves, reads, and understands God’s word; and who walks in God’s ways.

Such a son "maketh a glad father." "When this is said, there is evidently something more implied in the fathers character, than at first sight appears.-Worldly parents rejoice, when their children excel in the wisdom that, in a temporal view, promises well for their future life. But for all that bears the aspect of really serious religion, such parents are terrified. Instead of being glad when they discern the symptoms of it, they are beyond measure distressed and alarmed; they are vexed, fretted, mortified, as if something had occurred quite dishonourable to their family, and which, of all things, they must studiously conceal, if they cannot avert it; which, however, they do all in their power, with a cruel and criminal assiduity of varied means, to accomplish. They mourn over their poor child, as having got its head turned; and they curse in their hearts the methodists and fanatics by whom such notions have been instilled into his mind. And all this, just at the time when, in the estimate of the God of heaven, their child is beginning to be wise! This is an awful case. How unnatural in one sense! In another how sadly natural! It is quite what might be expected. They who are unimpressed by the words of the Redeemer, in reference to themselves, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"-cannot reasonably be expected to feel their application to others. They who love and seek for themselves, as their own portion, the wealth, and honours, and pleasures of the world-how can it be supposed that they should adopt another standard of desire and enjoyment for their children! The father whom "a wise son makes glad," must be a pious father-a fearer of God. Parents who are themselves religious, can alone rejoice in the true spiritual religion of their children.

The same observations require to be carried forward to the second clause of the verse, which is the opposite side of the alternative:-"But a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." The "foolish son," is the son who fears not God,-who is without the principles of piety. In this sense, it is no uncommon thing to find a youth whom Solomon would have pronounced a fool, abundantly wise in regard to all that pertains to this world, both its learning and its business..Now, a godly parent, how grateful soever he may be for this wisdom, yet will not be satisfied with it. He cannot. So long as he sees the heart not given to God-no indications of that spiritual change without which there is no admission to the kingdom above, he will still heave the sigh of disappointment and grief, and long and pray for the happy day when his eyes may behold it.

I need hardly say, that in the style of parallelism in this verse, both parents are to be considered as meant in both clauses. They are supposed to be one in character, and consequently in feeling and desire, respecting their common offspring. The father who is glad for his son’s wisdom, will be grieved by his folly; and the mother to whose heart his folly is heaviness, will fully sympathise in the gladness imparted by his wisdom.-The two clauses might be transposed, and retain all their truth: "A wise son maketh a glad mother; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his father."

There is here, then, a lesson for children, and a lesson for parents:-1. I am far from meaning that the young should be religious, merely to please their parents. They might be hypocrites for this purpose; but for this purpose alone they could not be religious. The first considerations by which youth should be induced to prefer a life of true religion, should be their relation to the blessed God, and the inestimable worth of their own immortal interests. The first and most sacred and imperative of their obligations are those under which they lie to Him; and for the happiness of their undying spirits, which is indissolubly connected with true religion, He, desirous ever of their good, has graciously provided, and has commanded them to seek, and to seek supremely. But we are

more than warranted to urge on the young, as a collateral motive, the concern which their parents feel for their happiness, and the propriety of laying to heart, that by an ungodly course, along with the ruin they bring upon their own souls, they bring heart-break to those whom it is their first earthly duty to love; that thus, in a most affecting sense, they incur the guilt at once of suicide and of parricide. "Why should not this consideration be urged, to deter from irreligion and vice? I do urge it, my young friends. I urge it earnestly. Ah! it will be a bitter, bitter drop in the cup of future woe to many an ungodly youth, to recollect how ill requited were all the tender anxieties, the godly counsels, the fervent prayers, the faithful admonitions, the melting tears of pious fathers and mothers, who would fain have won them to God and to happiness, but whose affectionate solicitations and remonstrances they resisted, going on frowardly in the way of their own hearts.

2. We have a lesson for parents. Let them see to it, that they put spiritual interests first in their desires, and efforts, and prayers in behalf of their children. Let them beware of all the biasing and misguiding influences of parental partiality, that would lead them to overlook, or to palliate the evils discernible in the characters of their children; and of that easy, listless hoping for good in future, that would make them deal with present faults, even of a serious description, with a seemingly kind but really cruel indulgence. Let the cords with which you draw them from evil to good be the cords of love; but never let go your hold of them. Let the rod with which you seek to drive folly from their hearts be the rod of love; and, while on no account you use it when it is not necessary-that is, when you can accomplish the desired effect without it,-do not withhold it when it is; for the highest authority assures you, "He that spareth the rod hateth his child." In this Book of Proverbs, we are not, in general, to look for any very strict connexion between the maxims that are successively introduced. Sometimes, however, an associating link, sufficiently natural, may be discerned. It is so here. The following verses might readily be suggested by the first.

Verse Proverbs 10:2. "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death." Worldly parents covet for their children, as they do for themselves, the wealth of this world. They wish them to be rich. In all their plans for their settlement in life, this is the main concern, the summum bonum-the "one thing needful." And not a few even of Christian parents seem to act as if, on this subject, they had adopted the world’s maxims. All else is made to yield to this. If, in a situation that promises to be lucrative, there are temptations of a moral and spiritual kind specially hazardous, how ingeniously they impose on their consciences! "What situation," say they, "is there in this world without its temptations? If this has one kind, others have other kinds:-and then, grace is free. Situation, however free of temptations, cannot impart it, and situation, however full of temptations, cannot keep it back." These are but flattering unctions. You would not, for any earthly consideration, set down your child amidst barrels of gunpowder, while sparks were flying in all directions around them. You hurry him away from a situation, when any violent and deadly epidemic makes its appearance, and his life is imminently at stake. Had you a right feeling in regard to his eternal interests, your first inquiries would ever relate to the security of them; and your weightiest solicitude would be to avoid exposing them to risk. Let both parents and children ponder the truth in this verse. Forget not that, how honestly and fairly soever acquired, riches bring with them many temptations and perils. The terms used in God’s word on this subject are very strong; and the strongest of all are from the lips of Him who " spake as never man spake:"-" How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*-Above all, let parents

be on their guard against instilling into their children’s minds such a love of riches as might tempt them, in "hasting to be rich," to use unjustifiable means for their acquisition.

* Luke 18:24-25.

’’Treasures of wickedness" may mean, either treasures wickedly got, or treasures wickedly spent, or both. Such treasures "profit nothing," that is, evidently for the bestowment of true happiness. It is a saying of divine truth, confirmed by universal experience, "that a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth:" and it is specially true, when the abundance is of the kind here described. There cannot fail, in that case, unless conscience has become "seared as with a hot iron," to be many misgivings, much inward remorse, self-dissatisfaction and selfreproach-a sting in the treasure. The connexion of the two parts of the verse intimates, that "riches profit not" in "delivering from death." They cannot save even from temporal death, and far less from death eternal. Probably both-though the latter rather as an inference from the former-are included in the Psalmist’s words, "They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means-redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:) that he should still five for ever, and not see corruption."*1 So far from profiting then, they only serve, by making a man more reluctant to quit this world, and less prepared for another, to sharpen the sting of death, and to surround the grave with thicker horrors. They chain the spirit to earth, and torture it with the anticipation of the chains of hell.*2 *1 Psalms 49:6-9.

*2 Compare 1 Timothy 6:9-10; James 5:1-5. On the contrary-"righteousness delivereth from death."-"Righteousness" in this connexion, evidently means, not mere justice in dealings with fellow-men; but, as in many other places, all that is included in a course of right principle; a course of faith and love and practical obedience. This " delivers from death"-not merely saving from the gallows, preserving from the punishments which human laws inflict upon the wicked; but taking the sting from death, and victory from the grave; at once preserving "from the second death," and leading to "life everlasting."

Another collateral and closely associated consideration is presented in verse Proverbs 10:3. "The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked."

Among the children of men, in their natural unregeneracy, "there is none righteous, no, not one." They are "the righteous," who are justified from condemnation, and sanctified from pollution, by the pardoning mercy and the renewing grace of God, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." For them God provides present peace and joy; and all the means of maintaining and perfecting spiritual life, with the influences of the Spirit to render means effectual, for nourishing them up unto "life eternal,"-the higher life He has reserved for them, with himself in heaven. Surely, then, God will not leave them destitute of what is needful for them in "the life that now is." He who gives them the greater blessings, will not withhold the less. He who gives life to the soul, will not neglect the body. He who bestows heaven’s bliss, will not deny that measure of earth’s good which he sees will prove for the greatest benefit.*1 It is of temporal supplies the wise man is here speaking. The "famishing of the soul," indeed, might be understood, with great truth, of the proper and peculiar life of the soul. But the connexion rather demands a different interpretation: and in similar connexions, the word soul is often used (very frequently especially in the Old Testament

Scriptures) to signify the person, and the animal life. The famishing of the soul, at the same time, may have reference to that weakness and fainting of spirit, which is the result of the corporeal exhaustion produced by the extremity of want.*2 It is of God’s people it is said in divine promise-" Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."*3 *1 Psalms 37:3; Psalms 37:16; Matthew 6:33.

*2 Psalms 107:5. rr *3 Psalms 34:10; Isaiah 33:16. On the contrary, "He casteth away the substance of the wicked."-The righteous have blessings as their "substance," that are permanent. They belong to their immortal nature, and shall continue theirs for ever. So that to the poorest of them the Lord says, "I know thy poverty-but thou art rich." Though "having nothing," they "possess all things." "All things" are theirs.*1 But "the substance of the wicked" is "of the earth earthy." It pertains not to the soul, and partakes not of its imperishable vitality. O the miserable, but sadly common mistake of the rich man in the parable, when he addressed his soul in terms of congratulation, as if, in the abundance of worldly good, it had got what would give it real and permanent satisfaction-" Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry!"*2 *1 Compare 1 Corinthians 3:21-23. rr *2 Compare Luke 12:16-21.

"Casting it away" is an act indicative of regarding it as worthless. The substance of this world is that on which the hearts of the sons of men are set. But God will "cast it away." He will not only bereave them of it-and that, it may be, suddenly:-but what is there, in all this substance, that can avail as purchase-money for the soul and for heaven? Had a man "the world" to offer, God would "cast it away." He would say, "Thy money perish with thee!" "Riches profit not in the day of wrath." The famished soul must then die, and die for ever! But we are ever in danger of extremes. Riches must not be our portion; but neither are they to be despised. They are, in themselves, a good. Many a time are they included among the blessings which God promises to bestow; and when so promised, they cannot be considered as an evil. This remark is necessary, to render the verses now expounded consistent with those which follow; in which the attainment of this good is made the motive to diligence, and such diligence one of the ingredients and characteristics of wisdom.

While habits of early industry are a means of preventing vice-for "to be idle is to be vicious,"-they are also the preventive of poverty, and the way to the enjoyment of temporal comfort and abundance:-verse Proverbs 10:4. "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich."

While it is dangerous to have the spirit of "them that will be rich"-who set their hearts on wealth, and make it the determining point of all their plans and pursuits, yet if, by the blessing of God upon honest and well-principled industry, riches do come, they are to be received gratefully, as a boon from the hand of God, to be employed for His glory, and for the good of others-relatives, friends, fellow-Christians, and fellow-men. This is the true benefit of riches. They put it into a man’s power to effect more extensive good. They give their possessor the privilege of resembling God the more as The Universal Dispenser-" the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift"-the bountiful giver of all that is enjoyed throughout creation. He who is animated by the godlike virtue of benevolence, must rejoice when he has it in his power to indulge it in more extensive exercise. That the connexion is such as I have intimated with the principles of early training, is apparent from verse Proverbs 10:5. "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he

that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame."

Prudence and sober industry will enable a youth, as the apostle expresses it, to "requite his parents," and thus, by the reciprocations of practical affection, to gladden and comfort their hearts;-and nothing ought to be a source of purer or more exquisite gratification to a son than this, specially when, in divine providence, his parents come to be placed in circumstances that require it. Such a son too, by the universal respect which his character draws upon him, will be a credit and an honour to them. On the contrary, the indolent and slothful in his disposition-the "sleeper in harvest," becomes an idle unprofitable vagabond, or possibly what is worse, a cunning artful knave, or a vacant, mindless, and heartless sot-a reproach of all himself, and (although it may be sometimes undeservedly) a discredit and shame to those who brought him up. The remark suggests itself afresh, that the virtues of industry, and sober application to business, are closely connected, as practical results, with the "fear of God." There may be diligence and sobriety where there is no religion; but there is, assuredly, no religion, where there are not diligence and sobriety. When the fear of God reigns in the heart, the prosecution of a man’s worldly calling, being conducted under the influence of the religious principle, becomes a religious act, and industrious activity a part of godliness.

20-Pro_10:6-12

Proverbs 10:6-12

LECTURE XX.

Proverbs 10:6-12.

"Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot. The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall. He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known. He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall. The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins." The preceding verses have reference to industry and idleness; and of these we have a comparison, as to their present and future effects, in the opening verses of the passage before us,-"Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot."

"The just," as we formerly observed, is not the mere rigidly equitable man; but the man who, under the influence of the principles of true religion, unites benevolence with righteousness, and seeks, in acts of kindness as well as of equity, to fulfil "the royal law." Ho is the "good man," as distinguished from the merely "righteous man," for whom, the apostle says, "some would even dare to die." Such a character was the patriarch Job;* in whom righteousness and goodness appear blending in lovely practical union. "Blessings are on the head" of such a man. His value is appreciated; his real usefulness felt. If he prospers, he enjoys his prosperity with a blessing from God, and with the gratulations and plaudits of men. He sees and enjoys the general favour in which he is held. It gives him confidence, so that he can open his mouth without being ashamed.

* Job 29:11-17.

"But violence covereth the mouth of the wicked." Of this clause a different rendering has by some been proposed. That of our received version, however, seems preferable, and we retain it. It yields a natural contrast with the first. Some conceive that there is an allusion to the practice of covering the face of the condemned.* According to this view, the import will be, that the violence of the wicked will bring him to condemnation. More probably, however, "covering the mouth" moans making ashamed-putting to silence. His detected and exposed iniquity, and rapacity, and selfishness, shall be like a muzzle upon his mouth, shutting it in silent confusion.

* See Esther 7:8; Job 9:24. The latter passage seems to mean, that the wicked man, into whose hands the earth is given, condemns, silences, puts down, those by whom righteous judgment was executed. And the blessing that is on "the just" is not confined to the period of his earthly life. It follows him to the grave. It hallows his ashes. It rests upon his name, when he himself has bidden a final adieu to the world. "The memory of the just is blessed." His memory is blessed of God, who

smiled complacently on his life of faith and love and practical godliness, and took him to himself at its happy close. It is blessed of his family, his kindred, his friends, his companions. It is blessed of the Church of God. It is blessed by mankind at large. For even the world, although incapable of appreciating the excellence of those principles by which the conduct of the truly good, the just, the children of God, is influenced and regulated, yet cannot but approve and admire the characteristic consistency which these principles produce, as their legitimate result, and with which the profession of them, unless the profession of hypocrisy or of selfdelusion, will invariably be associated.

I may here observe, that perhaps the blessings which rest on the "memory of the just," are purer than even those which came upon him while he lived. While a man lives, there are, in this our fallen world, envy and malice, misapprehension and calumny enough to taint, at times, even the fairest reputation; but death, in general, disarms these enemies to living fame, and justice is done to the dead which was withheld, or but stintedly and partially bestowed, during life. Death is a smoother-down of asperities and alienations. Few are so thoroughly embittered as to carry their malice, in all its rancour, to the grave. And, in regard to those who knew and admired, esteemed, and loved the departed, there is, as all feel, a keenly sensitive jealousy of his memory,-a tenderness that shrinks from doing it wrong, and that is wakefully on the alert to vindicate it from the very slightest aspersion. It is embalmed in the sweetest of the heart’s affections; and the intrusion of aught that would taint the sweetness is resented with a sensibility specially acute. On the contrary, "The name of the wicked shall rot." The expression is strong, but far from unduly so. It becomes loathsome,-offensive as the putrid carcase of a dog. It is cast out and forgotten. Men have no pleasure in taking the name into their lips, or recalling the memory of the character with which it was associated. Whatever, during life, had been his greatness, (falsely so called, for there is no true greatness independent of goodness,) his name, even if recorded in his country’s annals, excites disgust instead of satisfaction, and his course is like a vile, stagnant, putrid kennel in the field of history-nauseous to every well-ordered and rightly-thinking mind.* * For a commentary on these two verses read the 112th Psalm.

Let all remember, not the posthumous blessing of fellowmen only, but, in a special manner, the infinitely more desirable blessing of the living and life-giving God. "The Lord taketh pleasure in his people." Their names are in his "Book of life." There they stand enrolled, in connexion with the name of "the Lamb that was slain." It is in this connexion that their names are well-pleasing to God, and that his blessing rests upon them. There is in the very best of men enough, and infinitely more than enough, to rot their names, and render them offensive to the God of taintless purity. But He delighteth in his beloved Son. And those who give their names to Christ in the profession of the gospel, are blessed for his sake, and held in everlasting remembrance. His name is "as ointment poured forth;" and theirs, in Him, partake of the fragrance. And moreover, God delights in his own image, in the measure in which, in each of his people, it is produced. He cannot but delight in "the beauty of holiness." "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright." In this Book the wise and the foolish are brought before us under very many points of comparison and contrast. We have several in the verses that follow:-verse Proverbs 10:8. "The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall."

It is one of the marks of true wisdom, and none of the least, that it is not self-sufficient and self-willed. This is the evident import of the former part of the verse. We might consider the

disposition in reference both to God and to men,-to the Supreme Ruler and Lord of the conscience,-and to existing human authorities. Tho "wise in heart will receive" God's commandments. This, true wisdom will do implicitly. It will never presume on dictating to God, or on altering and amending His prescriptions: but, proceeding on the self-evident principle that the dictates of divine wisdom must, in all cases, be perfect, will bow in instant acquiescence. With regard also to earthly superiors, a humble submission to legitimate authority, both in the family and in the state, is the province of wisdom. There is a self-conceit that spurns at all such authority. It talks as if it would legislate for all nations. It would give commandments rather than receive them. It likes not being dictated to. It plumes itself on its skill in finding fault. There is no rule prescribed at which it does not carp; no proposal in which it does not see something not to its mind; no order in which it does not find something to which it cannot submit. This is folly; for, were this temper of mind prevalent, there would be an end to all subordination and control. To the "wise in heart" stands opposed "the prate fool but a prating fool shall fall." The phrase in the original is a fool of lips, a lip-fool. It may be understood in two ways. First, the self-conceited are generally superficial there is much talk, and little substance; words, without sense; plenty of tongue, but a lack of wit. Light matter floats on the surface, and appears to all; what is solid and precious lies at the bottom. The foam is on the face of the waters; the pearl is below. Or secondly, the reference may be to the bluster of insubordination; the loud protestations and boastings of his independence on the part of the man who resists authority, and determines to be "a law to himself." In either sense it is true, that "the prating fool shall fall." His words are a stumbling-block to his own feet. He exposes himself by his recklessness and rashness. He is in constant danger of falling into self-made mischief, or of exposing himself to the effects of individual resentment, or to the punitive visitation of the laws. The distinction at which he aimed, as a self-sufficient authoritative oracle, not being sustained by any such weight of intellect as is necessary for such pretensions, he falls from his fancied elevation into derision and neglect.

I have said that the "wise in heart" will receive the commandments of God implicitly. This may be considered as corresponding to the character in verse Proverbs 10:9. "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known." "Walking uprightly" stands opposed to all duplicity, all tortuous policy, all the crooked arts of manoeuvring, for the purpose of promoting reputation, interest, comfort, or any other end whatsoever.* * Comp. Proverbs 2:7.

He who walketh thus-" walketh surely." He walks with a comfortable feeling of security-a calm unagitated serenity of mind. This springs from confidence in that God whose will he makes his only rule. In the path of implicit obedience, he feels that he can trust* And further, the way in which he walks is the surest for the attainment of his ends.-Proverbs are generally founded in observation and experience, and express their ascertained results. Hence, even though not inspired, they have generally truth in them. It has become proverbial, that "honesty is the best policy." The meaning is, that the acts of deceit very frequently frustrate the object of him by whom they are employed, and land him in evils greater than the one he meant, by the use of them, to shun. Let it be deeply impressed on all minds, and an ever-present thought, that the way of safety, of reputation, of happiness, of honour, and, generally speaking, of success, is the way of evidently commanded duty. In the opposite course,-the course regulated by the ever-shifting maxims of a worldly expediency, and the tactics of an accommodating policy, there can be nothing of that sweet confidence in God, which is the peculiar enjoyment of the "upright;" but the consciousness of evil

interdicting all such confidence, separating between the soul and God, and distracting it with unceasing solicitudes.

* Comp. Psalms 37:1-7. And detection comes at last!-"He that perverteth his ways shall be known." Artifice and guile seldom succeed long in screening themselves from discovery. The feet of the artful man are caught in the meshes of his own net; and his very efforts to disentangle himself discover his wiles. And then come, as the necessary consequences of the discovery, loss of character, loss of confidence, loss of interest, loss of comfort, loss of society, loss of friendship, and loss of the very end which all his arts had been plied to obtain,-the very object for the sake of which he perverted his ways.-And all this is no more than righteous retribution. The results, and the sufferings to which they give rise, are self-produced. The man has not even the comfort of not having himself to blame.

We have had the "prating fool" in contrast with the "wise in heart." In the next verse, we have a contrast of a different kind:-"He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow: but a prating fool shall fall." We might, indeed, avoid the appearance of contrast altogether, by simply rendering the "but"-"and." I am disposed, however, to think the but may be retained. The characters brought into comparison are the sly artful man-the man of looks, and nods, and hints, and innuendoes,-and the open, loquacious, chattering fool. The former is incomparably the more dangerous and mischievous to others;-the harm from the folly of the latter falls principally upon himself. We had the former already before us.* There is no character more odious, and none more pernicious in any society, domestic, ecclesiastical, or civil. The "winking eye" sows jealousies, foments dissensions, introduces distrust, separates friends, divides families, troubles churches, agitates kingdoms. It "causeth sorrow"-often the keenest inward anguish, and, it may be, the most serious outward broils and calamities. Surely that eye-as well as "the eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, the young eagles shall eat it." The folly of the most reckless is not so perilous as the studied art of the "double-minded." Still forget not that the "prating fool shall fall." Let both evils be avoided. Be straightforward, yet be circumspect.

* Proverbs 6:12-14. The image in the 11th verse (Proverbs 10:11) is a very beautiful one, "The mouth of the righteous is a well of life"-or a living fountain. In Hebrew idiom, " living water" means, as various passages show, springing water.*1 As a well or fountain, then, of springing water, clear, cool, and refreshing to the exhausted traveller, so to the weary soul is "the mouth of the righteous." Thus precious, thus salutary, thus cheering, thus invigorating and bracing, are the instructions, consolations, and counsels, of the wise and good. The mouth "speaking from the abundance of the heart," brings forth the stores of a well-informed mind, and of a pious, kind, affectionate spirit. It is a striking figure which is used by Job, to express his disappointment on the failure of those friends to administer consolation and strength, from whose lips he had eagerly and fondly anticipated it.*2 The caravan in the wilderness, with their tongues cleaving to the roof of their mouth for thirst, see water at a distance. Their spirits rise at the sight. They hasten forward. But, ere they reach the spot, it has passed away. "The mouth of the righteous" will not thus disappoint the expectations of those who look for its refreshing words. The mouth of God’s servants and of God’s people ought, in this respect, to be like His own. His mouth is indeed "a well of life." His instructions are all truth, and they are all life-giving. It was of them, as accompanied by the teaching and influence of the Spirit, that Jesus said-speaking of the water of the well of

Sychar-"He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but who soever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*3"

*1 See in the margin, Genesis 26:19. rr *2 Job 6:15-20. rr *3f John 4:13-14. rr In the original, the latter part of this verse is the same as the latter part of the sixth. The words may be rendered either, "violence covereth the mouth of the wicked," or, "the mouth of the wicked covereth violence." As they occur here, the latter seems the more natural meaning, as standing in more distinct and suitable contrast with the other clause of the verse:-" The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life," but "the mouth of the wicked covereth violence." From the one there proceed the words of comfort, truth, and joy; under the tongue of the other there lie concealed cursing and bitterness, wrath, and clamour, and evil-speaking. There is something more fearful in the idea of the mouth covering violence than in that of its uttering it. If the mouth is kept close, it is only covering, till a convenient season, the violence that is within;-intimating, that the wicked is well aware when it is most for his nefarious purposes to keep silence, as well as when to speak out. Even when he compresses his lips and says nothing, there is no good there. It is but a cover to violence. The connexion is natural between this and the following verse-" Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins." Hatred and love are opposites, in their nature and in their effects. Here we have one of the many points of contrast.

"Hatred stirreth up strifes." It will not allow its object to rest. It is ever jealous and touchy; catches impatiently at every trifle; lets nothing pass that can possibly be construed amiss; magnifies and misrepresents; is easily provoked; thinks evil; rejoices not in the truth but in iniquity; cherishes resentment; looks out for modes of retaliation; seizes every opportunity to pick quarrels; easily irritated, it is not easily appeased,-taking fire in a moment, but difficult to quench, and slow to cool. It blows up the kindling fuel, and stirs the dying embers of strife.

"Love," on the contrary, "covereth all sins." It is ever disposed to overlook, to pardon, to forget. This must, of course, be understood in harmony with such other parts of Scripture as Leviticus 19:17.-"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." Suffering sin upon a brother, is an act, not of love but of hatred-and one of its very worst. By "love covering all sins," is meant the general disposition to pass over personal wrongs; not to be quick in taking offence, and, when offended, to be quick to reconciliation, "easy to be entreated"-every wish and desire set upon restored agreement.* * 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 4:31-32; James 3:13-18. This passage in Proverbs affords the explanation of a much abused passage in the New Testament; the latter being a quotation of the former-" Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."* Men have interpreted this of almsgiving; and have represented gifts to the poor as covering the sins of the charitable from the eye and vengeance of Divine justice. There is in this a twofold error. Charity is not alms giving; it is love:-and it is not from the justice of God that it covers the sins of him by whom it is exercised, but from public exposure to others that it covers the sins of its object. The words in Proverbs show this: the "hiding of the multitude of sins" standing in contrast to the "stirring up of strifes."-The sense affixed, in thoughtlessness, to the words of Peter is most pernicious. But the true sense, as here made apparent, presents one of the most important of love’s exercises, and one most salutary amongst the Lord’s people in the fellowship of his churches-essential, indeed, to the preservation of peace, and union, and social prosperity.

* 1 Peter 4:8.

Let this spirit, then-the spirit of love, be increasingly cultivated. "Love as brethren." "Let brotherly love continue." Let the world see in you "how Christians love one another." This is the evidence of your own discipleship,*1 while it is one of the means of the world’s conviction, and conversion to Christ.*2 *1f John 13:35. rr *2f John 17:20-21 rr

Mark here the identity of the great principles of Old and New Testament morality. Many speak of them as if there were essential differences between them. It is not so. They are the same. When Peter says, "Charity covereth the multitude of sins," he quotes Solomon. When Paul says, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head,"*3 he quotes Solomon. When our Lord himself says-" Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy;"*4-he does not quote the saying with approbation, as if it were a true interpretation of the law, and then lay down a law of his own in distinction from it. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy," was not the Law of Moses;-no, never, and in no wise. Love to personal enemies was inculcated by the Law of Moses as well as by the law of Christ.*5 Our blessed Master is to be understood as only reprobating the false gloss, and restoring and confirming the true sense of the law. The whole law is summed up by Him in the two great precepts of love to God and love to men; or in the one great principle of love.*6 And in the parable of the good Samaritan, He shows that this love included enemies and aliens, as well as friends, and countrymen, and kindred.*7 And this is the Book whose morality is to be set aside by the atheistical and heartless novelties of the "New moral world!" O the deceitfulness and presumption of the human heart!

*3 Romans 12:20. rr *4 Matthew 5:43-44. rr *5 Exodus 23:4-5. rr *6 Matthew 22:35-40. rr *7 For the full discussion of this subject, see Wardlaw’s Syst. Theol. Lects. x, 11: vol. 3. But of God’s Law, "holy, just, and good," we are violators. We have incurred its sentence of condemnation. Vain is every attempt to justify ourselves before God, by any appeal to our own characters when tried by it-either by the one or the other of its great precepts. We cannot stand. There must be something else for us than the Law, or our case is desperate. It is not enough that the excellence of the Law shows the book which contains it to be of God: its very excellence is what condemns us. It is a comfort, however, that it does prove the book which contains it to be divine; for the same book which contains the Law contains the gospel. The same book that shows us the ground on which we are condemned, tells us the ground on which we may be justified. The same book which reveals God as a Judge, reveals him as a Saviour. The same book that tells us of judicial wrath, tells us also of pardoning grace. The same book that appointed "the ministry of condemnation," appoints also the "ministration of righteousness." The same book that reveals Sinai, with its "blackness and darkness and tempest," reveals Calvary, with its propitiatory Lamb Of God, and its "still small voice" of love and mercy!

21-Pro_10:13-18

Proverbs 10:13-18

LECTURE XXI.

Proverbs 10:13-18.

"In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding. Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction. The rich man’s wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty. The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin. He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth. He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool." The sentiment expressed in the beautiful figure of the eleventh verse-" The mouth of the righteous is a well of life," is here, in the thirteenth verse, conveyed with more literal simplicity-" In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found." Where there is "understanding" in the mind, there will be "wisdom" in the "lips." The lips will utter what the mind contains. The possession of a sound understanding, that has been employed in laying up useful knowledge, not only provides a man with a source of constant enjoyment to himself, but enables him also to benefit others. It is not right that the lips of the man who "has understanding" should be always closed. He will know, indeed, when to speak and when to be silent; but to keep his knowledge entirely to himself, would be "lighting a candle and putting it under a bushel." It is no uncommon thing to find a proneness to talk, not in proportion to the fulness but to the emptiness of the mind. But no duty can be clearer than that the man who has understanding should make his understanding useful. And he who, truly wise, puts God first among the objects of his knowledge; and his own eternal interests first among the objects of his desire and pursuit, is the man who will, by his lips, be most truly serviceable to others. Speaking the dictates of an understanding enlightened by the Spirit of God, he may be the instrument of making others "wise unto salvation."

"But a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding." The sentiment is similar to that in the latter clause of verses eighth and tenth,-"A prating fool shall fall." "Void of understanding," does not mean destitute of natural intellect. The rod is not for the back of him who is thus naturally incapable of comprehending the lessons of divine wisdom. The character brought before us is that of the man who is full of himself, and who, in the vanity of his ignorant and self-sufficient mind, will not listen to the lessons of true wisdom. In childhood, this temper requires "the rod" of parental discipline, and will ever be exposing the subject of it to the necessity of such infliction. And in the community, when the self-will that has refused to receive instruction, or to be subject to salutary restraint, gives way to the indulgence of its evil propensities, it must be dealt with by the punitive coercion of the magistrate, for the general security and the public good. And in a sense still more serious, the man "void of understanding," who casts off the fear of God, who walks "in the sight of his eyes, and the imagination of his heart," exposes himself to penal visitations in a quarter infinitely higher. He is amenable to God for the use of his faculties; and by the abuse of them,-by their desecration to ignoble and worthless, or to wicked and ungodly ends,-he "treasures up unto

himself wrath against the day of wrath;" and, in agreement with the allusion of the wise man in the words before us, he shall be "beaten with many stripes." The sentiment is still similar in verse Proverbs 10:14. "Wise men lay up knowledge: but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction." To "lay up knowledge," very obviously implies that value is set upon it. Men never think of seeking and accumulating what they regard as worthless:-and in proportion as an object is prized, will be the degree of eagerness with which it is pursued, and of jealous vigilance with which it is "laid up" and guarded. Thus the Miser. With what an eye of restless and eager covetousness does he look after the acquisition of the idol of his heart's desires!-with what delight does he hug himself on his success!-with what avidity does he add the increase to his treasures-carefully secreting them from all access but his own! With a care incomparably more dignified and useful, how does the man of science mark and record every fact and observation, whether of his own discovery and suggestion or of those of others! How he exults in every new acquisition to his stores! He lays all up in his mind; or, fearful of a treacherous memory, in surer modes of record and preservation. Hints that lead to nothing at the time may lead to much afterwards. Some one, in another generation, may carry out into practical application, or into the formation of valuable theories, the facts and conjectures that are now, in apparent isolation, "laid up" for such possible future use. The true philosopher, to use a colloquial phrase, "has all his eyes about him." He allows nothing to escape notice, and nothing, if he can help it, to pass into oblivion. "He lays up knowledge." But alas! in this respect as in others, "the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light." Surely, if such be the practice of the wise men of the world, much more ought it to be of the truly wise, in regard to divine knowledge, the best and highest of all! * * Proverbs 2:1-4.

It is the Christian's duty to seek knowledge in all directions, and by whatever helps he can be enabled to find it. It is his duty to lay it up for use-first for the purposes of selfimprovement and self-direction, and then for the further purpose of enabling him to contribute to the instruction and guidance of others. And every Christian should make it a point of conscience, to find out the particular sphere in which the knowledge he has laid up may be best turned to account for others' benefit-whether in the occupations of a Christian instruction agency, or in those of a Sabbath-school teacher, or in any other more private or more public department.

"But the mouth of the foolish is near destruction." The expression is forcible, and its meaning sufficiently plain. The fool babbles without discretion-with reckless inconsideration and rashness. He expends his shallow stock thoughtlessly and at random. You can place no confidence in him. He speaks when he should be silent, and is silent when he should speak. He blabs out secrets, forgetting till it is too late that they were confidentially entrusted to him. He suits not his talk to time, place, or company, but comes out with communications to parties the very opposite to those for whom they were intended, or to whom they are appropriate; and is in constant danger of saying just the things he ought not to say. Thus you are ever trembling for him-never sure but the very next opening of his lips may run him into a snare, and expose him to mischief.

Standing opposed as this does here to "laying up knowledge," it clearly relates to the propensity to talk without knowledge and without thought. And while the words of folly may prove the ruin of the fool as to this world, by the injudiciousness of their utterance, and by the breach and destruction of confidence;-" the fool's mouth is near destruction" in a sense much more alarming. "For every idle word," says Jesus, "that men shall speak they shall give account in the day of judgment;" "for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." There may be a vast

amount of guilt in words: and thus "the mouth of the fool is near destruction," inasmuch as its very next utterance of profane and ungodly thought or feeling may place him on the very verge of hell; so that, were he cut off with the words on his lips and in the state of heart they indicate, he must sink into everlasting woe.

There is a pursuit that is incomparably more prevalent in the world than that of the "laying up of knowledge." To this Solomon refers in the next verse. It is that of wealth:-verse Proverbs 10:15. "The rich man’s wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty."

"Wealth" is pursued, as if there were the general and rooted conviction that it drew every thing in its train that heart could desire; as if it were the security for all that is necessary to the attainment and enjoyment of happiness, and the preservative from all that nature deprecates and dreads-a source of perfect security-a "strong city." It is evident that the wise man does not here express the sentiment that there is real security in the rich man’s wealth. It is the state of mind that is intended-the confidence which the rich man places in his riches. This is clear from the connexion in which the same words stand elsewhere-" The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit."* * Proverbs 18:11. No doubt the possession of riches preserves from the evils which are specially incident to poverty. The rich are free from the distresses of the poor. Even from these, however, the protection is, in the last degree, precarious; for the riches themselves which constitute it, are every instant insecure. The "strong city" is exposed perpetually to be assailed and taken; the high wall to be overthrown; the citadel invaded and rifled; and he who trusted to its munitions left exposed, defenceless, disappointed, and, in proportion to the amount of his previous confidence, forlorn, and wretched;-driven, at times, even to insanity, or tempted to self-murder; and, to avoid the privations of time, plunging into the infinitely more fearful privations and woes of eternity!

Besides, insecure as the bulwarks are, there are multitudes of evils, common to rich and poor, from which, even while they stand, they are no protection. They cannot keep out disease, either of body or of mind, or ward off relative any more than personal afflictions. They can neither keep away nor cure, neither alleviate nor remove, the agony of the gout or the stone. They cannot quench the burning fever. They cannot arrest the progress of insidiously mining consumption. They can neither hinder nor heal the still more affecting maladies of the mind, and replace Reason on its vacant throne. They cannot purchase exemption from the grave, for the wife of the bosom, for the child, the parent, or the friend. And, if they are incompetent to ends like these, far less can they Save The Soul. Death-the "king of terrors"-"the last enemy," shall scale the walls of the "strong city," and surprise its confiding occupant in the very citadel of his strength. Where can he find a barrier that can prevent his entrance; where among all his treasures a bribe that will stay his dart! And when "after death comes the judgment," what shall he have, when he stands, stript of all his worldly possessions, and, what is infinitely worse, stript of every plea of defence-which, but for the temptations of the world, he might in time have provided,-a poor, naked, helpless, trembling culprit, before the tribunal of a neglected God-what shall he have to stay judgment-to avert damnation? "Riches profit not in the day of wrath!"

"The destruction of the poor is their poverty." The word rendered destruction being the same as in the preceding verse, it would be arbitrary to change the sense. Retaining it, the words are capable of two meanings. First, there are temptations peculiar to poverty as well as to riches. Agur was

aware of these when he prayed, "Give me not poverty-lest I steal and take the name of my God in vain."* He who gives way to such influences of poverty, insures "destruction" as much as he who is "full and denies God, and says, Who is the Lord?" Secondly, as we found the preceding clause of the verse to refer to the state of mind-the confidence of safety inspired by his wealth in the bosom of the rich, it seems fair and natural to understand the latter clause on a similar principle. "The destruction of the poor" will then mean, that which, in their own eyes, is their destruction; that which engenders their fears and apprehensions-their constant dread of destruction. They are ever apt to contrast their circumstances with those of their wealthy neighbours, and to deplore their poverty, and fret at it as that which keeps them down, depriving them of all good, and exposing them to all evil. And, without doubt, it is the source of many and heavy sufferings, both-in the way of privation and of endurance. But the poor may indulge their fears, and make themselves unhappy without cause. Their forebodings may be more than groundless. If by their poverty they are exposed to some evils, they are exempted by it from others. If they but trust in God, they have a far surer ground of confidence than wealth can ever afford to the richest on earth. They are under the eye and the care of that Providence, without which even "a sparrow falleth not to the ground." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower"-how much stronger and more impregnable than any which wealth can construct! Thither running, they are safe. "Their place of defence is the munition of rocks."

* See Proverbs 30:7-9. And as riches cannot save, poverty, blessed be God! cannot hinder salvation. No, nor can it shut out the soul from the present joys of salvation, or the consolations that spring from the "exceeding great and precious promises" of God’s covenant. On the contrary-" Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" James 2:5. The poor have, at times, been so pressed by their fears, as to allow themselves to be tempted to sin, in order to shun the "destruction" they dread. But Oh! let sin be ever more dreaded than all the ills, in all their accumulation, of poverty. Remember,-sin will do, what poverty cannot do: it will ruin the soul. Let the poor seek the peace, and comfort, and safety which are imparted by the gospel; and thus, possessing the "true riches," they will not need to" fear what man can do unto them." The worst of all destructions will be far from them. They shall know, in their experience, that "godliness with contentment is great gain;" and when "heart and flesh fail; God will be the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever."

Verse Proverbs 10:16. "The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin."

"The labour of the righteous" may be understood in either a more restricted or a more general sense; either of his daily labour in his worldly business, or of all his active engagements. The words are alike true as to both. With regard to the former-it "tendeth to life" inasmuch as it is conducted on right principles, and with a view to right ends; not to those of mere selfishness, but to those of piety and benevolence. It "tendeth to life," by contributing to the truest happiness of his own life, in correspondence with the words of Him who said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive;" and it "tendeth to life" also, by imparting, as far as his means and opportunities extend, happiness to the lives of others.

There is a higher sense too in which it "tendeth to life." And in saying this, I refer, not solely to ordinary labour, but to the whole of the active engagements of the child and servant of God. They

all bear a certain relation to his final acceptance, and attainment of life everlasting. I need hardly say-on no ground of personal merit. The only ground of acceptance and life to any son or daughter of fallen man is found in the merit of the divine Mediator-in the righteousness, the sacrifice, and the intercession of Immanuel. But genuine faith in that Mediator-whether existing before or after his manifestation in the flesh, according to the amount of existing revelation-must be shown by the "work of faith and the labour of love." And the "labour of the righteous"-of which the true principle is known to the Judge, "the searcher of hearts," who distinguishes between the false and the true, according to the motive in operation,-will be graciously accepted, as the labour of one "accepted in the Beloved," and whose works are recognized as having their source, not in the spirit of self-righteousness, but in the power of faith. God the Father will then testify his regard to righteousness in two ways:-first, in justifying sinners on the ground of a righteousness fully commensurate with all the demands of his law, in their full amount of spirituality and purity-the perfect righteousness of his own Son:-and secondly, by making personal righteousness of character, or the holy influence of the truth, the necessary evidence of interest in the righteousness thus provided in Christ for the justification of the ungodly;-acknowledging the good works of his people, as works conformable to the precepts of his law, but evangelical in their dictating motive; and bestowing the reward of free grace, according to the measure both of rectitude in the act and rectitude in the principle.* * Comp. Luke 12:33; Luke 19:12-19; Romans 2:3-11; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Hebrews 6:10-12. On the other hand, the fruit of the wicked (tendeth) to sin." The contrast is striking. It is not directly said, as the previous clause might lead us to expect, "tendeth to death," but "to sin." This, by the wise man, is considered as the same thing. It "tendeth to sin," and consequently to death. Thus it is said, "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* Between the two there is an intimate and inseparable connexion.

* James 1:15. The "fruit of the wicked" means here, apparently, the immediate proceeds of his labour-his income-his revenue. And the idea intended, seems to be, that when the wicked man prospers, and so acquires possessions, they only enlarge his means of sinning; only increase the amount of his selfish, worldly, vicious indulgence. The fruit of his labour, neither first nor last, is given to God, for the glory of His name, or for purposes in harmony with His will. The modes of using it, therefore, only serve to augment guilt, and aggravate the sentence of death. To such, by their abuse of it, prosperity proves a curse instead of a blessing. Whatever tends to death must be so regarded. Oh! it is an affecting sight, to behold men, as they call it, enjoying life, when their real occupation is-fitting themselves for destruction, "treasuring up wrath," forging for themselves "chains of darkness," ensuring death-the death that never dies, and adding virulence to the venom of its eternal sting. The sentiment of the next verse is very similar to some that have already come under review-" He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth." The instruction meant, I need not say, is the instruction of wisdom-salutary, saving instruction-the "counsel of God." He who humbly hears and "keeps" it, "is in the way of life"-in the way of present happiness, and in the way to life eternal. "But he that refuseth reproof-the reproof that would admonish and bring him to God, "erreth." Under the influence of a miserable delusion, he wanders farther and farther from "the way of life." He is not, like him who "keepeth instruction," in that way: he is already out of it; and he diverges from it more and more widely. He is like a traveller who has missed his road, and yet will persist in taking his own course, pertinaciously refusing all direction from those who are able to give it him. That traveller may fall into the pit or over the precipice; or,

overtaken by the darkness and the storm, become desperate, and lay him down and die. We pity him; but his blood is on his own head. Thus it is with the-inner who "refuses reproof," who shuts his ear to remonstrance, however affectionate and earnest, and to every voice of faithful kindness that calls him to the way of life.*

* The verse here commented on, may be rendered, "He that keepeth instruction is a way of life," i.e. is a guide to the way of life; "but he that refuseth reproof causeth to err."-Comp. marg. of E. V.

Verse Proverbs 10:18. "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander is a fool." In the character depicted in this verse there is a threefold evil. There is, first, the indulgence of a sinful passion-the passion of hatred. God's word gives it no countenance. Its injunction is-"Love your enemies." There is only one description of hatred that is there tolerated. God himself is said to "hate all the workers of iniquity." But He hates them only as such. It is the character, not the person that is hated. If God hated the wicked personally, He would have pleasure in his death, a sentiment He solemnly abjures, as foreign to his nature. It is in a corresponding sense then, that we must understand the Psalmist when he says, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee?. .. I hate them with perfect hatred."* It was simply as the enemies of God that he hated them. Could he have converted them into friends of God, and thus brought them to the enjoyment of His favour, and to the life which it imparts, he would willingly have done it: and that would have been the act, not of hatred, but of the truest love. We are not allowed to hate any human being.

* Psalms 139:21-22.

Superadded to this, there is the guilt of hypocrisy and falsehood: he "hideth hatred with lying lips." The lips that cover hatred by lies-that is, by words that are in opposition to the true state of the mind and heart,-must of course be the lips of flattery-pretending love and friendly feeling, while mischievous devices, the dictate of cherished malice, are revolved in the mind. There can be few things more despicable or more detestable than this malignity of falsehood-oil on the lips and venom in the heart-all that is good in words, all that is evil in inward wish. There are not terms in language strong enough to express the abomination and the guilt of such conduct.

There is too the further guilt of treachery. I am disposed to take the words, "and he that uttereth a slander," in this connexion, not as a new and distinct character, but an additional feature only of the former. The man is supposed to "hide hatred by lying lips" from him who is the object of it, while, at the same time, he is slandering him to others. This is an addition to the diabolical wickedness. And at the same time, he who acts the part described is emphatically "a fool." Even in a worldly sense-even on the principles of common discretion, he is foolish; for the slander is almost sure to reach the ear of the person whom he flatters; and then he stands in the unenviable position of one selfbetrayed, and procures himself contempt, indignation, desertion, and mischief, for his pains. He becomes an outlaw from all reputable society; is put under the ban and the disgrace even of the world.-But in a higher sense "he is a fool." The odious want of principle displayed by him brings him under a ban more fearful than that of the world,-fixing upon him the curse of that God who "abhors the deceitful man;" and who hath doomed all liars to have their part in the "lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."* * Psalms 5:6; Revelation 21:8. Where is the man who will not join in the strongest terms of reprobation in regard to this hypocritical and treacherous villany? The world, as well as Christians, are open-mouthed against hypocrisy. There is often, however, a great deal of it practised under less obnoxious designations,-a great amount

of dissimulation and flattery that passes under the names of needful prudence, and the etiquette of compliment and courtesy; in which, fair and fulsome words to the face, are followed by the curse of dislike, or the jeer of scorn, or the tale of slander, or the self-gratulation of good riddance, as soon as the back is turned. But the hypocrisy which has the largest measure of the world's sarcastic virulence is-religious hypocrisy. And assuredly, no one can go beyond due bounds in the condemnation of it, wherever it really discovers itself. It is to be feared, however, that the detestation of hypocrisy is, in the case of many, only a convenient cover for the dislike of religion. They hate hypocrisy. And yet, how comes it that they have such a chuckling delight in the detection of instances of it? Were it the object of their serious hatred on right principles, such detection should fill them with sincere, heart-felt grief. But the manner in which they are affected by such discoveries, real or supposed, shows that they are not shocked by the dishonour done to God by such false pretensions, nor by the guilt brought by them on the consciences of those by whom they are made, and the fearful consequences to which they are thereby exposed. They avail themselves of such detections to throw out their general sarcasms and their sweeping innuendoes against the professors of religion at large. They shrewdly suspect that "it is not all gold that glitters;" that where there is most show there is often least substance. And, where there is more than ordinary appearance even of humble and unostentatious devotion, they are ready with another proverb, alleging, with a meaning wink of the eye, that "deep waters flow smoothly;" but that these saints (possibly the designation preceded with an epithet of vulgar malediction) are all, if one but knew them, much alike.

Now, my friends, we go fully along with you in your strongest reprobation of hypocrisy, of false and treacherous pretensions, whether to men or to God,--and especially, if you will, the latter. But forget not that the very idea of hypocrisy implies a reality of which it is the simulation. We have no objection that you be as cautious as you please in crediting the professions of religion; but it were a very unwarrantable abandonment of all charity to deny that there is any sincerity to be found. When you know that a forgery exists on the notes of any Bank, or on any department of the national Coinage, it is natural, and it is right, that you should be the more jealous in examining and distinguishing the counterfeit from the true. But why are you thus careful? It is because you set a value on the true. You never think of concluding that all are forged together. It would be well, if your abhorrence of hypocritical profession arose from your really setting a value on true religion itself-loving it, and deploring its desecration. But, if this were your state of mind and heart, it would carry you farther than even to the unfeigned admiration of it in others. You would be religious yourselves. You would feel at once its true dignity and its true happiness; and, not with "lying lips," but with lips of truth, giving utterance to the feelings of devotion, cherished in "simplicity and godly sincerity," you would unite with all "that in every place call upon the name of the Lord." You would give yourselves, heart and hand, to His service, under the influence of the "faith that worketh by love."

22-Pro_10:19-32

Proverbs 10:19-32

LECTURE XXII.

Proverbs 10:19-32.

"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise. The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom. The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it. It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom. The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted. As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation. As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him. The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish. The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth. The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness."

Three of these verses relate to the same subject. It is one which has come before us more than once already-the use of the tongue-its mischievous and its beneficial effects. The maxim contained in the first is, like many similar ones, of a general character. It is no easy matter for a man to be a great talker, without saying both foolish things and faulty. The more especially, that men who are full of talk are in most cases (for there are exceptions) superficial men, without much solidity of judgment to direct and regulate their speech. Their extreme propensity to talk makes them forgetful of the common but just and needful maxim, "Think before you speak." They speak without thinking. To hear them, one would fancy they had some pleasant sensation in the very movements of the organs of utterance; or that they were using them for the sole purpose of giving them volubility by practice; or that the sound of their voices was peculiarly grateful to their own ear, or, in their vain fancy, to the ear of others. Talk they must. And what is nearest the surface comes forth, be it right or wrong.

"But he that refraineth his lips is wise." To "refrain the lips," is to be "sparing of words." He is truly wise who speaks with due consideration of when, where, and what.

There is one case in which "the multitude of words" is singularly inappropriate. I mean, in worship:-when a man pours out a volume of talk to God; as if this were what God desired and would be pleased with; as if the worshipper (if such he should be called) were vain of his fine and fluent speech, even before the throne of the Infinite Majesty, and imagined he should be "heard for his much speaking"-either for the quantity or the quality of his words! *1 How beautifully is the truth of this remark exemplified in the pattern of prayer given us by Jesus himself-the great, the Divine

Teacher!*2 *1 See Ecclesiastes 5:1-3. rr *2 Matthew 6:9-13.

Verse 20. "The tongue of the just is as choice silver: the heart of the wicked is little worth." The sentiment in the former clause is very similar to that in verses 11 and 13. The figure is different. The lessons of instruction, the counsels, consolations, directions, and reproofs "of the just" are precious as silver-as "choice silver,"-"silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times." They effect ends which silver, ever so refined, cannot attain.-The contrast, in the second clause, is striking:-" But the heart of the wicked is little worth." Why is the contrast not between the tongue of the wicked and the tongue of the just? Simply because the state of the heart gives its character to the tongue. If the one be "little worth," so will be the other. There is a beautiful correspondence between the language of our Lord and that of Solomon. Jesus speaks of the "good treasure" that is in the heart of the good man;* and Solomon speaks of his tongue being as "choice silver." What he utters, is just a part of the "good treasure" brought out from within for use.

*3 Luke 6:46.

Men admire talent, and are loath to think ill of him who possesses it, and to whom they feel themselves indebted, perhaps, for both pleasure and information. They weave the golden threads of genius into a vail, which they throw over the moral corruptions and defects of the heart and character. They allow talent to stand as a compensation for vice, and palliate irreligion for the sake of mental eminence. But it is to the heart that God especially, and in the first instance, looks. It is a heart renewed by grace; a heart in which the truth dwells by faith, and works with holy power; a heart under the dominant influence of heavenly wisdom;-it is such a heart that, in God’s sight, renders the tongue "as choice silver." It is not the facts or demonstrations of science, nor the selectest beauties of elegant literature, that are here meant; but the lessons of divine truth. The most brilliant display of parts in conversation would not, in the Bible, receive the designation here used, were not the eloquence of the lips seasoned with the salt of genuine piety; and so calculated, not to minister amusement and intellectual gratification merely, but what the Bible calls "grace to the hearers." And when, in any case, the tendency is of an opposite nature,-were all the brilliancy of genius ever possessed by the human mind concentrated in the one individual speaker, and flowing with all captivating sweetness from his lips,-this would be no protection to him, from the severest reprehension, and the heaviest denunciation of Heaven. Nay, the reprehension would be all the severer, the denunciation all the heavier, in proportion to the amount of intellect thus unsanctified, and withheld from God,-unbaptized by the Spirit, unconsecrated to God’s glory. Genius thus unhallowed, becomes only the more perilous, the more pernicious, the more guilty. In the same strain it is added, verse Proverbs 10:21. "The lips of the righteous feed many: but fools die for want of wisdom." This is the same sentiment, under still another, and a very natural figure. Instruction, counsel, and comfort are represented as the food and nourishment of the soul. The righteous man may be a poor man:-yet he possesses what may render him, on many occasions, far more valuable, because far more useful, than the possessor of the largest amount of "choice silver." The silver may provide "the meat that perisheth;" but the lips of the righteous furnish that which "endureth unto life eternal." The words of his mouth give life to the dead, and they strengthen the life of the spiritually living. He directs the perplexed by wholesome counsel, and he soothes the afflicted with seasonable and tender sympathy,-thus feeding and cherishing the drooping and fainting spirit. The righteous man, by the wisdom of his lips, "both saves himself and them that hear him." On the contrary, "Fools die for want of wisdom." That is, of the true wisdom-"

the fear of God." In spite of all their acquisitions in science, and all their reputation and honour, applause and flattery, for their worldly sagacity, they "die." No power in the range of science or art can ward off either the first or the "second death"-no devices of the wiliest sagacity, can elude the detection, or perplex the councils, and nullify the judgment of the Omniscient and Almighty! With the character of the righteous comes, in sufficiently natural connexion, "the blessing of the Lord:" for it is on them His blessing rests:-verse Proverbs 10:22. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." The expression-" the blessing of the Lord maketh rich," is evidently susceptible of two meanings;-either that God’s blessing constitutes true riches; so that he who possesses it has in that blessing itself the best and most desirable wealth; or, that by the blessing of God riches are acquired. Men fancy that the requisites to such acquisition are in themselves. The Bible ever inculcates an opposite lesson-reminding them of their dependence, and of the necessity of the divine favour to success* * Deuteronomy 8:14; Deuteronomy 8:17-18; 1 Chronicles 29:12-16; Daniel 5:22-23. The meaning of the latter clause will, of course, be modified according as we affix the one or the other of these senses to the former. If the first be the true meaning, then the words, "He addeth no sorrow with it," must signify, that this blessing is in itself the source of the purest and richest joy. The child of God, indeed, feels, like others, the sorrows of life. His religion is not the parent of apathy, but rather of more acute and tender sensibility; but the blessing of his heavenly Father sweetens every bitter cup that is mingled for him; sustains him under the pressure of the heaviest calamity; nay, even converts the sorrows of life themselves into grounds of praise, by rendering them the means of spiritual benefit. The Lord "adds no sorrow." It gives no real cause for sorrow; inasmuch as, "all working together for good," all shall be joy in the end. And then the blessing shall be realized in its fulness-sorrow and sighing having for ever fled away.

If the second be the meaning, then this latter clause will signify, that the riches obtained by the good man, who nought them in dependence on the divine blessing, being acquired with a good conscience, and used to God’s glory, are enjoyed by him without the agitations of perplexing anxiety and care, the secret gnawings of self-accusation and remorse, or the harassing distraction of spirit arising from the haunting apprehension of their loss. Both senses are good, and both equally true and natural.

Cultivate, brethren, a spirit of dependence, and a spirit of gratitude. Amid the bustle and excitement of worldly business, Christians themselves are in danger of forgetting their entire dependence; in danger of losing sight of God; of taking undue credit to their own sagacity in scheming and following out their schemes; of "offering sacrifice to their own net, and burning incense to their own drag;" but "Fond mortals but themselves beguile, When on themselves they rest;

Blind is their wisdom, weak their toil, By thee, O Lord, unblest!" And mark-no wealth can be comfortably enjoyed, that has not been acquired, in dependence on the divine blessing, by means which have the sanction of God’s law; and that is not used in a manner and for ends in accordance with God’s will.

We should reckon a man deranged in mind who should, in the way of pastime, break those laws ^of human society which are guarded by the sanction of death. Yet how much more are they chargeable with derangement, by whom the laws of God are violated with reckless mirth, although

the sanction which guards them is one so incomparably more fearful! To do this in sport!-how inconceivably infatuated! Such folly, however, is to be found:-verse Proverbs 10:23. "It is as sport to a fool to do mischief: but a man of understanding hath wisdom." The "mischief" here spoken of is not, I apprehend, to be understood, exclusively at least, of that in which the giddy, volatile, thoughtless minds of youth are prone to indulge; which, however annoying, ends in no very serious consequences to those who are the subjects of it. Even this youthful propensity, however, is one constantly in danger of running to an extreme, and requires to be curbed and restrained. If parents and guardians treat any of its mischievous tricks as mere sources of amusement, there is a temptation to set the wits to work to devise a still better one next time; so that what began in jest may come to end in something more serious; and the young may be tempted to adopt and act on the unprincipled and vexatious maxim-"No sport without mischief!" But "the fool," considered as the man who "has not the fear of God before his eyes," goes much further than this. He makes "sport" of injuring the character and reputation, the property and interest, the personal and domestic comfort and happiness, of others. And, in still more general terms, he commits sin with a sportive and inconsiderate lightness, and heedlessness of consequences. Such men injure and disquiet their neighbours. They tempt others to crime, and laugh at the success of their temptation-enjoying the sport so much the more if they see any thing like remorse in those whom they have seduced. They treat with merriment even acts of nefarious turpitude, if they can be perpetrated with present impunity.

They hear with derision the admonitions and expostulations of the godly-jeering at them as all cant and hypocrisy; and, to show their superiority to restraint, and their proud defiance of threatened danger, they will sometimes repeat the evil reproved in the very face of the reprover, and that too with aggravations; or commit some other act still worse, and delight in laughing at the gravity of countenance and the heaviness of heart with which their conduct is contemplated. Alas for human nature!-there is such folly. But on the contrary, "The man of understanding"-the man enlightened by the truth and Spirit of God, "hath wisdom;" wisdom which prevents his acting so infatuated and ruinous a part. He considers all that belongs to his neighbour as by the law of God-the law of love-rendered sacred; and "mischief" which he would not like as practised upon himself, he shrinks from practising upon others. All sin, too, he regards with any feeling but that of sportiveness-any eye but that of mirth and encouragement. He dreads it, as of all evils the worst; hateful to God; ensuring His displeasure and curse; polluting and ruining the soul.

Sport and happiness are not one. When there is laughter in the mouth, there may be no joy in the heart. There is such a thing as laughing away terror; hiding real alarm by assumed gaiety; concealing anguish of conscience by the mirth of social revelry. The reflection is suggested by next verse-"The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him: but the desire of the righteous shall be granted." The wicked, then, has his fears-secret suppressed forebodings-the "fearful looking-for of judgment." "Even in his laughter, the heart is sad; and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Till he has arrived at that most appalling of all states-" having the conscience seared with a hot iron," he will have his misgivings, his disquieting apprehensions, scaring, like "a sudden phantom, his maddest mirth. And his fears are far from groundless:-they "shall come upon him." And not merely his fears in life; but the worst and most overwhelming of his fears-the fear that assails his spirit, when he comes to the verge of an eternal world, (the great testing-time of human principles, human joys, and human hopes,) all, and more than all, "shall come upon him." During his career of

iniquity, he might affect to call such alarms, whether he saw them in others or at times felt them rising within himself, superstitious and womanish fears; but there is a reality in them. Conscience is in them; God is in them. They "shall come upon him."

"While the "God with whom we have to do" is true to his threatenings, he is no less true to his promises. The righteous are as sure of the fulfilment of their hopes, as the wicked are of the realization of their fears:-" But the desire of the righteous shall be granted." This might be taken comprehensively. "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."* The good man's "desire," in regard to all spiritual supplies and blessings here, and for the enjoyment, not of temporal mercies merely but of God's love in them, "shall be granted," in answer to believing prayer. But the connexion leads us to consider the words as having special reference to the fulness of his desire, in the completion of all his hopes of future blessedness. And that blessedness shall be something far surpassing the thoughts of the most capacious mind, and the flights of the loftiest imagination.

* 1 John 5:14-15. And let me here apply a test of present character. The sources of the happiness of heaven will be the same things with those which are the desire of the righteous now. Is "the desire of their souls," for instance, to their Lord and to "the remembrance of him?" There the desire shall be satisfied:-they shall "see him as he is," and be " for ever with him."-Is their desire after communion with God 1 There, "He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them!"-Is their desire after freedom from sin, and perfection in holiness? There they shall be "like Him" who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."-Is their desire after the joy of pure and holy fellowship with the family of the redeemed? There, all shall be clothed with the white robe, not only of imputed righteousness but of personal sanctity-all pure, even as God is pure!-Is their desire after perfect and permanent deliverance from all the sorrows and sufferings of time? There, "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," Revelation 7:16-17. This last may be considered as the desire of nature: the others are the desires of grace. And what we earnestly wish all to bear in mind is-that unless these spiritual and heavenly desires are in the heart now, there can be no wellgrounded anticipation of the possession of the blessings hereafter.

Many and striking are the figures employed in Scripture, to impress on the mind the transient nature of the prosperity of sinners, as contrasted with the stability and security of God's people. Here is one:-verse Proverbs 10:25. "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation." The whirlwind is rapid and impetuous, mighty and destructive, while it lasts. But it lasts not long: it "passes away." Such is the course of the wicked. Their triumphs, their boastings, their sportive mischiefs, are only as. the shortlived fury of the hurrying tempest.* * Comp. Job 27:16-21; Psalms 37:35-36; Psalms 58:9. In the latter clause-" But the righteous is an everlasting foundation," the verb is supplementary: "But the righteous-an everlasting foundation." Some supply has; making the words mean that he builds on a firm and permanent basis; he trusts in the "rock of ages"-in the "precious corner-stone, the sure foundation." But the antithesis in the verse leads us rather to the idea of his own stability and endurance, as represented in other passages;* and in verse 30th of this chapter, "The righteous shall never be removed." Perhaps there may be a reference to the violence of the wicked being

directed against him, and his remaining, under the protection of the divine power, unmoved, unharmed. The whirlwind assails the mountain; sweeps and eddies along with impetuous and tearing fury; leaves here and there slight traces of its raging course:-but the mountain stands unshaken on its deep-laid and immoveable basis. Such shall be the amount of the wicked's power; such the harmlessness of its results, against those who are under the protection of Jehovah. It shall spend itself, and pass away; and the righteous shall not be moved. "If God be for him, who can be against him?"

* Psalms 15:5; Psalms 112:6-8; Matthew 7:24-25. And reversing the question-as with awful truth it may be reversed-in regard to the wicked themselves:-if God be against them, who can be for them? Could they succeed in rousing the universe to take their part, what would all its combined powers and resources avail against the Maker of the universe?-against Him who says, with divine majesty, of all the opposition that can be brought to bear against Him-" Who will set the briars and the thorns against me in the day of battle? I will go through them,-I will burn them up together!"

It is worthy of being noticed, how often the two ideas of wickedness and sloth present themselves together to the mind of Solomon; the one apparently suggesting the other. Having spoken of the wicked, he brings before us the sluggard-"As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him."

There is no difficulty as to the meaning of the comparisons here used. Vinegar, or the sour grape, sets the teeth most unpleasantly on edge;-smoke, and especially smoke from particular descriptions of fuel, smarts, pains, and injures the eyes. All have felt this: and all who have employed a sluggish messenger for the execution of their business, instantly feel the appropriateness of the comparisons. He is sent for something you long to have, and are in special haste to obtain. You wait, and wait; you look out, and look out again, and again; but he is never like to return. You get impatient, irritated, fretful, angry. He is commissioned on some business that requires despatch,-in which, indeed, expedition is every thing: he lingers and loiters, and saunters away his time in listless lounging or trilling, till the opportunity is lost, and we are mortified and harassed by disappointment. And apart from the consideration of actually evil effects, the very sight of the yawning, lazy loiterer, whether engaged on our own business or that of others, is teasing and provoking. One is ever disposed to push him out of the way. He is a perfect annoyance-"as vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes." The sentiment in next verse-"The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened," has been already fully illustrated* We pass on.

* Comp. Proverbs 3:2; Proverbs 3:16; Proverbs 9:11.

Verse Proverbs 10:28. "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish."-" The hope of the righteous" is present "gladness." O what gladness! above all that earth can grant, and springing from a source with which earth cannot interfere! And it shall end in "gladness:" not in disappointment and shame, but in all the joy of a glorious fulfilment. What gladness has the "hope of the righteous" imparted to many a soul, in passing through the valley of the shadow of death; enabling the happy combatant with the king of terrors to sing in the very midst of his conflict, as in triumph over an already conquered and fallen enemy-" O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" 1 Corinthians

15:55-57. And what a day of exulting gladness will that be, when, "the hope of the righteous" having been completed by the resurrection from the dead-the "multitude which no man can number shall stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands; and cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" Revelation 7:9-10. "But" on the contrary, and in contrast with the fulfilled anticipations and perfected joys of the righteous, "the expectation of the wicked shall perish." What a striking and affecting counterpart to the statement in verse 24th (Proverbs 10:24)-"The fear of the wicked shall come upon him!" He has his fears; they are realized:-he has his hopes; they are frustrated and lost. The fears are well-founded; the hopes delusive and vain. They are based and built on false and deceitful views of himself and of God. They have no foundation ill truth. They are like the house built on the sand, which may stand in the summer’s sunshine and calm, but gives way, with tremendous and utter downfall, before the storm and the flood of winter. His "expectation shall perish." He flattered himself with its stability; but it was while it was untried:-in the end he is buried in its ruins. "His hope is as the giving up of the ghost." The vision that has deceived him,-the unreal phantom that has cheated his eyes and allured his wandering steps onward and onward to the gates of hell shall vanish then in "the blackness of darkness for ever!"-all his fears fulfilled; all his hopes for ever blasted! The next verse may be taken in connexion with this, as assigning a sufficient cause for the "hope of the righteous," being "gladness" in their end-" The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity." The connexion may not very readily appear as the words stand in our translation. They may be rendered-" Strength to the upright, is the way of the Lord" "but destruction to the workers of iniquity." Either rendering holds out the communication of divine strength as the ground of the final perseverance of the righteous, and their happiness at last. It is the "way of the Lord"-his usual mode of dealing with his people, to give strength to them when they seek him, and thus "keep them through faith unto salvation." * And the other part of "the way of the Lord" is, "destruction to the workers of iniquity." "Evil shall not dwell with Him." As "the just God,"-"a God of truth and without iniquity," this must be his way. Under his holy and equitable administration, the righteous and the wicked can never possibly fare alike.

* Comp. Isaiah 40:28-31; Deuteronomy 33:25. The sentiment is still similar in verse Proverbs 10:30-"The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth."-The word "removed" might be interpreted of his confidence and security under the protection of Omnipotence. But the contrast, or antithesis in the verse leads to a somewhat different interpretation. "The earth" should be rendered "the land." The reference in the words appears to be to the promises made by Jehovah to his people, of continued and permanent possession, on condition of their continued obedience; and his threatenings against them on the ground of unbelief and rebellion. These promises were made to the righteous. Canaan was the land of promise. It was obtained by faith; and "by the obedience of faith" it continued to be held; and by unbelief and disobedience it was to be forfeited and lost.* Accordingly, the various removals of Israel were for their failure in faith and obedience,-for their unrighteousness and wickedness, as the indication of a heart departing from the Lord. The language, addressed to the people at large, always, of course, implies God’s regard to the righteous considered individually, and the assurance of his blessing to them.

* Comp. Deuteronomy 9:4-6, with Deuteronomy 11:8-9; Deuteronomy 11:26-28, and Deuteronomy 29:24-28.

Even the present world the people of God enjoy better than the wicked; inasmuch as they enjoy it with his blessing and the assurance of his love, imparting to all its lawful possessions and enjoyments a zest and relish of which the men of the world, even "when their corn and their wine are increased," know nothing. And then, "the land" shall be inherited by them for ever-the "better country, even the heavenly"-the "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." And when they once set foot on the inheritance above; when they once settle there; thence they shall never be removed. They shall have it in everlasting possession, by the charter, sealed with blood, and sure as the word and oath of Him "with whom it is impossible to lie." And that land "the wicked shall not inhabit." No foot of the "uncircumcised and the unclean" shall ever tread its holy soil. There shall be a full and final separation of the vile from the precious. Into the "holy city,"-the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," there "shall in nowise enter anything that defileth." All there shall be "holy and without blemish." That land shall never need to rest by the banishment of its inhabitants, that it may enjoy its Sabbaths, which had been desecrated by the ungodly and profane. Its one universal and perpetual Sabbath of holy rest shall never be disturbed; and it shall be enjoyed alike by all the blessed inhabitants,-being, in its character and in all its holy exercises, in full harmony with the pure and delighted feelings of every individual of the countless multitude of the redeemed.

We dwell not on the closing verses, as the sentiment they contain is very similar to what has been repeatedly before us. Let a single remark suffice.-While the tendency of all that "the righteous" utter, from the "good treasure of the heart," is to profit souls, and to "save them from death "-the tendency, on the contrary, of the "corrupt communication" that proceeds out of the mouth of the wicked,-of the words of the "froward tongue" and the "perverse lips,"-is to spread spiritual death;-every word bearing upon it a taint of evil that carries pestilential infection to the heart. O! that men would but consider, not only the direct sin committed against God by the utterance of evil, but the amount of moral mischief of which such utterance may prove the present and ultimate occasion! As by the slightest puncture, the virus of putrefaction may find its way into the entire animal frame, inflaming, swelling, fevering, mortifying, killing; so may the virus of moral contamination and corruption be conveyed to the soul by a single word, and effect its present disorder and its final destruction; while, from that infected soul the contagion may spread to the injury and ruin of thousands.

23-Pro_11:1-9

Proverbs 11:1-9

LECTURE XXIII.

Proverbs 11:1-9.

"A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight. When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom. The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them. Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death. The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness. When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust men perisheth. The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead. An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered."

It is common for a general sentiment to be conveyed under a limited form of expression; for an individual case to be selected, to illustrate and enforce a universal principle. Thus it is iii the first of these verses. The general affirmation is manifestly couched under a particular one, that all unjust dealing is "an abomination to the Lord;" while all righteous dealing is "his delight." The God of the Bible is-"the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness, and whose countenance doth behold the upright." And the pervading injunctions of his word are in harmony with this representation of his character. Under similar terms to those before us, the divine injunctions and prohibitions are frequent and strong,*1 and the violation of this maxim is one of the sins which we find complained of by the prophets, as amongst the causes of the divine judgments upon Israel.*2 *1 See Leviticus 19:35-36; Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Proverbs 16:11, &c.

*2 Hosea 12:7; Amos 8:4-6; Micah 6:10-11, &c.

I speak to many who are men of business. Do not, pray, take the language literally, as if it had application only to such as, in their business, actually require the use of scales and weights? It involves the principle of all your mutual dealings. In all these, the eye of God is upon you.

Many are pleased at the dexterity with which they practise their deceptions. The fraud is undiscovered; and, being undiscovered, is unfelt by those on whom it is practised:-and what is never known and never felt, can be no harm. So they think. But God sees it; and He estimates the action on no such principle:-no; nor is it the principle on which you would estimate it, were you the party defrauded. You have no idea, in your own case, of admitting that what is not missed is not lost; or that the cleverness of the fraud is any palliation of it. You do not think the better of the merchant with his "balances of deceit," that the unfairness of the balance is ingeniously concealed. You do not regard it as a compensation for the property abstracted from your plundered house or warehouse, that the impression of your keys has been adroitly obtained, or the mode of entrance

skillfully devised and expertly executed. You do not approve of the laws of ancient Sparta, which, to encourage cleverness and sleight of hand, rewarded instead of punishing the youthful thief who could steal without detection. Depend upon it, if you plume yourself on the dexterity with which you have contrived and executed a plan for cozening your neighbour, it will be no palliation with God, nor will any amount of such dexterity produce any abatement of His sentence of condemnation. It is the moral principle, or want of principle, in which the evil lies; and the very measure of thought and contrivance expended for the purpose of ensuring success in the contravention of God’s law, instead of diminishing, will serve to aggravate your guilt in His sight. The "abomination" will be only the more loathsome.

Many are the subterfuges, many the quirks and evasions, to which men betake themselves, with a view to shelter their consciences and keep them easy in the practice of iniquity. And amongst others may be particularized the commonness of certain modes of deception and fraudulent dealing. Oh! say they, there is no man in the line by whom it is not more or less done; and if we do not conform to the custom, we shall be undersold by our neighbours, and may shut shop at once. Then, I reply, if you are Christians, do so. Run all risks, incur all losses, rather than offend God. What you do is not the less "abomination" to Him, that it is done by many as well as by you. That is only so much the more lamentable; and the stronger is the reason why Christians should, by their stern adherence to integrity, rebuke the prevalent practice, by acting as exceptions to it.-There are few departments, for instance, in which fraud is so little thought of, as when it is practised upon the revenue of the country. And yet there is nothing as to which the requisitions of the Bible are more peremptory, and which is more distinctly and strongly put under the regulation of a sensitive conscience. The difference between the man who cheats a single customer and the man who cheats the revenue is, that the former defrauds one, while the latter defrauds millions. Let not your question be, fellow-Christians, What is interest? but, What is duty? not, What will man think? but, What will God think? Shun every approach to what you know, from His word, to be "an abomination" to Him; and practise unvaryingly, in defiance of human opinions and of all apprehended consequences, that in which He delights;-for of all evils the worst is God’s displeasure, and of all blessings the richest is God’s favour. The latter is cheaply purchased by the loss of every earthly good; nor is there any amount of such good that can be a compensation for the former. Let it be the sentiment of every mind, and the feeling of every heart, that one frown of God is enough to annihilate every kind and degree of benefit that can arise from transgression.

If there is anything in which the phrase an honourable pride might be used with propriety, it is the case now mentioned of unbending, uncompromising integrity of principle. But the very next verse teaches us that pride, in every form, must be denied-" When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." The entire Bible, from the beginning to the close, points against pride. All that is said in it of what man is; and all that is revealed of the way of salvation, both as it regards the ground of the sinner’s hope, and as it regards the means of the believer’s preservation to the end, has the same tendency-"to hide pride from man,"-to "lay him low, and keep him there." It is the avowed design of the gospel, that "the lofty looks of man should be humbled, and the haughtiness of man bowed down, and that the Lord alone should be exalted." Against pride shafts are aimed at every turn. God frowns upon it; and shows it to be His purpose throughout to mortify and humble it. It is the pervading maxim of the Divine word-"Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased." In the end, pride must bring "shame."

Perhaps, however, the reference in the words before us, may especially be to the influence of pride in our intercourse with men. And in this view of them, they are verified in different ways. For example-The manifestation of pride,-of supercilious loftiness and self-sufficiency, strongly tempts others to spy out defects, and to bring down the haughty man from his imaginary elevation. Every one takes a pleasure in plucking at him, and leaving the laurel-wreath which he has twined for his own brow, as bare of leaves as possible; and thus to cover him with "shame."

Another way in which it tends to "shame" is, that it leads him who is the subject of it to undertake, in the plenitude of his confident self-sufficiency, to fill stations for which he is incompetent; by which means, he ere long exposes himself to the derision or the pity of his fellows. He shortly finds himself in the position of those described in our Lord's parable who "choose for themselves the highest seats," but in the end, abashed and crest-fallen, "begin with shame to take the lowest rooms."*-That parable is a graphic commentary on the words before us.

* Luke 14:7-11. On the contrary, "with the lowly is wisdom." In the highest departments this is true. The lowly, distrustful of themselves, ask wisdom of God, who "giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not." And wisely distrustful of their own strength as well as knowledge, they receive strength from above, and are "strong in the Lord." And moreover, the lowly act otherwise than has been described, in their intercourse with men. They remember the words of the apostle, "I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly."* The man of this character all are disposed to take by the hand-to respect, to encourage, and to put forward.

* Romans 12:3.

I have recommended a principle of unbending rectitude, as the principle which the God of truth and righteousness approves. I may further recommend it, as the best of all casuists,-our surest and most ready director in the right way. Such is the spirit of the third verse-"The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them." Or even, in regard to "transgressors," suppose the contrary-so far as this life is concerned. Suppose them by their well-contrived and well-covered arts to succeed and to accumulate wealth-still, "Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death."* * For further illustration of verses Proverbs 11:3-4, see Proverbs 10:2; Proverbs 10:9; Proverbs 10:13.

"The day of wrath" evidently means the day of judgment!* O my friends, what an affecting commentary will the transactions of that day read to an assembled world on the solemn question of our Lord,-"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Matthew 16:26.

* See Romans 2:5. The same general sentiment-of the superior advantages of the righteous, both now and in the end, is expanded in the next two verses-"The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness."

"The perfect" are those whose hearts are sincere, and undivided; given up in their dominant principles and affections, decidedly and unreservedly, to God. They are the same with the upright; whose uprightness, as before shown, "directs their way"-in safety, and to safety; while the wicked, by their worldly and crafty devices, often involve themselves as well as others in mischief. And

while, in their progress through this world, they are many a time ensnared in the meshes of their own arts of deceit, their feet are entangled in a snare from which, in the end, there is no deliverance-the "snare of the devil." By him they are "taken captive at his will;" and, having abandoned God, have then-part with him and his angels. They "fall by their own wickedness"-fall beyond recovery. They are "taken"-taken finally and irretrievably, "in their own naughtiness." The frequent repetition of this truth should impress it on the memory and heart. Let it be indelibly impressed on yours. Nothing can be more certain than that lies, deceptions, breaches of promise, plans of doubledealing and artifice, however they may seem to prosper for a time, are the sure road to ruin. The man who has recourse to them is weaving the shroud for his reputation, and digging the grave for his interest here,-while he is fitting himself for destruction hereafter, "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath." The same strain of thought is still followed in verse seventh-"When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish; and the hope of unjust men perisheth."* * Comp. Proverbs 10:28.

There have been some who have questioned whether the doctrine of a future state was understood under the former dispensation. They have regarded that economy as to such an extent carnal, worldly, and temporary, as to have excluded from it all reference to that subject. I might show you, from many passages, the falsity of such a sentiment. In this verse we have one of them. Nothing can be clearer than that, were there not such a future state, the expectation and hope of righteous and wicked alike must perish together, and that the very distinction so evidently made here between the one and the other, proceeds upon the assumption of a state beyond the present. The maxim of wisdom would otherwise be-"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Such expressions, having evident reference to expectations and hopes entertained at the time of death, clearly evince that a future state was matter of full conviction with Solomon himself, and that its sanctions were by no means held back, but were pressed upon the people. The next verse may be taken by itself, as expressing a frequently occurring case-"The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead." This was a thing which Solomon had often observed; and which harmonized to such an extent with general observation as to have become marked and striking. The general state of things was then what it is now; * yet had it been frequently noticed, how singularly good men had been, by divine interposition, preserved from trouble, and delivered out of it,-and especially when the trouble had arisen from the conscientious exercise of principle; while the wicked, especially if in any way they had been the authors of the trouble, impending or suffered, have "come in their stead," and found their feet taken in their own snares. Thus was it in the case of Mordecai and Haman; and thus in the case of Daniel and his unprincipled accusers.

* Ecclesiastes 9:1-3. But the verse naturally connects with the preceding verses to complete the antithesis between the righteous and the wicked occurring so regularly throughout the passage. When thus taken together, they may be considered as having reference to the same period-the period of death. "When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish; and the hope of unjust men perisheth: the righteous," when he dieth, "is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead." This will express the same sentiment as that of the prophet, "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness," Isaiah 57:1-2. And while he is thus "taken away," the wicked, his enemy, succeeds to the trouble of which that enemy had been the cause; or, if not to it,

to some other. Thus has it many a time been with blood-thirsty persecutors, when they have succeeded in their vindictive plots of death against God’s servants. They have dismissed the saint from his sins and sorrows; but have themselves become the victims of divine visitation. Thus it was with Herod. Thus it was with the persecuting Jews, who "both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets," and pursued with the same unrelenting malignity the apostles of the Lamb. But of true religion there is the semblance as well as the reality: and the semblance is worse than worthless. It avails not the professor himself, and is injurious to others:-verse Proverbs 11:9. "An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered." This verse, indeed, may be understood with a reference to all insincere professions of friendship and good intentions-to all insinuating and nattering pretensions, adopted for the purpose of effecting a particular end. How many are there, who for objects of their own deceive others; no matter what the result may be to the deceived, provided the deceiver but accomplishes his selfish aim:-though even that is frequently lost to the hypocrite, injuring and destroying both his neighbour and himself,-the flattered and the flatterer alike suffering. In religion, the hypocrite has a purpose. His religion is not real. He assumes the cloak to cover some secret design. The verse itself suggests the design-the undermining of the principles of others. He makes great pretensions. He insinuates himself into confidence. He gets a character. The confidence increasing, he becomes by degrees more and more bold, till, by slow steps, he unsettles the principles, shakes the faith, dissipates the seriousness, and ruins the souls of others. Moreover, hypocrites are awful stumblingblocks. Full many has the detection of their true character hardened in sin and worldliness, and established in infidelity. Full many have they thus "destroyed."*

* The character of the hypocrite is given, Matthew 7:15; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. The tendency of it may be illustrated from such cases as that of the lying prophet in 1 Kings 13:18, &c; 1 Kings 22:6, &c.

"But by knowledge shall the just be delivered."-By general knowledge, the result of experience, and observation of character, and natural and acquired sagacity,-the just man is placed on his guard against false and flattering professions, and is enabled to detect and expose them, and to shun the consequences. And still further, by the knowledge of God’s word, he is enabled to discern the symptoms of false professions of religion, and so to avoid the insinuations of the religious deceiver. He repels by his knowledge the assaults of " the wicked one," and of his crafty and malignant emissaries; as the Lord Jesus foiled Satan by the sword of the Spirit.

Observe in conclusion-

1. None can condemn hypocrisy more severely than the Bible itself does. What character is there that is branded in this Book with a broader and deeper brand of divine reprobation? But the same Bible which condemns and reprobates hypocrisy, recommends godliness, and affirms and urges its necessity. My friends, all would be well, if, agreeing with the Bible in the one sentiment, you agreed with it also in the other. The Bible is consistent. It proportions the vehemence of its reprobation of hypocrisy to its right estimate of the thing that is desecrated and dishonoured by the false assumption of it. Oh! that you would but show the genuineness of your hatred of hypocrisy by your admiration and love, your adoption and practice of the reality of which it is the semblance-TRUE RELIGION!

2. Fellow-Christians, see to it, that you let the world have no such cause of offence as the world are so disposed to find. Be honest. Be upright. Be consistent. "Give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." "Be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ!"

24-Pro_11:10-17

Proverbs 11:10-17

LECTURE XXIV.

Proverbs 11:10-17.

"When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace. A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter. Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it: and he that hateth suretiship is sure. A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches. The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh." The first of these verses states a fact. The fact is, that the life, the safety, the well-being of righteous rulers,-of men in high station and of extensive influence, actuated by the principles of justice and goodness,-are much set by on the part of the members of a community; that the general wish is for their preservation in life and office; and that their deliverance from any danger occasions congratulation and joy; while, on the contrary, "when the wicked perish"-when unprincipled men, selfish, unjust, and cruel oppressors, are cast down from their "high estate,"-even though it should be by sudden and violent death,-instead of grief, there is gladness; instead of wailing, "there is shouting." He "departs without being desired;" and the people, when the fear that before restrained them is removed, speak out their feelings. Delivered from the malaria of despotic oppression, they breathe freely, and quickly discover in each other's minds at once the unanimity of hatred, and the unanimity of satisfaction. For this fact the reason is assigned in next verse-"By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked."

Upright men-men of sound principle, alive to the rights and solicitous for the happiness of all over whom their power or influence extends, and above all, men animated by the highest of all principles, the fear of God,-are an eminent blessing to a community. By their means "the city is exalted;"-the commonwealth advanced and elevated in character, in honour, and in general prosperity; and especially in the "righteousness that exalteth a nation." The rule of such men is in itself an inestimable benefit. Their prayers, their example, their pious efforts, their self-denying devotedness to the public good, all bring down the blessing of Heaven. They are men for whom, on principles of personal attachment and of public-spirited patriotism, not a few might even "dare to die." On the contrary, "by their mouth"-that is, by their unsound counsels, their pernicious maxims, their false sentiments, and, it may be, their lewd, irreligious, blasphemous talk,-"the wicked" corrupt the public mind and morals, and subvert the true glory and the true prosperity of a country. This accords with the anticipations of reason, and with the general recorded experience of mankind. The decline and fall of states have to be traced, in most instances, to the misgovernment of unprincipled men.

Let it be our constant and earnest prayer for our country, that right principle may direct her councils, supreme and subordinate, as the surest means, under the blessing of God, of elevating her character, prolonging her existence, and augmenting her prosperity!

Verse Proverbs 11:12. "He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour: but a man of understanding holdeth his peace." From the antithesis in the verse it is evident, that the word "despiseth" is not to be understood of secret and silent contempt, but of contempt expressed, whether in words, in actions, or in looks. The man who is destitute of wisdom, or sound discretion, ridicules and exposes his neighbour, for every little failing he happens to discover in him. In this he not only violates "the royal law," but acts unwisely on his own account. The man of prudence-the wise man, "holdeth his peace." He considers, in the first place, that every one has his failings, of which, from the power of custom, he may not be sensible; and that he, therefore, may have his,-notorious enough to others, though unperceived by himself: and under this impression, he is tender toward others from a sense of his own defects and his liability to more. He is further aware, that by the expression or manifestation of scorn, he may bring upon himself odium and resentment, and even serious mischief; or at any rate, were he indulging in this satirical and contemptuous disposition, render himself universally disagreeable, and reap, as his merited reward, a studied exclusion from the social circle. No man can be a more unpleasant member of society, in the private walks of life especially, (of which free and confidential familiarity is the very zest) than he who makes it his business to spy out failings, to detect and fasten upon every thing that is ridiculous or ludicrous in the appearance, the motions, the character, or the manners of all with whom he comes into contact, and to expose it. "The man of understanding"-the man who has a proper regard for his own comfort and enjoyment, who duly appreciates the principle of "the golden rule," and considers how large an amount of the social happiness of mankind arises from things that are in themselves of minor importance,-even when the failings of others do not escape his notice, but may be such as strongly to tempt the propensity to exposure-will lay a restraint upon himself, and "hold his peace." This is one case, then, in which silence is wisdom. It does not stand alone. There follows another:-verse Proverbs 11:13. "A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter."

But, while in this case there is wisdom, there is more. There is the principle of fidelity. The "talebearer" is at once one of the most odious and most mischievous of characters;-the man with whom no secret is safe; who cannot be at ease, till he has it out; who goes from one to another, and from party to party, big with it, and watching his opportunity to introduce it appropriately; and when no such opportunity offers, unable to contain himself any longer, and forcing it in, "in season or out of season." The propensity to reveal secrets-to a certain degree common to all, though in some discovering its unsubdued power by an unrestrained indulgence-is imputable to different causes. In the first place, we are ever apt to be vain of knowing what others are ignorant of;-but this of course cannot be known to others, and can procure no gratification to this vanity, without disclosure. Then, further, we are equally apt to be vain of the confidence reposed in us-of our having been made the confidants of others,-and especially when these are persons of any name and notoriety. This is a very self-contradictory vanity; for it is impossible to give indulgence to the propensity inspired by it, without, in the very act of doing so, showing that the confidence placed in us, and on which we are pluming ourselves, has been misplaced. The very revealing of the secret is an avowal that we should not have been trusted, and a warning against trusting us again.

There are various ways of acting the "talebearer." There is that of open blabbing. And this, as it is the simplest, is, in truth, the least dangerous. The character becomes immediately known; and all who have secrets which they really wish kept will take care to withhold them from him.

There is next that of confidential communication. The secret-holder affects to look this way and that, to ascertain that no one is within hearing; and then, with many whispered doubts whether he is doing right, and whispered no-doubts that he is perfectly safe with the dear friend to whom he speaks, imparts it in a breath that enters only his solitary ear, as a thing received in the profoundest secrecy, and not, on any account whatever, to go further, to be kept still as the grave;--thus setting the example of broken confidence as the encouragement and inducement to keep it! Then he goes, and finds out some other dear friend, with whom the same scene is repeated.

There is that also of sly insinuation. The person who has the secret neither openly blabs it, nor confidently whispers it, but throws out hints of his having it-allusions more or less remote to its nature,-by which curiosity is awakened, inquiry stimulated, and the thing ultimately brought to light; while he who threw out the leading notices plumes himself on his having escaped the imputation of being a talebearer. The story was not of his telling! Now these, and whatever others there may be, are all bad; and the greater the amount of pretension and hypocrisy, so much the worse. A "faithful spirit" is what all should cultivate, and maintain at whatever risk or cost. But all should be cautious. It is very wrong, generally speaking, to come under an obligation to secrecy, without knowing what it is that is about to be imparted.* We may thus bring ourselves into a snare, entrammelling our consciences; for the secret may be something which ought not to be concealed. It may involve the interests of others; it may involve the cause of religion and the honour of God. Beware, then, of rashly receiving secrets. It cannot be the duty of any man to keep a secret which he has thus ignorantly and indiscreetly pledged himself to keep, on his discovering what it is, and what are its bearings and results. Yet it may cost him a severe struggle to bring himself to break his word. To keep a secret of the description in question, however, would evidently be to add a greater sin to a less;-to add to the sin of rashly committing ourselves, the further and heavier sin of allowing others to suffer undeservedly by our silence, or the interests and honour of religion to be compromised and injured. And again, if a man is sensible of the strength either of his propensity to reveal what he knows, or of the temptations to discovery to which he has the prospect of being exposed, let him at once decline being the confidential depositary of any secrets. As for the known "talebearer," the hunter after secrets, of which he immediately, and of previous purpose, manifests his unworthiness of having intrusted to him-his desert is to be shunned and detested, to be hissed and hooted out of society.

* Hence one strong objection on the part of Christians to the system of Free-masonry, which withholds its secrets till those who seek initiation take solemn oath never to reveal them.

Many things in this Book-as from Solomon’s own official station might have been anticipated-have an immediate relation to Rulers. Generally, however, the principles of what is said relative to them, are capable of easy transference, and sufficiently pointed application to ordinary life. Thus-

Verse Proverbs 11:14. "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." It is obvious enough that there is something here to be understood. The counsel that keeps the people from ruin must be wise and good; and when given, it must be taken and

followed. There may be no lack of counsel; but it may be counsel that "causeth to err from the way of understanding;" and both ruler and people would have been better without it. But the case supposed, appears to be that of a self-willed, self-sufficient, head-strong ruler, who glories in his power; who determines to wield the rod of that power in his own way, and who plays the hasty, jealous, resolute, sensitive, and vindictive tyrant; who disdains to call in counsel, or who does it only for the pleasure of showing his superiority to it by setting it at nought. I conceive the phrase "where no counsel is" to be intended to convey not a little of the character of him by whom it is declined or disregarded. He is a character under whose rule "the people fall." We have an example of such a character-foolish, high-minded, insolent-in Solomon's own successor Rehoboam. And yet, at the same time, in his case we are taught the necessity of understanding all such maxims as maxims that admit of exceptions. Rehoboam did take counsel;-and his counsellors were not few. Had they been fewer, there would, in that instance, have been more safety. Had he stopped with the "old men who had stood before David his father," all would have been well.-But in the verse before us-"the multitude of counsellors" stands contrasted with "no counsel;" and the sentiment is in accordance with reason and with experience. The character intended is that of one who, instead of, in his own, self-sufficiency, refusing counsel, betakes himself, especially in cases of difficulty, to different judgments; compares their respective decisions, and adopts, after due deliberation, what appears to recommend itself as the best, or frames a measure from the hints and dictates of the whole. Still it is implied that the counsellors be selected, as men of understanding, prudence, and principle. "In the multitude of counsellors," unless they are suitable characters,-not a multitude taken capriciously and at random, or under the influence of any improper disposition,-there might be distraction and hazard rather than guidance and security.-How much better would it have been for Ahab, had he taken for his sole counsellor Micaiah the son of Imlah, _____ "faithful found Among the faithless-faithful only he,"

-than it was when he preferred the four hundred prophets of Baal! "The multitude of counsellors" was, in that case, his destruction. The maxim, therefore, is general. It affirms the danger of solitary self-sufficiency, and the safety of deliberate and, in proportion to the complexity and difficulty of each case, and the nature and amount of its consequences, of extensive and diversified consultation. And the principle applies to all as well as to rulers. Consultation is right in regard to what may materially affect our own interests. It is specially incumbent when the interests of others, whether as to character, or property, or personal and domestic comfort, are implicated. These are never to be sported with-never to be treated with hasty indifference; and a truly right-hearted man will be anxious to avoid having on his conscience the painful reflection, that others should have suffered through any over-confidence on his part in his own judgment. The fifteenth verse we had occasion to take in formerly, in connexion with a previous passage, on which the general principles regarding suretiship were discussed;-the desirableness and even duty of shunning it; the impropriety and cruelty of urging it; and the special instances in which it might, and even ought, to be complied with.* * See Lecture on Proverbs 6:1-5. In verse sixteenth (Proverbs 11:16), agreeably to a Hebrew idiom far from uncommon, a comparison is manifestly designed:-"As strong men retain riches, so doth a gracious woman retain honour." The immediate allusion probably is to spoil taken in battle. The valiant and powerful, by whose prowess and might it has been gained, defend their booty-their wealth-against all aggressors and plunderers. They will not suffer it to be touched. They watch it with an eye of fire and an arm of strength. And thus is it as to the honour of a virtuous and pious woman. She holds it dearer than the riches of the wealthy; dearer than the

prey of the warrior, which not its own value merely but the point of honour renders precious in his eyes, and the object of vigilant sensitiveness; dearer than life itself. She holds it as a jewel of inestimable value, maintaining it in unsullied purity; repels, with dignified and indignant determination-with the appalling firmness of sensitive and offended principle, indicated by an eye that flashes with the quickness of lightning, and a cheek that flushes with the vehemence of unutterable scorn-every act, or word, or look, that presumes on a freedom, or dares a reflection on her untainted fame.

True religion has ever been associated with assigning to the female portion of the community their due estimation, and rank, and influence in society. It was so under Judaism; it is so still more under Christianity. If Christian women would but contrast their situation, as daughters, wives, and mothers, with that of females under any of the forms of idolatry and false religion, they could not but be thankful for the amount of "honour" they have of which to be jealous; and thankful for the religion to which they are indebted for the treasure. And as the character of human society depends to so very great a degree on the illumination, the dignity, the purity, and the influence of the female mind,-I cannot avoid again, in "words that burn," or at least that utter the indignation of a burning heart, denounce that brutal and brutifying system, which has presumed of late, with an unblushing effrontery, to offer itself to the acceptance of an enlightened and civilized and Christian community, and which, by degrading the dignity, tainting the purity, and quenching the vestal flame of womanhood, would more than annihilate its salutary influence; and, inflicting on human society a corresponding degradation, assimilate it, in the extinction of all its holiest and happiest ties, to the promiscuous herding of the beasts that perish. The subject is one on which, I freely own, I cannot speak with patience. When I think of the feature of the system of Socialism to which I have just adverted, independently of its atheism, its fatalism, and its anarchy, I again denounce it as meriting alike the contempt of every person of understanding, and the abhorrence of every person of principle.

Verse Proverbs 11:17. "The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh." There are two descriptions of mercy. There is mercy to sufferers, and mercy to offenders. Mercy to sufferers is the disposition to relieve; mercy to offenders is the disposition to forgive. The two are infinitely united in God. Under his government all sufferers are offenders. It is only as offenders that they are sufferers; and when he pardons the offence, he cancels the sentence to suffering. And in every good man the two are united. They should, indeed, be regarded as one principle, operating in different departments.

Now, "the merciful man," whether considered in the one light or in the other,-in exercising forgiveness or in relieving distress-"doeth good to his own soul:" he effectually consults his own interests. He does so, even for present enjoyment; for in the exercise of the generous and kindly affections there is a genuine and exquisite happiness. The divine sentiment of the Saviour,-"It is more blessed to give than to receive," has its full application here. Jesus himself, above all that ever lived on earth, experienced its truth. He "delighted in mercy." He came from above on an errand of mercy. The divine authority of that errand of mercy he proved by innumerable works of mercy, diffusing around him an incalculable amount of blessing. His heart melted over human suffering; and ho "went about doing good." "The merciful man" participates in this blessedness of the Son of God!

"The merciful man," moreover, procures favour with his fellow-men;-he "makes himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;" he causes society to feel an interest in him,-to regard and treat him as its friend and benefactor. This is eminently gratifying and pleasing;-to know that in the hearts of fellow-men our names are associated with affection and blessing, and that when we "fail," there will be some ready to welcome us into "everlasting habitations," who had been made friends by our kindness during their sojourn in the wilderness. But above all, the mercy of the merciful is associated with the enjoyment of the favour and blessing of God.-"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Thus in the most emphatic sense, "the merciful man doeth good to his own soul." With regard to the unmerciful it is in every way the reverse: "The cruel troubleth his own flesh." He ensures his own wretchedness. He stirs up resentment, instead of conciliating favour; so that on every hand, in every face, he sees an enemy, from whom, on his own account or on account of others, he dreads the fulfilment of the Saviour's maxim-"With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." How can he be happy? There is unhappiness in his very passions. The opposite of the character of God, they cannot but be associated with misery. They are the counterpart of his who was "a murderer from the beginning." And as likeness to God in mercy is joined with likeness to God in blessedness; so likeness to the devil in malignity is joined with likeness to the devil in misery and ruin. "He shall have judgment without mercy who hath showed no mercy."* * See Matthew 18:21-33.

25-Pro_11:18-23

Proverbs 11:18-23

LECTURE XXV.

Proverbs 11:18-23.

"The wicked worketh a deceitful work: but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward. As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death. They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the Lord: but such as are upright in their way are his delight. Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered. As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion. The desire of the righteous is only good: but the expectation of the wicked is wrath." The expression in the first of these verses, "a deceitful work" does not mean a work of deceit practised by the wicked upon others, but a work deceitful to himself. By some the phrase is rendered "an unprofitable work," which, in point of effect, is much the same; unprofitable meaning, obviously, the reverse of that which he himself anticipates: hence "deceitful." As to present happiness, his course proves so; for even amid wealth, should he acquire it, and the temporal honours and earthly benefits which wealth brings with it, he still feels the truth of His words who never uttered aught but what was in accordance with fact-"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," Luke 12:15. And if he looks for anything else in the end than the final ruin of all to which he had trusted, he will find himself still more deceived,-his fondest hopes blasted for eternity! Although it was not all truth that was spoken by Job's three friends, and though even of what was true the principle and motive were wrong; yet much of what was true they did speak; and their descriptions are at times very forcible and striking. Such is that of Bildad the Shuhite, "Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish: whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web," Job 8:11-14. And the apostle Paul represents the connexion between wickedness and final destruction as of the same certainty with that between the seed and the harvest-"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting," Galatians 6:7-8. The connexion is equally sure on both sides of the alternative. The reaping must be according to the sowing. He who, with the hand of faith, "sows righteousness"-sows the seeds of spiritual obedience-shall, as his "sure reward" reap life; while he who scatters in this world the seeds of earthly-mindedness and sin shall reap, as his "sure reward," in the world to come, a harvest of death. This is a law of the moral world as infallible in its operation as any law of the physical world. The same general thought is continued in verse Proverbs 11:19. "As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death." The "sure reward" in the preceding verse is "life" in this: and as that reward is sure in the one case, the "deceitfulness of the wicked's work" lies in its effecting "death" as its result, instead

of "life." He who "pursueth evil" may overtake it, and may boast himself in the success of his pursuit. But the very evil that he overtakes shall slay him. It is as if a man were to pursue a serpent, captivated by the beauty of its appearance in its shifting and glistering hues, but ignorant of the venom of its sting or its fang, and, in the act of laying hold of it, were to receive the deadly wound. Death treads on the very heels of the man who "pursueth evil;" and when he overtakes the evil, Death overtakes him. And in the next verse we have the reason why "life" is attached to "righteousness," and "death" to "evil." It is, that God, from the holiness of Ids nature, infinitely loves the one, and infinitely hates the other. "They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the Lord: but such as are upright in their way are his delight." Many a time, and in various and striking ways, has God given testimony to the truth of this declaration, but nowhere and at no time was it so impressively displayed, as in the deeply awful scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary. On the cross it was written in blood-the blood of His own Son! And while God’s hatred of sin is infinite, his determination to punish it is immutable, and his power on the part of sinners irresistible, verse Proverbs 11:21. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered." The terms "though" and "join" are supplementary. The words stand literally-"Hand in hand the wicked shall not be unpunished." It is said that no fewer than sixteen interpretations have been given of the words; and, as not seldom happens, the most common seems to be by far the most natural. "Hand in hand" is the emblem of union; of united power; of pledged combination:-and the sentiment seems to be, as expressed in our authorised version, that sinners, combining their counsel and their power,-encouraging one another in evil,-braving the "terrors of the Lord,"-jointly laughing away their fears, and perpetrating evil with a high and determined hand, shall not be the more secure from the penal consequences of their sins. "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel," no, nor might, whether personal or combined, "against the Lord." They may combine successfully against human authority and vigilance, and may successfully resist the power of an earthly government; but if God be against them, escape they cannot. To the counterpart of the sentiment in the previous verses an addition is made in the second clause of this. It is not said merely "the righteous," but "the seed of the righteous shall be delivered." This implies the divine favour and blessing to the righteous themselves in the first instance:-and then there is a regard to "the seed" for their sakes. Their offspring have many a time been regarded and kept from evil on their account. We see in the divine conduct, at times, the principle operating which David expressed when he said, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?" 2 Samuel 9:1. Thus it was in the case of Noah. Thus it was in the case of Lot. Thus it was of old, and thus it is still, in the case of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose posterity, even in the midst of their continued unbelief and rebellion, are "beloved for the fathers’ sakes." The promise of the covenant to Abraham was-"I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee in their generations;" in which promise, although it related to the spiritual seed, there was evidently a primary reference to the natural offspring, among whom, both in the outset and at the end, the spiritual children and their appropriate blessing were to be found. "Salvation was of tho Jews;" and it was "to the Jews first." And among the proofs that God "had not cast away his people," Paul says, "For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." The promise of the covenant remains.* But "let not the seed of the righteous"-the children of the godly-deceive themselves. God may act kindly and mercifully towards them for their parents’ sakes:-they may, on their account, enjoy many blessings, and be dealt with in much patience and longsuffering. But let them not fancy they

can be saved in virtue of any connexion whatever, even with the very best of men,-the holiest saints that ever lived. No, my young friends. If you do not make a right use yourselves of the privileges with which God is pleased to favour you-no such relation can give you safety in the end. Your advantages will only aggravate your guilt and your condemnation. Your godly parents shall have their place on the right hand of the Judge, while-O heart-rending thought!-heart rending to both parent and child!-severed from them, you shall find your station on the left, and be banished, not from them only, but from the God of light and love, the source of all the happiness in the universe, for ever. O join heart and hand with your parents in the love and service of God; and a double blessing will rest upon you for their sakes.

* Psalms 103:13-18, and Psalms 112:1-2. In the idiom of the Hebrew and of other Eastern languages, a comparison was sometimes expressed by the simple juxtaposition of the things intended to be compared. Thus it is in the next verse-"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion." The "as" and the "so 'is" are supplementary. The original stands thus:-"A jewel of gold in a swine's snout-a fair woman who is without discretion."-I doubt not, you may find expositors by whom this simile will be traced out in not a few ingenious and some far-fetched points of resemblance. This, however, is more a display of ingenuity than of wisdom. Obviously the great general idea intended to be conveyed by it, is that of offensive and disgusting incongruity. Nose-jewels, sometimes very elegant and costly, were, as they are still, worn by females as a part of Eastern finery. They are mentioned among the ornaments of the vain and wanton daughters of Zion, for whose light and ungodly walk the judgments of God were denounced, in Jehovah's name, by the prophet. Nothing can well be more expressive than the simile, when understood as the image of incongruity. "Discretion" must here be understood in its largest and best sense; not of mere worldly prudence,-though even in that or any other restricted sense, there would be truth in the comparison,-but of true feminine propriety, both of sentiment and feeling, and deportment, springing from and guided by a pious and well-ordered mind. A nose-jewel in a swine's snout is ridiculously out of place, the subject of merriment and laughter. And is it not thus with beauty without discretion? The features may be admired; but the words and acts of imbecility, absurdity, and folly expose their possessor to the titter and the mirth mingled in some bosoms with pity, but in more with scorn, of the company,-and are many a time enjoyed afterwards as the topics of jest, and sarcasm, and scandal. But this is not all. The nose-jewel in the swine's snout,-as it alters not the nature of the animal nor abates its propensities to filthiness, must be for ever raking amidst mud and garbage and all manner of pollution. And thus beauty without discretion-unguided by the firmness of principle or any correct and consistent sense of propriety-is ever liable to be degraded by the artful designs of flattery, to serve, by its own degradation, the basest and most unworthy purposes.

We cannot, if we are ourselves right-minded,-if we have even good sense, apart from piety,-admire such beauty. It hardly deserves the name. True loveliness consists not in the mere exquisite symmetry of features. It cannot exist without expression. To constitute true beauty, the countenance must be the index of the mind and the heart-of what is intellectual and what is amiable. The very finest and best-turned assortment of features can inspire no complacency, no admiration, if there looks out from them, or even looks in them, the expression of unlovely passions,-of pride, of impiety, of vanity, of cruelty, of revenge. The incongruous unseemliness of such expression in such features, makes us turn away with loathing, instead of hanging on the

countenance with admiration and love. And the woman here described-the mindless, heartless, senseless beauty (if we may use terms so self-contradictory) becomes one of the most pitiable objects in nature, when the flower fades; when the bloom departs and the wrinkles appear; when the food of her vanity, and the source of her attraction, such as it was, is gone; when admiring fools cease to flatter, and to her own quenched eye and fretted spirit the mirror too faithfully reveals the cause. Whether the want of discretion be considered as meaning silliness, emptiness, an unfurnished mind,-in which case there are no inward resources of enjoyment when what was merely outward is gone; or whether it be understood of the absence and violation of propriety and feminine seemliness,-in which case there is the forfeiture of all esteem, and the substitution of unmingled contempt-unmingled unless with pity,-and the consequent absence of all that can impart solid satisfaction in the intercourse of others. In either case, there is not a more wretched being than a faded beauty; whose place, when thus unceremoniously thrown aside, others come forward to fill, awakening the spirit of heart-consuming envy-the "rottenness of the bones." O my female auditors, seek the beauties of the mind, and heart, and character; and especially those of true piety. These will never fade; but will increase in attraction to the end. These will ensure esteem, respectability, and comfort, when encroaching age has defaced the outward charms of youth. Such a character possesses within itself resources of enjoyment, and will command the interest of affectionate regard, whether in single or in wedded life. Above all remember-"favour is deceitful and beauty vain; but the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." The 23d verse (Proverbs 11:23) is capable of two meanings:-1. It may refer to the matter of the desires cherished, respectively, by the righteous and the wicked. "The desire of the righteous," for others, "is only good." They cherish the principle of benevolence. They delight in seeing all around them happy. This is part of the character of the good man, that he wishes well to all-evil to none, not even to his enemies. Nor is he satisfied with desiring good. He shows the sincerity of the desire in "doing good to all as he has opportunity." On the contrary, "the expectation of the wicked is wrath"-or, as those who take this view of the passage understand the word,-misfortune, disappointment. These are what he seeks, waits, longs for in regard to others, and enjoys when they come upon them.

2. It may refer to the issue of their respective desires and expectations. The desires of the one-of "the righteous," terminating in the possession of good, only good; and good infinitely surpassing all that those desires could take in or anticipate; while the expectation of the other, his vain and groundless expectation, issues in wrath-in the fearful effects of the anger of God, incomparably exceeding all that his apprehensions could forebode, and in spite of all his selfflattering hopes and fond delusions. We close with two reflections:-

1. True honour lies, not in condition, but in character. This is the maxim of wisdom. "Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich." One of our poets has expressed the same sentiment thus- "Honour and shame from no condition rise;

Act well your part-there all the honour lies." But O do not forget, that character must be estimated on Bible principles. All that, in the sight of God, is truly good, must have its basis in TRUE RELIGION.

2. Let sinners beware of the danger and the inevitable result of fighting against God! "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered!" What

fearful odds-the creature against the Creator!-the sinner against his rightful Judge!-the arm of flesh against the arm of omnipotence! "Hand in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." Though they could league all creation with them in the conspiracy and rebellion, how powerless the combination!" He that sitteth in the heavens should laugh; the Lord should have them in derision. He should speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his hot displeasure." Companions in sin shall be companions in banishment and in suffering. "Forsake the foolish, then, and live." Choose another fellowship. Give your hand to God’s people, giving your heart to God himself. "Hand in hand" with them in God’s service here, you shall be one with them in the enjoyment of His love and blessing hereafter. This is the only fellowship that can end well. All the people of God, with one heart and one soul, concur in saying to you-"Come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."

26-Pro_11:24-31

Proverbs 11:24-31

LECTURE XXVI.

Proverbs 11:24-31.

"There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. He that withholdeth com, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it. He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him. He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch. He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise. Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner." The farmer who is desirous to have an abundant harvest, must not sow his seed with a sparing and niggardly hand. A thin sowing must of necessity produce a scanty crop. Now, according to the representations of the word of God, that which is the case in nature, in the physical world, is the case also in regard to the use which a man makes of the means of doing good which providence commits to his care, in regard to the virtue of liberality, or practical charity.

Such is the general sentiment in the first two verses of this passage; and the sentiment is in harmony with the statements of the New Testament on the same subject.* * 2 Corinthians 9:6. The fact which Solomon states is, that there is such a thing-nay, that it is frequent and reasonably to be expected,-as gaining by giving; as augmenting substance by its free distribution. The fact has its origin in the promised smile and blessing of the Lord on the labours and the pursuits of the man of diffusive benevolence. That man, in the use he makes of his means, resembles the Divine Being himself, the universal Giver; and he acts in conformity to His will and purpose in the bestowment of His benefits. "When He fills the clouds with rain, it is that they may "empty themselves upon the earth," "that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater." So, when He blesses a man, it is that he may be a blessing. Mere selfish enjoyment is in no case God’s purpose. He constitutes every man a debtor to his fellow-men, in every case in which He puts it into his power to do them service. "God is love." "His tender mercies are over all his works." And God’s word is like himself. It is full of love; full of the principles, the precepts, and the examples of benevolence. Mark the fact, then, here stated. Scattering, does not seem a likely way of increasing-giving away, a likely means of acquisition. Yet here stands the declaration, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth." On the other hand, it seems a natural and reasonable sequence, that the more a man keeps the more he should have, that the less is given away, the more should remain; yet, "there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty."

It is a question, then, for the serious consideration of God’s people-whether, in this matter, they have sufficient confidence in Him; whether they trust Him as they ought to do. I fear not. They

have more reliance on their own plans of saving than on God’s blessing on giving; more dependence on the bank than on the promise. But is not the injunction of Jesus fully applicable here-"have Faith In God?" Is not this just one of the appropriate ways of putting faith to the test on God’s part, and showing its reality on ours? Is it not precisely the defectiveness of this faith that makes us timid, cautious, parsimonious in giving? ever fearing that we may stint ourselves, and feel the want of what we expend on suffering humanity and on the cause of God? Is it not thus by unbelief that we are tempted to sow sparingly? And ought it to be, that the husbandman trusts more to the laws of nature than the Christian does to the covenant of his God? Might He not say to each of us, in terms of gentle but merited reproof, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Even when we do give, give we not with a misgiving, as if we were not quite sure whether we were right,-rather hoping that God’s promises may be fulfilled than believing that they will? Alas! if the principle of proportion contained in the words, "According to thy faith be it unto thee," were applied in the present case, could we expect a large return? And may not this be the very secret of seeming failures, when they do occur?-He, bo assured, who gives to others in proportion as God gives to him, takes the surest method of opening still more widely the fountain of the divine benevolence to himself. The next verse continues and further developes the same thought-"The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

"The liberal soul" may signify, according to a common acceptation of the term, the liberal person; and "fat" being considered as a metaphor for rich-full of substance, the sentiment would simply be, the liberal man shall be the prosperous man. Or we may render the words thus, "The soul of the liberal shall enjoy abundance;" that is, ho shall both best attain it, and best relish it.

"And he that watereth shall be watered also himself." The man of unaffected, unostentatious benevolence, who lays himself out, in the use of his substance, for the good of others, attracts to himself general favour, both for his own sake, and for the sake of the community of which he is so useful a member. And further, he shall be compensated by blessing from God. God will smile upon him; and will so order His providence as to maintain and promote his prosperity. Or, if, to God’s infinite wisdom, that should not seem best for his higher interests, He will give him, in lieu of worldly prosperity, when that is abridged or suspended, such an amount of spiritual benefit as shall infinitely more than countervail the loss. Thus "he that waters shall," in one or other of two ways, "be watered himself;" either in kind or in kindness; either in increase of earthly acquisition, or in the nourishing condition of his soul by the very privation of his worldly joys. The streams of his bounty flow all around, to refresh and gladden the parched wastes of poverty and affliction;-and streams of supply keep flowing in, more than adequate to supply the waste. His wealth is like a reservoir, which, while it is ever sending out, is ever receiving;-and, to supply it, the God of love will even "open fountains in the wilderness, and springs in the desert,"-bringing its tributary rills from the most unexpected sources. O! it is a vile maxim, and at utter variance with the entire tenor, and most explicit and energetic statements of the word of God,-that stinting, and saving, and griping, and holding is the way to wealth. The plan may indeed at times succeed. Immense sums may be amassed. But what enjoyment is there in them? There is no blessing with the riches, either from God or man:-no disposition to promote the miser’s interest; no regret when his losses and disappointments come; no tear of pity; no hand to help in time of need. O how much happier the man who can say-"The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy;" and of whom it is said-"Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the

Lord will deliver him in time of trouble," Psalms 41:1. The beneficence to which the divine favour is pledged is, of course, beneficence practised on right principles. The same thing done from self-righteousness or ostentation, is not the same thing in God's sight with what is done in the spirit of the gospel-the spirit of self-renouncing humility, of lowly and lively gratitude for God's redeeming grace. When, therefore, there appear, in the providence of God, cases that seem like failures in the promised prosperity of the liberal, there are two considerations which we do well to bear in mind. The first is, that the Lord, who corrects his children not for "his pleasure but for their profit,"-their spiritual profit, that is-may at times, in his unerring wisdom, see trials in their substance to be the trials most appropriate for the effectual attainment of this end; in which case it would be unkind in the highest sense, and a breach of promise instead of a fulfilment of it, were he to allow them to gain this world at the risk of the next,-to grant them temporal prosperity at the expense of their soul's wellbeing in time, and safety for eternity. This is what they, if rightly minded, could not desire; and what He, in the exercise either of faithfulness or love, could not possibly do. The second is,-that we, who cannot search the heart, can never tell how far, even in the characters of God's people, there may be the intrusion and intermixture of those less pure and hallowed impulses, of which they are ever so much in danger, and which He may see operating in no small degree, even when they are escaping our detection. The specific case mentioned in the following verse, contains still an illustration of the same principle as in the two preceding, "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it." The prevailing maxim of the world ever since the first murderer gave utterance to the tendencies of human nature after its fall, in the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"-has been, "Every man for himself." And sometimes they who are loudest in denouncing this maxim when nothing immediately affects themselves, afford the most melancholy examples of its operation when they are put to the test. The identity of human nature in all ages is stamped on almost every sentence of this book of Proverbs. What presented itself to view in Solomon's days is no rarity still. There are such selfish wretches now, as there were then; who, when multitudes are famishing around them, will retain such supplies of the "staff of life" as are in their possession; aye, and, if they have any spare capital, will buy up as much as they can obtain from others, for the purpose of wringing a still higher price from a starving and dying community. There can hardly be a more affecting exemplification than this, of the power of an avaricious disposition in hardening the heart-in draining it of its last warm drops of sympathy. The man may gain his end. He may get a high price for his corn. But he pays a still higher for his money:-he pays for it in the forfeiture of character and sympathy and good-will. He is banished from the affections of his townsmen and his countrymen,-driven with curses out of their hearts. He may affect to despise this. He may hug himself in self-gratulation, that he has secured the pelf, and that their curses can't take his money from him. But this only renders him the more odious and despicable;-and, although for the time pluming himself on his independence; the time may come when he will be made to feel the truth of the saying, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold." What a contrast to his is the situation of the man, who, content with a moderate profit, disdaining, or rather conscientiously dreading, to take advantage of the pinching necessities of others, and to starve them into compliance with his unconscionable demands, feels for prevailing distress, opens his granaries, and supplies the market for the poor and the famishing; who will rather do this at a loss than see others perish for want that he may have abundance. How enviable his emotions! How precious the blessing of the poor,-how sweet to the ear and to the

heart! The word rendered "selleth" is by some interpreters understood of distributing or breaking bread to the hungry. This of course obtains a still more spontaneous and abundant blessing, than parting with it at a small profit, or even at cost. It was such disinterested kindness that brought a blessing upon Job from those who experienced it.*1 And it is this with which is associated the promised blessing of God.*2 *1 Job 29:11-13. rr *2 Isaiah 58:6-11.

What in the verse before us is said of individuals is true also of Governments. As there are few things in a community so fearful as famine, the government that, in a season of dearth, makes it its first concern to provide supplies of corn and provision for the poor, will bring on itself the blessing of the poor, and establish itself in the affection and confidence of the people. On the other hand, laws of which the tendency and the effect are to keep up the price of bread, and which thus press hard on the labouring classes,-whose families, on low wages, are scantily fed, and deprived of education to their minds by the difficulty of providing sustenance for their bodies,-it would require very clear and strong grounds indeed to justify. And, when their operation is felt, and the dissatisfaction is indicated by universal and indignant remonstrance,-as there is nothing so unhappy and so perilous as a discontented and murmuring population, cursing their rulers instead of blessing them,-there would require to be very cogent reasons for refusing the trial at least of a change.-This is not the place for discussions on political economy. One thing, however, is clear, that laws which "withhold corn" can never be popular, and that it is the very first principle and duty of every paternal government,-of every government that would settle itself in the confidence and affection of its subjects,-to "DO NOTHING BY PARTIALITY." The sentiment is similar, though more general, in verse Proverbs 11:27. "He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief it shall come unto him."

"He that seeketh good" stands here in contradistinction to "him that seeketh mischief." There can be no doubt, therefore, that the meaning is, "He that seeketh good to others; that is, makes the good of others his aim." The word rendered "diligently" signifies in the morning, or early. This is a Hebraism, and a natural one. When we make anything our business-when we set our hearts upon it-we set about it immediately; we give it our morning energies,-beginning the day with it, and occupying it as it was begun. The character designed, then, is that of one who desires, and industriously and perseveringly seeks, the well-being of all around him. That man "procureth favour"-favour both from men and from God; not only the kindly and grateful affections of men, but, in time of need, the practical manifestation of those affections. And as to God-it stands on record in his own word, that "with the merciful man he will show himself merciful." The connexion thus explains the meaning of what follows. No man ever "seeketh mischief" to himself. And he that seeketh it to others does in effect seek it to himself. "It shall come unto him:" that is, his attempts to do harm will recoil upon himself. Enmity will be the result, instead of favour. All about him will be made his foes. And, what is worse, he will be exposed to the divine displeasure; for it also stands recorded in the same word, "He shall have judgment without mercy who hath showed no mercy." The trust in riches mentioned in the 28th verse (Proverbs 11:28), we have already had before us.* How prone is the possessor to "say to the gold, Thou art my hope, and to the line gold, Thou art my confidence!" The possession ought, according to its proper and legitimate tendency, to lead the heart to God, from whom cometh down every good gift; but alas! it too often draws it away from Him, and produces confidence in itself instead of the giver. The giver banished by his gift!

* Proverbs 10:15. From the connexion in which the words stand, there may perhaps be a special reference to riches gained by means such as those that had just been specified. And in that case, the language of Jeremiah becomes peculiarly appropriate, "As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool," Proverbs 17:11. If a man so trusts in his wealth, as to be emboldened by his confidence to acts of high-minded oppression and injustice-that man "shall fall." He shall fall into decay. His riches shall "make themselves wings." God shall blight and blast his hopes and wishes. Or, if he continues to maintain his eminence, he shall finally fall with the more tremendous and frightful ruin.

"But the righteous shall flourish as a branch"-a vigorous, fresh, extending, blossoming, fruitful branch. The image is a beautiful one. It is applied, in the dying blessings of Jacob, to his favourite son, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall," Genesis 49:22. Whether understood temporally or spiritually, it is equally true and equally beautiful. God shall bless that man. He shall "spread out his roots by the waters, and the dew shall lie all night upon his branch." "His beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon." He shall be "filled with the fruits of righteousness," and at the same time with those of peace and joy in his own bosom.

Verse Proverbs 11:29. "He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart." There are many ways in which a man may "trouble his own house." He may by the violence and irritability, the peevishness, fretfulness, and selfishness of his temper; he may by his avarice on the one hand, or by his reckless prodigality on the other-involving his family in starvation and suffering by opposite means; he may by intemperance, with all its horrid attendants; he may by sloth and idleness, and indisposition to work. "He shall inherit the wind." The expression is a very strong one. Could any words more impressively convey the idea of loss, disappointment, and ultimate destitution and misery?-heir to the wind! Beggary shall be his portion. He shall be "clothed with rags."-The result he himself deserves. A man’s family is his first charge from heaven, and ought to be his chief and constant solicitude. The only evil to be lamented is, that he brings the destitution upon them as well as upon himself. It often happens, however, in the providence of God, and by the natural operation of human sympathy, that the family is looked after and provided for, while the "troubler of his house" is left to the consequences of his guilt and folly.

"And the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart." The meaning evidently is-and it accords with what has more than once been under notice,-that the prudent and discreet, the just and good, shall have the superiority. The posts of station and influence,-the mastery shall be theirs. They get on in society; while the foolish, the indiscreet, and unprincipled, are left behind in the race of competition.

Verse Proverbs 11:30. "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and ho that winneth souls is wise." An eminent commentator thus expounds the verse-connecting its two clauses ingeniously and happily together;-"The good example, pious discourse, wise instructions, fervent prayers, and zealous good works, of the righteous, become exceedingly beneficial to those around them: they are as fruit from the tree of life; they promote the salvation of sinful men. And, as immortal souls are valuable beyond all estimation, he who thus wins souls, and allures them into the way of

eternal life, is emphatically the wise man; he proposes to himself the noblest end; he uses the only proper means; he perseveres, and is prospered by God himself."

I am aware that of the last clause the expositions have been various; but there is no occasion. "The wise winneth" or gaineth "souls," is literal; and it accords sufficiently well with the former part of the verse. It expresses the very best and highest effect of wise benevolence-the benevolence of "the righteous." The soul outweighs the world in value. So was its preciousness estimated by the most competent of all judges. It is not enough, however, to admit this in words. The admission must be followed out in action. I know not which is the more foolish-to deny the position, or to admit it in words and contradict the admission in conduct. There is a difference in the kind of folly. The former, could we conceive it possible, would indicate a disordered intellect; the latter is more the product and indication of a disordered heart. There is in it more of criminality.-The wise men of the world may set at nought the efforts of him who makes it the aim of his life to "win souls;" they may hold in scorn the kind of knowledge by which souls are won; they may scoff at futurity and at the Gospel provision for securing its happiness; but their scorn is only a fulfilment of the intimations of the very Book they despise; which has prepared us to expect that "not many wise men after the flesh" should be found in the number of its believers, and the subjects of its saving influence,-and which pronounces "the wisdom of this world foolishness with God." Surely he who views man as immortal, and moreover as sinful and guilty, acts wisely, when he sets his heart on winning him from sin to holiness, from guilt to forgiveness, from the "fearful looking for of judgment" to the possession of inward peace, from the desire and pursuit of things temporal to the desire and pursuit of things "unseen and eternal;" from death to life, from hell to heaven. He who thus "winneth souls" is wise in regard even to his own interests-for they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever," (Daniel 12:3.) This Book is ever impressing our minds with the character of God as "the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness." In every form does this sentiment come before us. We have it in the last verse. "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner." The meaning here is not, that in the present world there is a regular and constant distribution of reward and punishment. This is not the fact; nor is it any part of the doctrine or Scripture. The reference evidently is to the convictions of chastisements of God’s people; which are the results of sin remaining in them; the testimonies of their heavenly Father’s displeasure against it, but love to them. He hates their sins, but loves their souls; and seeks the final salvation of the latter by the means adopted by him to deliver them from the former. The expression, "How much more the wicked and the sinner," may be interpreted of temporal judgments-present tokens of the divine displeasure. But for the full sense we must look further. The text is quoted by the apostle Peter, according to the version of the Septuagint,-"If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" 1 Peter 4:18. Here, the connexion leaves us at no loss as to the ultimate and most important reference of the words. The sin even of God’s people is visited with the indications of God’s displeasure; so that the righteous are saved with difficulty-by a series of inflictions involving in them at times a large amount of heavy suffering; which the Lord is not willing to employ, were it not that He sees them to be necessary for the attainment of the great end oi his love in their final well-being. If so-if sin be thus, in God’s sight so "exceeding sinful,"-"where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" How can they "escape the damnation of hell?"

Let the people of God, then, hold in abhorrence that which exposes them to the displeasure and frown of their heavenly Father-a frown the more distressing that it is the frown of love; and implore the accompanying influence of the Holy Spirit with every stroke of paternal discipline, that it may work in them the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and make them "partakers of the divine holiness." And let "the ungodly and the sinner" be assured that their sin will find them out. No covering can vail it from the eye of "Him that sitteth on the throne;" nor is there any power in the universe that can protect from his righteous vengeance.

If he that "winneth souls is wise "-the souls of others; surely, the first province and the first mark of wisdom must be, for a man to seek the salvation of his own soul. This is indeed "The One Thing Needful."

Ye who have felt the preciousness of your own souls, and, in solicitude for their security, have committed them where alone they can be safe,-even into the hands of that Saviour who "is able," and who alone is able, "to keep that which is so committed to him against that day,"-seek the wisdom necessary to "win the souls" of others; and be in earnest in the use of it. Selfishness is the reigning sin of fallen nature; but it is dislodged from its throne by the power of the cross. Then "no one liveth to himself." Every believer’s life is felt by him to be no longer his own. He lives for God, for Christ, for souls,-for the temporal and eternal well-being of his race. O live thus. Identify the happiness of all around you with your own. Seek the latter in the former. In seeking and. finding the good of others, you will most effectually seek and find your own. Your own substance will grow, while you "deal your bread to the hungry;" and you will experience that the spiritual life in your own souls is never more prosperous than when you are engrossed in the benevolent work of doing good to the souls of others, of "seeking the profit of many, that they may be saved."

27-Pro_12:1-19

Proverbs 12:1-19

LECTURE XXVII.

Proverbs 12:1-19.

"Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish. A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord; but a man of wicked devices will he condemn. A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved. A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones. The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit. The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them. The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand. A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised. He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread. A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding. The wicked desireth the net of evil men: but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit. The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble. A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recommence of a man’s hands shall be rendered unto him. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise. A fool’s wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame. He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit. There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health. The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment."

It is by "instruction" that "knowledge" comes. He who fancies he has all in himself will never learn. He who fancies he has already got from others all he can get, will cease to learn.-Again, in proportion to the love of instruction will be the acquisition of knowledge. Thus must it be in every department: thus it is in regard to the knowledge of divine things-the truth and will of God.*-Further, the love of instruction implies humility. It argues a sense of ignorance and need of information. It is a common thing for men to allow pride to cheat them of much valuable knowledge. They like not to be thought ignorant; unless it be in regard to the knowledge of divine truth. Some absolutely plume themselves upon their ignorance on suck subjects. They would be ashamed were they supposed acquainted with the Bible, and will at times put questions for the very purpose of showing how ignorant they are of its contents! Surely a more melancholy or affecting view of the perverseness of our fallen nature there cannot be, than appears in the fact, that the highest, the greatest, the best of all the possible subjects of thought or investigation, God Himself, is that which last and least engages human attention and interest! Were man what he ought to be, this of all subjects would be the one on which he would most "love instruction," and delight to find "knowledge."

* Comp. Proverbs 2:1-6. That the knowledge of duty as well as of truth is here to be included, may be inferred from the latter part of the verse-"but he that refuseth reproof is brutish." Such conduct is "brutish," as irrational, senseless, unworthy of a creature endowed with intellect; distinguished by reason from the beasts of the field, and distinguished from them too by his immortality. It was when Asaph recovered from that strange temptation, under the power of which he seemed to forget the eternity of man's being, and to confine his estimate to the present life, that he exclaimed, "So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee!" Psalms 73:22. And the same comparison is repeatedly used respecting the ungodly. They sink themselves even below the level of the brutes. I say even below, for the brutes fulfil the ends of their being, under the impulse of their respective instincts and appetites; but the man who forgets his immortality and forgets his God, does not fulfil the end of his. He acts a part infinitely beneath it, and is emphatically "brutish."* *Comp. Psalms 49:10-12; Psalms 92:5-6.

There may also be comprehended in the expression, the absence of what every rational creature ought to have-spiritual discernment and taste; the destitution of all right sentiment and feeling in reference to God and divine things. This is the character of him whom Paul denominates "the natural" or animal "man," who "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him."

Verse Proverbs 12:2. "A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn."

God must delight in goodness. Goodness is His own nature. He cannot but take pleasure in resemblance to Himself. On "the good man" His blessing descends,-on his person, on his labours, on his substance, on his family, on his temporal enjoyments, and on his temporal trials and corrections. The character with which "the good man" stands here contrasted seems to show that good has at least a special, if not exclusive reference to benevolence; "But the man of wicked devices will he condemn." Such a man was Judas, to whom, knowing the treachery of his heart, Jesus so early said, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" The false-hearted attended Jesus to the last, and then, with the kiss of false friendship, having first sold, betrayed him. They too were "men of wicked devices" who "consulted how they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him"-kill the very pattern of all goodness! God "condemned" him who betrayed, and them who paid the bribe. Both became the victims of righteous vengeance. The principle of the next verse is the same-"A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved." The prosperity that is obtained by wickedness shall not be permanent. There is rottenness in the "root" of it. The hidden curse of God is in it: and that curse has in it a secret power of blight and wasting, which no wit of man can anticipate, and no power contravene. Where that curse is nothing goes well: everything fails; and no one can divine the cause. The very means devised for safety turn out means of insecurity and loss. A kind of fatality appears to wait upon every step of the man's course. A fire, blown he knows not how, consumes his substance. His 'wicked devices" for his own aggrandizement turn out like plans contrived for his own destruction.-The words indeed may have a different meaning. "Established" may have reference not to the stability of his fortunes, but to that of his mind-to tranquil self-possession and firmness. The steadfastness of the righteous, in this view, is finely expressed in the latter clause of the verse-" But the root of the righteous shall not be moved." Even if, in the providence of God, his substance should fail, he himself remains unshaken and entire, in all his best blessings and in all

his hopes. He loses nothing. He gains. "What injures him in one way, benefits him in another and a better. And his spirit remains unbroken; his confidence loses not its hold. He resembles the mighty oak of the forest, that has stricken its roots wide and deep into the soil: the raving tempest may assail it, may shed its leaves, may snap a few twigs and slender branches; but it stands itself firm in all its unblemished majesty.* * Comp. Jeremiah 17:5-8.

Verse Proverbs 12:4. "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones."

"A woman of virtue." The word is to be understood as including, along with strict conjugal fidelity in affection and conduct, good principles in general, in their practical operation;-piety and consistency; industry, economy, prudence, and good management; steadiness, propriety, and becoming dignity; all the affections, all the duties, and all the delicate seemliness, belonging to her station, as a wife, as a mother, and as a mistress.

Such a woman is "a crown to her husband."-There is supposed by some to be an allusion in the expression to the practice of crowning bridegrooms on the occasion of their nuptials, as an emblem of the new authority and honour with which they were conceived to be invested. Be this as it may, the meaning is plain. A crown is a mark of dignity: and a "virtuous woman" being "a crown to her husband," represents the respectability, credit, reputation, which accrue to a man from such a connexion;-not only from his having made so suitable a choice, but from the inevitable association of the one with the other, and from the discreet and generous conduct of the wife, in at once hiding her husband’s failings, and in giving prominence to his excellencies and virtues. In this respect wives have much in their power, in either maintaining or letting down the respectability and honour of their husbands. It is a miserable case, when there is contested superiority between man and wife. The woman that does contest it can never answer to the description here of a "crown to her husband." No woman can that aims at assuming the crown to herself; and especially when, instead of keeping her usurpation a secret, she evidently aims at letting everybody know of her success. Such a woman does what she can to stamp her husband with degradation and littleness. Husband and wife are one; and they are so associated in the minds of others as to be, in a certain measure, identified; the respect, or the disrespect, felt for the one, almost unavoidably and insensibly, extending itself to the other. It is the duty of the husband to "give honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel;" and the husband who is not sensitively jealous of all that touches the respect due to his wife, and is not solicitous to make the best of her character in the eyes of others-indignantly protecting her from every act or word or look or insult, signally fails in a most essential element of conjugal love and duty. But it is best when husband and wife so feel themselves one,-their interests, their honour, their happiness one,-that superiority and inferiority are words unknown in their conjugal vocabulary; when authority never needs to be asserted, and subjection is never felt, the one being exercised, the other rendered in love; and when husband and wife are thus reciprocally "a crown" to each other, each adding to the other’s reputation and honour. But there may be more in the "crown" than the idea of honour. Garlands were also worn on occasions of festivity and joy; and on this very account they graced the nuptial ceremony, which, in all ages, has been one of gladness and social mirth. In the metaphor, therefore, joy and honour may be considered as combined;-the former as well as the latter arising to a husband from the character of the wife of his bosom, the joint head of his family, the worthy partner of his earthly lot. He feels and values the honour; and the joy is one of the richest sweeteners of his earthly

pilgrimage. The contrary part of the alternative is expressed in strong, yet not too strong, terms:-"But she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones." The first thing that here presents itself to the mind is unfaithfulness to the marriage vow. And, assuredly, to the man who truly loves his wife, this must be one of the most agonizing wounds it is within the range of possibility to inflict upon him. And I would have husbands to remember-for there is at times to be found abundant sensitiveness on the one side, when there is comparatively little, if any at all, on the other,-that the obligation to fidelity is the same on both parties; and that the contrary is "rottenness" in a wife's bones, as well as in a husband's. I enter into no questions of comparison and casuistry, but affirm the general law, and assert the equal deference due to feeling on the part of both. But there are other ways in which a wife may "make ashamed," and, although not to the same degree, may be "rottenness in the bones." She may be otherwise depraved and unprincipled. She may be a slattern; she may be a drinker; she may be a waster; she may be improvident; she may be vain, and light, and frivolous; she may be contentious, imperious, peevish, passionate; she may be a gossip and a scandal-monger. Her husband sees this, and sees the effects of it on the minds of others: and the sight brings vexation and anguish of heart; especially when he connects the character with the education of a rising family, on the members of which the example of a mother exerts so early and so powerful an influence. "It is rottenness in his bones." The figure is strong. We may consider it as conveying two ideas: 1. The "bones" are the strength of the frame. Upon them the whole is built. There is, therefore, in the idea of caries, or rottenness in them, that of the wasting of the vigour of body and mind, and tho bringing of the man prematurely to his grave; and that too by means which cost him, ere this result is effected, exquisite suffering. Then-

2. "The bones" are unseen. The poor man is pierced with inward and secret agony, which he cannot disclose; pines in unseen distress,-distress, of which the cause is hidden, while the effects are sadly and rapidly visible. Too often has it happened, that wives, who by their conduct have deprived home of its attractions, and made it the scene of annoyance and wretchedness, rather than of comfort, peace, and social joy,-have been the temptations of their husbands; have driven them to the ale-house and the evening club, to bad company and excess, to the ruin of business, of family, of character, of health, of life. Ye wives, beware: ye have much in your power. Let the beautiful description of conjugal duty, and consequent conjugal union and happiness, drawn by the pen of the inspired Apostle, in writing to the Ephesian church, be realized under the domestic roof of all husbands and wives calling themselves Christians.

Verse Proverbs 12:5. "The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit." The verse has been rendered-" The policy of the just is honesty; the wisdom of the wicked is cunning." And this rendering marks more strikingly the intended distinction. The "righteous man," in all his "thoughts," keeps by what is "right." He deals in rectitude, as opposed to "deceit;" and from his actions you may know his thoughts. It is not so with "the wicked." He thinks one way and acts another. His words and deeds are not the fair index of his thoughts. In the next verse, the same evil is depicted, only rising a step higher,-I should say, perhaps, sinking a step lower-in turpitude-" The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them." The principles of murder are in the heart of the wicked man, and the words of murder are in his lips. The idea in the latter part of the preceding verse is evidently retained here. In the words that suggest and advise "laying wait for blood," there is "deceit;" and deceit for the

most atrocious of all ends, the death of the hated object. Before the purposes of a wicked selfishness even life will not be permitted to stand.* "But the mouth of the upright shall deliver them." It is clear that "the mouth of the upright" implies the simplicity and commanding power of truth. It is not entreaty by which he is supposed to prevail, but the pleadings of truth. In such pleadings there is a power that is ever fitted to produce the effect; especially in cases where the death of the good man is sought under the forms of law; when they plead their own cause, with wisdom, with the internal evidence of simple truth, and with the mien and the majesty of real and conscious innocence. Even in such cases, however, it is far from having always been so. From the first martyr to the Christian faith, onward through the entire history of persecution, numberless instances of the contrary present themselves: but there are not a few also of the overawing and disarming power of the "mouth of the upright." When Jesus fulfilled his promise-" I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist," there was a power which, though it might not convert opponents, or even conciliate such favour as should ensure protection for the future, yet laid a restraint upon the indulgence of vindictive fury:-and many a time truth has silenced, when it has not saved; has promoted the cause even when it has not preserved its present advocate.

* See Proverbs 1:10-19. At all events, the words suggest the idea that "the mouth of the upright" is the only weapon the upright is warranted to employ. It is his to plead, and to plead in simplicity and sincerity, leaving his cause thus pleaded, with God.

Verse Proverbs 12:7. "The wicked are overthrown and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand."

Solomon had a signal exemplification of this in the case of Saul, and his father David. Possibly this instance might be in his eye at the time. Saul seemed to have the mastery; and David to be forsaken, and in constant and imminent peril. Yet the house of Saul was overthrown so as not to be; while David and his house were established; established in the divine favour and in the promised throne of Israel. Thus has it often been.

Verse Proverbs 12:8. "A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised." This is capable of two interpretations. It may refer to commendation by men, or to commendation by God. When understood in the one or in the other, wisdom requires to be somewhat differently interpreted. If a man possesses a sound judgment and proves a prudent, discriminating, faithful, and salutary adviser, in times of difficulty, perplexity, and trial,-that man will be "commended according to his wisdom" by his fellowmen. But if commendation from God be intended, wisdom must be taken in its higher sense,-as signifying not mere secular discretion, but religious principle; according to the invariable testimony, not of Solomon only but of all the inspired penmen, that "the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom." This is not the wisdom that secures the eulogy of men; but it will ever secure the commendation of God-the Infinitely Wise, the Infinitely Good. And indeed, the two things may be united. A man who has "the fear of God before his eyes" will always be a faithful counsellor; and if, at the same time, he have sound wisdom and discretion in regard to the affairs of life, fitting him for counsel and arbitration-this will form the perfection of character. There will be commendation both from men and from God. Forget not the counterpart of this statement, "But he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised." In the pride of your hearts, you may affect to hold very cheap the contempt of men;

though even that is often more pretension than reality-disappointment rankling at the heart, while scorn is curling the lip. But what must it be to be "lightly esteemed" at last-to be "despised" by that God who has in His hands the destinies of the universe.

There are expressions that have got into currency as the words of Scripture, that are not to be found in Scripture. Of this we have an instance in the way in which the former part of the tenth verse is usually quoted,-"The merciful man is merciful to his beast." No such words exist in the Bible. The nearest to them are the words which occur here. You will say, it is but a difference of words; and I am ready to admit that the sentiment as it has obtained currency, is in the fullest harmony with Bible principles. But there is more in the sentence as it stands in the Bible than in its ordinary form. That a merciful man is "merciful to his beast" expresses no more than that a kind and benevolent disposition will extend its exercise to the inferior creation as well as to fellow-men. Now, this is almost a truism. We may occasionally, in consequence of certain perverse habits of thought and feeling, acquired by incidental circumstances, or by injudicious training, or unfortunate example in early life, find the anomaly of a person kind to men and harsh to brutes. But it is an anomaly; and, as an anomaly, a comparative rarity. The man who really deserves the character of a merciful man, we expect to derive the very character from his kindness to the inferior tribes of creation as well as to men,-to the whole range, as far as within his influence, of sensitive existence. But the maxim contained in the words "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast" is, that practical kindness, extending to the brute creation, is an essential part of the character of a scripturally good man.-He deserves not the designation of a "righteous man" who is destitute of mercy. He is without one of the most important features of resemblance to God. When the Scriptures describe His character, He appears before us as extending a benevolent care over all creatures. His word is full of this. Read the 104th Psalm. You will find throughout a beautiful and sublime illustration of the general sentiment, "The Lord is good to all; his tender mercies are over all his works." And the lips into which grace was poured, have said in terms of lovely simplicity, and pregnant with meaning, "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten before God "-" one of them shall not fall to the ground without your heavenly Father." Each one of His children should delight to witness the joys of all creation, and strive by every means to promote them. The poet deprecates the friendship of the man "who needlessly sets foot upon a worm."

There are few things more shocking than the wanton barbarity practised upon animals that are employed in the service of man. How useful!-how ill treated! There are two systems of treatment pursued, both of which, after all, are but different descriptions of mere self-interest. There is the system that works them hard and gets most labour out of them in the shorter time they last:-and the other is the system that by working them less severely, exacting from them a smaller average of toil, makes them last the longer time. But with "the righteous" there ever will be, more than a mere calculation of self-interest. It will not be merely "the life of his beast," because it is his, and because he considers gentle treatment as the most economical, that "the righteous man will regard." That would not be mercy, but mere prudential management for his own advantage. Higher motives will influence him. It will not even be mere sensibility. It will be sensibility associated with principle, and a regard to the authority and the example of God. The latter part of the verse is a singularly strong expression for hard-heartedness-"The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Mercy, if ever exercised at all, is exercised with a surly and grudging reluctance; and the extent of

its doings and its gifts is so restricted and parsimonious, that they will appear to the man of generous spirit, who "delights in mercy," no better than "cruelty." The expression may perhaps also mean, that of wicked men even the kindness is frequently injurious. As they have no thought beyond the body, the world, and time, they often express their kindness in a way that may prove prejudicial in the extreme to those who are disposed to accept of it. As it is said that "he that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet;" so may it be said of the kindness of the ungodly. It makes no account of the highest of all interests; and will propose and urge plans of worldly benefit fitted to ensnare, and damage, and finally ruin the soul. Of such kindness let all beware. It is "cruelty" in disguise. The former, however, is probably the true meaning; and the language has special reference to the treatment of inferiors, and of dependent brute creatures. "What affecting exemplifications might be found for illustration in the treatment of slaves. How often have the very descriptions of kind treatment-treatment on which the owner highly plumed himself, been such as only to fill with indignation and shame the bosoms of all possessing a truly compassionate and generous spirit! And how often has the iron-hearted tyrant vaunted of his "mercy" in the course pursued towards his captive victims, or those who have offended him; "when he was only presenting a practical commentary on the words, "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel."-And have you never met with a monster in human form, who, when reproved for merciless severity to his "beast," has laughed at you, and told you, with manifest self-complacency, how much harder he could make his blows if he chose; as if he had whereof to glory in the mere fact of his not putting to his entire strength in venting his passion, or enforcing his merciless determination with the still worse coolness of a fiend?

Verse Proverbs 12:11. "He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding." Industry again!-A general principle is illustrated by a particular case. The principle is, Nothing Without Labour-a principle applicable alike to business, knowledge, and religion. Bread-corn will not spring up, ripen, and yield its produce spontaneously. There must be ploughing, sowing, harrowing, cleaning, reaping, thrashing, grinding, before a morsel of bread is obtained. And so business will not prosper, knowledge will not increase, religion will not thrive, but by the sedulous, persevering use of all instituted means. The antithesis between the two parts of the verse is plain, "But he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding." By "vain persons" we understand idle, dissipated, frivolous, time-killing persons. I warn young men especially to beware of such. They may present themselves under different aspects:-as low profligates; as aspiring, would-be, gentlemen; as men of station who can afford to be idle, who glory in it, and who flatter others by assuming them as their associates, and so giving them a distinction of which they are in danger of being vain.-Take care. "He that followeth them is void of understanding." He acts in opposition to all the plainest dictates of prudence and common sense, which testify the evil tendency of idleness, both as to present comfort, as to future success in life, as to true respectability, and as to moral and spiritual character. He flies in the face of all the lessons of experience; lessons the most striking and multiplied; lessons written many times in bitter tears, and not seldom even in blood. The next verse naturally enough connects with this:-"The wicked desireth the net of evil men: but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit." The word "net" may be understood of any means by which the wealth and honours of the world may be acquired. Thus it is used in Habakkuk 1:13-17. The net described in this passage is emphatically "the net of evil men." It is that of the oppressor, who regards his fellow-men as of any value, only as he can render them conducive to his own benefit and aggrandizement, and who uses them

accordingly; and, when his oppressive measures prove successful, vaunts himself in the power and the skill by which the success has been secured, taking the entire credit, unenviable as it is, to himself.-There seems to be a special reference, in the verse before us, to illegitimate or fraudulent means. In "the net of evil men," this is evidently implied. When "the wicked" see the devices of "evil men" succeed, they desire to try the same arts. Instead of any moral detestation of the means, they look only at the end. They see that attained. They are envious. They are tempted to imitate; and, there being little or no principle to offer resistance, the desire is at once put into practice. The violation of right sits but lightly on their consciences. The barrier of what men call duty and conscience, is easily thrown down. The sole question is, whether the plan be feasible,-whether it holds out a fair prospect of success. If objections are urged on the score of principle, they give a careless shrug and say, "Leave that to me; you have no business with my conscience; my question is-Will it answer?" If, in any case, conscience should remonstrate and restrain, and will not allow them to go quite so far, they yet envy, and regret their restraints. They still "desire the net" even when they can't bring themselves to use it. They wish they could get over their scruples, and, in this state of mind, the probability is that by and by they will.

"But the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit."-The "root of the righteous" might be understood as meaning the fixed, settled, stable principle of the righteous; and the sentiment may be, and it is an important one, and in harmony with much to the same purpose in this book-that acting on rooted principle, the righteous man will ultimately prosper; or, even if, in regard to this world, he should fail of success, his principle will yield the fruit of true happiness to him in the blessing of the Lord and the "peace which passeth all understanding." I incline, however, to think, that, as "the net" signifies the varied artifice, cunning, and fraud employed to gain riches quickly and easily-"the root of the righteous," as contrasted with the "net of evil men," may represent rather the source of his revenue or income: and-in opposition to the art of making rich quickly, to excite the surprise and the envy of others-a steady, firmly established, regularly and prudently and justly conducted business, bringing in its profits fairly and moderately; as a tree deeply rooted in the soil, draws thence its natural nourishment, and "receiving blessing from God," brings forth its fruit in due season. The two views are closely, if not inseparably, connected.

Verse Proverbs 12:13. "The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble." There may possibly, in these words, be an allusion to "the net of evil men" in the verse preceding. One of the means used by such men in attaining their ends-one of the meshes of the net which they weave for the purpose-is equivocation, falsehood, sometimes even perjury; and the defamation of persons; and the cheapening and abusing of goods; with a variety of other modes of untruth and dishonest chicanery. But often such men outwit themselves. They are "snared by the transgression of their lips." Their own words take them in. They are detected; and by detection their ends are frustrated, and reversed.

"But the just shall come out of trouble." The contrast is striking. "The just" is the man of principle. How often has the man of known integrity been released on the credit of his own word in times of suspicion and "trouble," when the man of known duplicity and deceit has been committed and retained; and, even when innocent, has got off with difficulty and is followed by doubt! The following verse presents another advantage of right words-the words of " the just." Their salutary counsel; their wholesome advice; their expressions of encouragement, consolation, and kindness, bring a rich reward into their own bosoms. They enjoy the satisfaction of seeing the happy effects

of their words-a sweet gratification to a benevolent spirit!-and reap a precious return of esteem and affection, of gratitude and cheerful benefaction-for "a man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth." And what is true of words is true of deeds; what is true of the tongue is true of the hands-" The recompense of a man's hands shall be given unto him"-a principle equally applicable to the wicked, who shall have both of man and God "according to their doings." In the next verse we have brought before us afresh one of the distinguishing characteristics of folly, on the one hand, and wisdom on the other. That of the former is a proud, high-minded self-sufficiency, which disdains all admonition, deems its own ways and plans ever and certainly the best, and can brook no control. That of the latter is the self-diffident humility that seeks guidance, courts instruction, and is ready to yield to good counsel at the hand of man, and renders entire and implicit submission to the mind and will of God-without which there is nothing that deserves the name of wisdom-"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes; but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.* * See on Proverbs 3:7.

Another mark of folly is brought before us in the 16th verse (Proverbs 3:12):-"A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame." The fool has no proper command of his passions. His self-sufficiency renders him impatient of contradiction-irascible, and headstrong; and he is incapable, from want of the vigour of self-control, of suppressing his anger. He allows it to burst forth in whatever place, time, or circumstances; and no matter in whose presence.-In contradistinction from the touchy and overbearing fool is "the prudent man who covereth shame."-Shame here means any affront. He does not, by his quick and blustering resentment, make it immediately known to all the world that he has been insulted, and that he has felt it. He stifles his passion; restrains the bursting out of wrath; lest he should utter hastily what may put him more to shame than any word or deed of insult from another ever could.-The virtue here commanded is that of self-command. The following verse-"He that speaketh truth showeth forth righteousness: but a false witness deceit," needs little comment, as we have had the same subject already under consideration.* We are reminded of the special necessity of truth in witness-bearing in order to the right decision of any cause. Hes who "tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," subserves the interests of equity; "shows forth righteousness"-contributing as far as lies in him to a just result: while a "false witness" misleads and deceives-drawing judge, and jury, and audience into a wrong train, and producing a false and unrighteous verdict, which acquits the guilty or condemns the innocent.

* See on Proverbs 6:16-19. The two following verses are closely connected with the preceding, and with each other:-"There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health. The lip of truth shall be established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment." The language of keen irritation, reproach, invective, and scorn, often inflicts wounds on the heart that are deep and hard of cure-wounds "like the piercings of a sword." This is especially the case, when the words are from the lips of a friend, or of one we love, when heated by sudden passion. The utterance of a moment may embitter the future of a life-time-the remembrance "piercing" the heart of him whose lips the words have escaped, even more severely than that of the object of them.

Wit, too, when not chastened and controlled by an amiable disposition, often wounds deeply, and is as "the piercings of a sword." Jibes, jests, irony, raillery, and sarcasm, fly about. No matter what the wounds, or where they be inflicted, if the wit be but shown. A happy hit, a clever, biting

repartee, will not be suppressed for the sake of the feelings, or even the character of a neighbour, or, as it may happen, a friend. The man of wit must have his joke, cost what it may. The point may be piercing in the extreme; but if it glitters, it is enough; to the heart it will go.-The man of such a character, whose wit is for self-display, to the sacrifice of every feeling but his own, never can be loved. He is feared, hated, avoided. "But the tongue of the wise is health." It has no keen "piercings." It composes differences, allays resentments, vindicates character, soothes the sorrowful, comforts the afflicted, cheers the drooping and desponding spirit, promotes peace and concord, justice and piety, personal and social happiness. In the last verse the value of truth is re-asserted. They whose lips are "the lips of truth" hold a position of preeminent security and peace. With those of a "lying tongue" it is all the reverse-momentary success-final ruin! The verse has been differently rendered:-" The tongue of truth is ever steady: but the tongue of falsehood is so but for a moment," (Hodgson). There is unvarying consistency in the one case; for truth is always in harmony with itself; while there is shifting evasion, vacillation, self-contradiction, in the other. Truth is ever at once the easiest course and the safest. Cleave then to TRUTH.

28-Pro_12:20-28

Proverbs 12:20-28

LECTURE XXVIII.

Proverbs 12:20-28.

"Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy. There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be tilted with mischief. Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight. A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness. The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute. Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad. The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them. The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious. In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death."

What is the precise point of the designed antithesis in the first of these verses? I am disposed to think, that the word rendered "deceit," may be understood as including deceit practised on a man's self as well as on others; and that here it may have the sense of self-deceit. Eminent translators, accordingly, in exact conformity with this idea, have rendered the word, in its present connexion, disappointment; frustrated hope. Should this rendering be questioned,-the word being generally used for fraud, or mischievous dissimulation and double dealing,-the principle of interpretation is still sufficiently obvious. Those who "imagine evil" dare not avow their designs. Dissimulation and craft are productive of incessant apprehension and anxiety. They necessarily engender self-dissatisfaction and tremor; and that from the very dread of detection, frustration, and consequent evil to themselves, instead of to those against whom they were plotting.-While such is the unhappy condition of the man who "imagines"-that is, who devises evil; who seeks to foment discord; to sow the seeds of dissension, and to encourage their germination and growth till they bear all their bitter fruits-on the other hand, "To the counsellors of peace is joy."

God is "the God of peace." Christ is "the prince of peace." "The fruit of the Spirit is peace." In harmony with His own character and with the character and ends of the dispensation He was introducing, Jesus pronounces a blessing upon the "maker of peace."* When the angelic host ushered the new-born Saviour into the world, they proclaimed "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!" All the exhortations of the divine word accord with this. Peace is the spirit of the Bible. Peace is the very element of the gospel. Peace is the bliss of heaven-" They shall enter into peace." The joy which the "counsellor of peace" possesses, springs from the inward satisfaction of having felt and acted in harmony with the will and the word of God, and with the best interests of men; and from complacency in the blessed results of his counsel and mediation. What a spirit that must be that has pleasure in the opposite! The very pleasure is misery. The very sweet is gall and wormwood.

* Matthew 5:9.

Verse Proverbs 12:21. "There shall no evil happen to the just: but the wicked shall be filled with mischief." This verse has been variously rendered. The rendering of the English version seems to have as fair a title to preference as any. The difference arises from the word for evil,-like that word itself-signifying either evil done, or evil suffered. Our translators have understood it in the latter sense; and we keep by it.

It will be evident that, in this understanding of the word, the sentiment in the first clause of the verse must be taken, like others, in a general sense. It is a fact in providence that many distresses come upon the righteous, and that, in the ordinary acceptation of terms, and according to the ordinary feelings of mankind, these are evils. They are, in themselves, "not joyous, but grievous." But viewed in their bearing on the higher department of human interests, the declaration may be considered as of exceptionless universality: the import being, in the terms of Matthew Henry-" The worst troubles shall be overruled for their good." In this sense it can be truly said of "the just"-"All things are theirs." "The world" is theirs. "Life and death" are theirs. "Things present and things to come," whether in themselves good or evil, are theirs, for "all things work together for their good." On the contrary-" The wicked shall be filled with mischief"-mischief to himself. The expression is strong. But when considered as inclusive not merely of present evils but of final results, what expression can be too strong? What expression can go at all beyond the truth; nay, can ever reach it?* * Comp. Proverbs 1:31.

Mark still again, in the next verse, the vileness of falsehood, the excellence of truth; and truth in act as well as in word. The two parts of the verse taken together suggest the remark:-"Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight." Honesty is just truth in conduct; and truth is honesty in words.

Verse Proverbs 12:23. "A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness."

"The prudent man," the man of modest and diffident discretion-"concealeth knowledge." He is not forward and ostentatious in the display of it. When he does bring it to view, it is on suitable occasions, when it is really required; and in a suitable manner,-not with vain-glorious parade, but with blended self distrust, and a measure of confidence proportioned to the amount of certainty.

There are persons with whom the growth of knowledge is only the increase of food for vanity. Every new acquisition pampers their self-conceit; and, indeed, is sought after, in a great degree, with that view-to gratify self-esteem, and to fit for display. True are the words of Paul, "Knowledge puffeth up:" and the augmentation of it may only puff up the more. This produces a very anomalous and incongruous combination-a mind filled with solid information, and a heart distended with the emptiness of vanity. And this generates the pedant,-one of the most contemptible and disgusting of all characters-the man who is ever showing off; ever aiming at effect; ever speaking as nobody else would speak; ever dwelling on his own themes in his own terms; and in every word, and look, and movement, courting notice to self, as the only object of his own admiration, or worthy of the admiration of others. What a fool even the man of "knowledge" does at times make of himself!-exemplifying the truth of the old quaint adage, "An ounce of mother-wit is worth a pound of clergy."

Still it is true, that the more extensive the knowledge which a man acquires, he is, generally speaking, the more conscious of remaining ignorance, and consequently the less vain; that it is in the early stages of acquirement that selfsufficiency and conceit are most apparent. It is the empty that are usually the most prone to vain-glory: "The heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness." The heart desires and dictates the proclamation. The heart is the fountain from which the shallow, noisy, babbling stream of folly is ever welling out. It is the ready indulgence of the heart's intense propensity to talk that betrays the folly. The fool becomes thus the herald of his own emptiness. "Even a fool, if he hold his peace," Solomon says elsewhere, "may be counted wise." But then, alas! to hold his peace is just the difficulty! He will speak; and he cannot speak without making his folly apparent. What is in will be out; and what is in is foolishness. "A fool's voice is known by the multitude of words"-the words being out of all proportion to the sense. "Yea also, when he who is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool."

There is a connexion, brethren, in which the former part of the verse ought to be very cautiously interpreted. I mean, in its relation to divine knowledge-or rather the knowledge of divine truth. Even in regard to the use of that knowledge, there is such a thing as "prudence." There is such a thing as introducing religion inappropriately, in places and at seasons, when its introduction is likely to do harm rather than good-such a thing as "casting our pearls before swine." And in many instances has the want of discretion,-the want of a due discrimination of the "time to keep silence" and "the time to speak,"-only produced derision on the part of the enemies of religion, and the blush of shame on the cheek of its friends. And yet the ill-timed mistake of the well-meaning but weak and indiscreet, ought not to be used as a cover and apology, as we fear it too frequently is, for "concealing knowledge"-for refraining from speaking, and for keeping our mind to ourselves, when a legitimate "prudence" does not at all impose silence; and when the real cause of the reserve, although it shelters itself under the protection of such texts as this, is no other than shame-a dastardly shame. O let us beware of this extreme. "A word spoken in season, how good is it!" Forget not that our Master has said-" Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of the Father, with the holy angels," Mark 8:38. In the following verse we have, in a fresh form, an oftrepeated maxim-" The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute."

Industry is the way to preferment; sloth to degradation. Sloth makes a man the subject, not the ruler; the tail, not the head; the vassal, not the master; the subjugated, not the conqueror; the bearer of the yoke, not the bearer of the sceptre. Would you rise?-be diligent; would you sink?-be idle. The maxim holds alike in the church and in the world.

Verse Proverbs 12:25. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad." The figure here is a natural one, and is common in all languages. The "heaviness" may arise from different causes; from the pressure of severe afflictions, whether personal or relative; from apprehensive fears of threatening calamities; or from distress of conscience under the conviction of sin. Such causes "make the heart stoop." They weigh it to the dust. On the contrary, in these circumstances,-"a good word maketh it glad." A "good word" is a word of sympathy and kindness, of encouragement and consolation, spoken in the ear, in the spirit of friendship. Above all, "a good word" is a word from God. O! there is no word so good, so pregnant with consolation and strength, and peace and joy, as "the word that cometh forth from the Lord." Have not you felt this, my fellow-Christians? When the heaviness of sorrow has been weighing your spirits down, and you

have been ready to sink into despondency, if a friend has whispered into your ear one of the sweet and faithful promises of your covenant God, has it not lightened the burden? Has it not lifted the crushing weight from your heavy-laden heart?-brought the smile of peace over your countenance, and the tear of joy to your eye?-What an important and interesting duty then does it become, to impart such "good words and comfortable words" to the downcast and heavy-hearted! It is a delightful designation of our God-" God who comforteth them that are cast down!" And this is one of the characters in which we should seek to resemble Him;-to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction;" and "to comfort them who are in any trouble with the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." For sinners convinced of sin, and oppressed with conscious guilt and fear-O how good the word of the truth of the gospel! It is the only word that can relieve and lighten it. Many an oppressed and agitated spirit has it set at rest. There are in this book of God, indeed, words that may well make the hearts of sinners "heavy"-words of solemn import-of fearful denunciation. O that we but saw them "stooping" under this "heaviness;" sensible of sin, feeling the hand of a righteous and holy God upon them; conscious of the justice of his condemning sentence and trembling in the apprehension of its execution! Then should we be sure of a ready entrance to the "good word" that tells of mercy for the chief of sinners through a divine Saviour;-the word that stilled the trembling spirits of the convicted murderers of "the Prince of life;" that sent the eunuch of Ethiopia on his way rejoicing; that filled with gladness the alarmed jailer at Philippi-giving a satisfactory answer to his question of agitation and dread-"What must I do to be saved?"-"the word of reconciliation "-" the faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." O listen, listen to the "good word" that came from the lips of Him who spake as never man spake-" Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Surely, when he uttered these words, the prediction of the prophet was fulfilled, in which Messiah is introduced as saying-" The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary!" Isaiah 50:4.

* Matthew 11:28-30.

Verse Proverbs 12:26. "The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them." The word rendered "excellent" is on the margin translated "abundant." And although it is a truth that in regard to character, in all its principles and their practical results, "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour;" yet such a statement is almost a truism. Taking the word as referring to possessions and prospects, as meaning that the righteous excels his neighbour, or men in general around him, in his lot as to happiness and hope-blessings in enjoyment and blessings in anticipation-it then becomes a statement of very great importance. It presents an inducement to the godly to "hold fast their profession," and an inducement to others to join their society, and cast in their lot with them. "The righteous" may belong to the lowest grade in the community of this world; for "to the poor the gospel is preached." But even the poorest of the people of God has a lot that may well be envied by the wealthiest and the noblest of the sons of earth. When we view them as the possessors, in the promises of God, and in the experience of their own hearts, of "all spiritual blessings,"-rich in faith and rich by faith, and the heirs of an everlasting and celestial inheritance, of a crown and a kingdom above,-we feel the truth of the position. The wicked themselves are convinced of it. But, as Solomon here adds-" the way of the

wicked seduceth them." Their way is the way of sin-" the course of this world." By this their way they are beguiled. There is something tempting in it always before them, by which they are lured forward. The pleasures of sin-the fascinations of the world-its riches, its honours, its company, its amusements, its present gratifications, its promises for to-morrow-all work upon, and "seduce" them.* * Comp. Proverbs 1:31-32.

Another graphic description follows of the effects of sloth:-verse Proverbs 12:27. "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of a diligent man is precious."

Even the sluggard, roused by particular circumstances, will at times make an effort; but having made it, he relapses into his habit of indolence, and the effort is rendered nugatory. He goes out a hunting; he catches prey; he brings it home. But he lets it lie, from sheer laziness, till it becomes useless. His labour is lost. "But the substance of a diligent man is precious." He turns his "substance" to good account. "What he gains becomes, in his hands, by the use he makes of it, "precious," as the means of further increase. And his substance becomes "precious" to others as well as to himself. It is industriously, profitably, benevolently used. In this lies the true value, the real "preciousness," of a man’s substance;-not in the acquisition, but in the use.

"We have had the sentiment of the 28th verse (Proverbs 12:28) repeatedly before us:-" In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death."-The words have no meaning, unless they be understood as implying, and having reference to, a future state. In one sense, you are all aware, there is death to the righteous as well as to the wicked. "Wise men die" as well as "the fool and the brutish person." But "the righteous" are in possession of spiritual life-a life which never dies-a life which the death that dissolves for a time the union of soul and body cannot injure, but only advances to perfection, setting the living and happy spirit at liberty in "the beauty of holiness," and meetness for the life of heaven. And thus, in regard to them, even now all that is tormenting in the fear of death-of the first or of the second death-the second imparting its terrors to the first,-is taken away; so that "in the pathway of righteousness there is no death." That "pathway," remember, begins at CALVARY; and your entrance on it must begin with faith in HIM who died there. You must start in it from the Cross. THERE ARE A THOUSAND PATHS TO HELL; ONE ONLY TO HEAVEN. "Enter ye in at the strait gate-strait is the gate and narrow the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." In giving you such counsel we are, in the highest sense, "counsellors of peace." We are seeking your peace, present and future-your peace for time, and your peace for eternity; your peace with God, your peace with yourselves; peace of conscience, peace of heart, peace on earth, and peace in heaven! Let us have joy of you in the Lord! If any poor wanderer shall be prevailed upon by what has been said to flee from the paths of sin and ungodliness and the world, and to choose henceforth "the way of life"-"my heart shall rejoice, even mine." That joy shall be shared by all who have experienced the happiness and the hope of true religion,-and by the spirits of the just and the angels of light above:-for "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

29-Pro_13:1-15

Proverbs 13:1-15

LECTURE XXIX.

Proverbs 13:1-15.

"A wise son heareth his father’s instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke. A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence. He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction. The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat. A righteous man hateth lying: but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame. Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner. There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches. The ransom of a man’s life are his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke. The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out. Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well-advised is wisdom. Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life. Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded. The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard." The language of the first verse is capable of two meanings: either, that hearing instruction and not hearing reproof are the effect and manifestation, respectively, of a wise or a scornful mind;-the wise son showing himself to be so by "hearing his father’s instructions" and the scorner showing himself to be so by "not hearing rebuke;"-which interpretation, on reading the words, strikes the mind as most natural. Or, (reversing cause and effect) that wisdom and scorning are the results, respectively, of hearing or not hearing instruction and rebuke. In other words-"The son that is instructed by his father turns out wise; he who receives no correction turns out a fool." In the first of the two senses the admonition is chiefly to children,-in the second to parents. Let both, respectively, receive, and ponder, and act on, the admonition as from God. The sentiment of verse second is similar to that expressed in the fourteenth verse of the preceding chapter-"A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth; but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence."-A single remark must suffice in further illustration of it. Although the spirit and practice of retaliation are nowhere vindicated in Scripture, but everywhere explicitly and strongly condemned; yet a treatment corresponding to their own conduct towards others, is what every one may expect, even independently of what deserves the name of retaliation. In the nature of things it cannot be otherwise. It is not in human nature, nor in any nature, not even in the divine itself, to love (with the love of complacence, I mean) that which is unamiable. An amiable disposition alone can secure love: and amiability of disposition is greatly indicated by the tongue. The man who is charitable in his judgments, and disposed to speak well of others, will be himself the subject of charitable judgment and of cordial commendation. All will love, and honour, and bless the man "in whose tongue is the law of kindness." Thus he "shall eat

good by the fruit of his mouth." On the contrary, against the man who is a "transgressor" with his lips, making them the instruments of malice in the utterance of slander and the fomenting of alienation and strife-against that man are unavoidably kindled all the feelings of indignation, all the angry passions; of which the result is "violence"-the violence of vindictive pride and sense of wrong. This interpretation of the latter part of the verse harmonizes best with the language of that which follows-"He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his mouth shall have destruction."

Verse Proverbs 13:1. "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." Here the important maxim-Nothing without labour, is again repeated. It is the original law of man's nature. The fatigue and distress of labour are, no doubt, the result of sin. Not so labour itself. Even in the garden of primeval innocence "the man was placed, to dress it and to keep it:" not to bask idly in the sun, and see everything spring and prosper around him-the ground dressing itself, and the plants trained and pruned by the hand of nature, and nothing left for him to do but enjoy the beauty, and the fragrance, and the fruit. No; his enjoyment was to be enhanced by his having a hand in all, and obtaining all as the reward of his own care and tending-his own "delightful task." It was by his "dressing and keeping" that everything was to thrive. On the two following verses it is equally unnecessary to enlarge. They bring up afresh very frequently recurring thoughts*-"A righteous man hateth lying; but a wicked man is loathsome and cometh to shame. Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in his way; but wickedness overthroweth the sinner."

* Comp. Proverbs 11:3-6; Proverbs 12:22, and other passages. The "hatred" of the "righteous" to "lying" arises from his sympathy in all things with God. He is "of one mind " with God; and to Him "lying lips are an abomination." He covets God's approving smile more than all that earth can yield, and would not lose it one moment for all the most successful duplicity could ever gain. And that smile a course of uprightness and integrity secures; but "the wicked," meaning here especially the liar, by his very lies, his deceit and falsehood, to say nothing of the varied crimes, for the concealment of which these are employed, is emphatically "loathsome." He is loathsome to God, loathsome to all the truly good, and even according to the conventional morality of the world, from which "lying" is excluded on the principle of expediency, "loathsome" to men in general:-and "cometh to shame;" loses confidence; is distrusted, shunned, nicknamed, scorned, and ruined. Destitute of the "righteousness" which "keepeth the upright in the way," he is, like all other "sinners," overthrown, discomfited, and destroyed by his "wickedness."

Verse Proverbs 13:7. "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." This verse bears a close resemblance to the 24th verse of the eleventh chapter (Proverbs 11:24), but the sentiment it expresses is not the same. That verse assures us of the favour of the Lord to the generous and liberal-who, under His blessing, prosper by giving, make rich by "scattering;" and of His displeasure at the niggard, whose blessings He curses, and whose accumulated stores He dissipates, making the very care he takes of them the means of their diminution and failure. But here the wise man brings before us quite different developments of character,-the ostentation of riches where there are none; and the affectation of poverty in the midst of riches.

Some make a great show of wealth, with little if any capital-living on false credit. Enamoured of the "lust of the eyes and the pride of life," they contrive to keep up an external appearance far beyond any means they actually possess. They affect high life on low finances. Even, at times, for the sake of commanding credit, they put on such an appearance to give the world the impression that they are prospering. They live at great expense; launch into extensive speculations; make a show of large dealings, great warehouses, great stock, and distant connexions. But all is hollow; there is no substance, no reality. It is only a gay bubble, sparkling in the sunshine, but lighter than vanity; which bursts anon, and its emptiness is discovered. What seems bullion is but a covering of gold leaf. What dazzles is but a passing meteor.

Such a course is nothing better than a species of swindling on a large scale; and surely the largeness of the scale should not diminish the guilt in our eyes. It is frequently adopted by men of little principle, when they find themselves sinking. Instead of giving in in time-they make a dash; they assume a higher and more splendid style of living than before, that they may thus avoid suspicion, and maintain their credit; while they know that they are only augmenting risks, hastening their own downfall, and more largely and seriously involving others. This is wickedness. On the other hand we have the miser. He scrapes, he holds, he hoards, he "has great riches." But he "makes himself poor;" not only feigning poverty, and assuming its garb and appearances before others, that he may not raise expectations by his wealth being known, but actually living in poverty;-denying himself the comforts and even the necessaries of life,-pinching and starving to add to the store which lies unused, of no service either to himself or others. This too is wickedness, but of another type. It must be ranked among the varieties of mental derangement, and yet it is derangement which, like some other descriptions of it, is of a moral kind, originating in the perversion of moral principles.-And akin to it, on this ground, is the love of money, and the eagerness to hoard, induced by the preposterous vanity of dying rich. I have called the vanity preposterous because of the strange incongruity of a man breathing his last in the conceit of being the richest he knows, and aware, at the same time, that the instant his last breath is drawn, the extent of his earthly possessions will be the length and breadth of his grave! And further, because the man who is vain of dying rich, is vain of that which is his shame. His dying rich is the very proof of his sin and shame. Had he done with his riches what God always intends when he bestows them, he would not have died so rich. Had he hearkened to the claims of benevolence and piety; had he dispersed and given to the poor, to relieve both their temporal and their spiritual need, he might have had less in his coffers, but an incomparably more enviable reputation on earth, and a better and more enduring substance in heaven.

Verse Proverbs 13:8. "The ransom of a man’s life are his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke." The verse has been understood in different ways. The import of it has been given thus:-"A rich man when he fears any evil from his enemies, can divert it by a sum of money; but the poor man, when he is threatened, dares not stay, but runs away." He does not stay to defend or buy himself off; but the moment he hears "rebuke" or threatening, aware that he has no resources, he stops not to hear it out, but immediately makes good his escape-takes himself off.

I prefer another interpretation-according to which the verse sets forth the comparative benefits of poverty and riches.-The rich are objects of envy; exposed to false accusation, to robbery, to theft, and to the risk of life. It is true that in their circumstances, they may, in seasons of public calamity, redeem their lives by "a ransom" from their abundant store. But the poor are still better off. They

are not exposed to danger. They are not envied; they are not "looked at askance with jealous leer malign,"-with the "evil eye" of covetousness; nor are they molested with the harassing disquietudes arising from such causes. "Who thinks of envying, or prosecuting, or defrauding, or taking the life of the man who has nothing? Who ever thinks of robbing or murdering a beggar? He is everywhere safe and free from molestation, from whom there is nothing to be had. Poverty, then, is not without its advantages. They are, to be sure, of a negative kind; and not likely to make men give the preference to poverty; nor do I mention them because it should, or that it may. All that is meant is, that such considerations should contribute to reconcile the poor to their providential lot.-Another consideration is this-that there is a death from which no riches can ransom, and a life which no riches can purchase. Here "the rich and the poor meet together." They stand on the same footing. They must both obtain life and salvation on the same ground. The rich cannot purchase it; the poor need not riches to procure it. It is "the gift of God," "without money and without price." By the same ransom all, "high and low, rich and poor," must be redeemed-"not with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and-without spot." O let rich and poor come to the same cross, and the same throne; to the same Saviour, and the same Father in heaven; and, trusting in the same foundation of hope, anticipate together the same eternal home. Believe in Christ and the riches of eternity are yours. He has paid the ransom.

Verse Proverbs 13:9. "The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out." Here light is joy. The meaning is, that of "the righteous" the joy is steadfast, permanent, increasing; while that of the wicked is destined to final and perpetual extinction--leaving him in the blackness of darkness.-Of the former "the light rejoiceth,"-or "burns brightly;" shines with growing lustre-" more and more unto the perfect day." Of the latter the joy shall close in misery and despair-his lamp extinguished in a darkness, of which the intensity will be deepened by contrast with the previous light.* * Comp. Job 18:5-6; and Job 21:17.

Even amid the gathering and brooding gloom of adversity, "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour." He possesses, in his hours of sorrow, a light of spiritual gladness which many a time shines most brightly and cheeringly when the lights of this world’s prosperity are dim or extinguished. Have you not found it so in your happy experience, ye friends of Jesus and children of God? Yes; and by and by, the gloom shall have passed away, and the light of your blessedness shall shine forth in all its splendour for ever and ever! Death, instead of quenching it, only removes whatever obscured the brilliance of its lustre; that in the purer atmosphere of heaven it may send forth all its radiance. There your "joy shall be full."-On the contrary, the light of " the wicked" is worldly prosperity alone. It is a "lamp" which every passing breath may extinguish, and which, even if no such accident befall it, is rapidly consuming-burning to a close. And when this only light fails, all is darkness-darkness without a single ray to relieve it-the darkness of unending night.

Verse Proverbs 13:10. "Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well-advised is wisdom." This verse has been rendered-" A fool, through pride, stirreth contention: but with the considerate is wisdom."-An immense proportion of the quarrels and disputes found in families, in circles of relationship and friendship, in churches, and in communities, have their origin and their continuance in "pride." And where it does not operate in producing them alone, it mixes itself up with other principles and motives-tainting and vitiating even such as are in the main good. There is a quick and touchy jealousy which cannot brook a word, or act, or look, that bears the slightest

semblance of disrespect or deficiency of deference. This is "pride." And resentment, revenge, envy, ambition, are all to a great extent, resolvable into "pride." From the contending interests of the world, bringing into operation these and other principles, arise so many unhappy strifes and alienations. And then, when there might be reconciliation and peace, "pride " interferes and prevents it. The question, Who is to yield?-or, Who is to yield most?-comes to be asked; and pride makes it difficult of reply. The adjustment might be easy, but for pride. Some point of honour-or what to pride seems such-must be maintained. The required apology must be complete in matter and in manner; not a word omitted or qualified; and the bow of humiliating submission must not want a hair’s breadth of its due profoundness. The offender must be thoroughly prostrated, that the triumph of pride may be complete!

And, as might be expected of our fallen nature and deceitful hearts, we are full of excuses for this pride. We are fond to exempt it from condemnation under some of its varieties; and we contrive to screen it under palliative epithets. We call it a becoming pride; a necessary self-respect and regard to our own dignity; a manly assertion of our own rights; a spirit that will not submit, and ought not to submit, to be trampled upon; and thus, under pretexts which involve a certain amount of truth, we cover from censure a larger amount of what is wrong. And the very manner in which even a Christian man may be seen, at times, to draw himself up, and toss his head, and look consciously great, when he is putting in this plea, should be enough to show him that there is a spirit working within not quite in harmony with the "meekness and gentleness of Christ."-Our pride and vanity naturally prompt to an over-estimate of wrongs of which we happen to be the objects; so that what, did it happen to another, we should never so much as notice, assumes much of consequence when it affects us; and we cherish the vindictive remembrance of little matters, which the wing of the passing moment has swept from every memory but our own. Nor do we only magnify the real,-we imagine injuries that were never meant, and have no existence; and impute to the worst motives what had either little or no motive at all, or a motive which, though mistaken, was good.

"But with the well-advised" or the considerate, "is wisdom." They show the wisdom of thinking more rightly of themselves; of putting a curb upon their pride and passion; of shunning disputes and quarrels, and, when they have unhappily occurred, of bringing them, by every possible means, to a speedy termination.

Verse Proverbs 13:11. "Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase." In this verse "vanity" evidently means all iniquitous methods of acquisition; and perhaps these are all called "vanity," because the expectations of him who uses them of real enjoyment in what he acquires, when successful, are so utterly vain. And what is true of private is no less true of public possessions. When such possessions are obtained, on the part of any country, by self-aggrandizing and unprovoked aggression, extermination, and conquest,-what are such means but injustice, oppression, and murder on an extended scale 1-and surely, we say again, the largeness of the scale should not abate our abhorrence of the evils! Gaining possessions by a violation of the rights of others,-of the principles of equity, and honour, and good faith-or, in one word, of the "royal law," is turning a country’s glory into shame; and, under the righteous and retributive administration of Heaven, the extension of dominion is but the extension of danger.* * Habakkuk 2:6-12.

"But he that gathereth by labour shall increase." The phrase for "by labour" is in the original "with the hand." But it signifies of course labour of all descriptions, all that comes under the designation of honest industry.

Verse Proverbs 13:12. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life."

Hope is the great cheerer of "the heart." And who has not experienced the sinking and "sickening" of the spirit from long-delayed expectations; and the joy that springs up in the soul, on the arrival of the long-looked-for good? A beloved friend, who has been for many a year in a distant land is returning home. How tardy then the flight of time!-days are weeks, and weeks months!" The heart" gets "sick" with "deferred hope." Then, when the hour of arrival and meeting does at length come, how vivid the ecstasy of delight!

We have, in Scripture, recorded illustrations of the sentiment. We have the case of Abraham in regard to God’s promise. O! the time was long! The delay looked strange. And, although his faith did not fail, yet at times his spirit seems to have felt the encroaching weariness of protracted waiting without any appearance of fulfilment.*1 Then, we have Hannah, pining at heart, amidst the insults and provocations of her "adversary," with the "deferred hope" of a son-when she "wept and did not eat" and her spirit was "grieved." *2 We have David too in the wilderness, heartsick in longing for Jerusalem and the courts and ordinances of God’s house.*3 And then we have Simeon, "waiting for the consolation of Israel"-fervently desiring his departure to heaven.*4 *1 Comp. Genesis 12:1-3. with Proverbs 15:2-3. rr *2 1 Samuel 1:4-12. rr *3 Psalms 42:1-2. rr *4 Luke 2:29-30. rr

Whither, in all cases, under the pressure of "hope deferred," shall we look? Whither but to our gracious God? He is the source, and He alone, of resignation and comfort, of patience and strength. And suppose, my Christian friends, the trouble, be it what it may, under which we suffer, and the "deferred hope" of whose removal makes us feel the "sickness of heart," the languor of spirit, here described-suppose it should continue with us even to the last; suppose the hope still and still "deferred," even on to the hour when "heart and flesh shall fail;" then the "desire cometh," in the highest sense the expression can bear. What was Paul’s desire should be ours. The object on which he set his heart supremely, should be that on which ours are set-"to be with Christ." And when that "desire cometh," it will be "a tree of life" indeed. For what says the Saviour himself, in engaging for the future peace and blessedness of his people?-" To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

Verse Proverbs 13:13. "Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded." The "word" is the word of God-whatever comes with His authority. Of the sinner who despises that word the "destruction" is sure. "The commandment" has the same meaning in the latter clause with the word in the former; and the expression "shall be rewarded" is on the margin, as in the original, "shall have peace." This agrees with the language of the Psalmist-" Great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them."

Whatever comes with divine authority is a divine command. The truth that comes with the authority of God, it is the duty of man to receive. Let it not, then, be forgotten that the Bible is the revelation of God’s mind to man as a sinner; and that the very first thing to which man as a sinner is bound, is

to accept the terms of forgiveness and life there prescribed. The gospel is, on this as well as other accounts, called "the law of faith;" being the divine prescription for the pardon and salvation of sinners. It has in it all the authority of a law.*1 The faith of the gospel is now the principle which produces obedience to the law. It "worketh by love" which is "the fulfilling of the law." And as it is in being "justified by faith" that we find "peace with God;" so it is in obeying God under the influence of this faith that we retain "the peace of God."*2 Thus, we have "in the keeping of His commandments a great reward."

*1 Gospel of John 3:22-24. rr

*2 Php 4:6-9.

Verse Proverbs 13:14. "The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."

"The law of the wise"-the law which they choose, and follow, and recommend as the rule of faith and duty, can be nothing else than this Holy Book-the Book of God. It was the law of the wise then; and now that it has been completed, it is more emphatically than ever "the law of the wise" still. They are truly wise who understand and believe its doctrines, and conscientiously obey its injunctions: for it is "a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." It is a fountain whose streams are salubrious and life-giving;-not like the waters of Jericho be/ore, but after they were "healed" by the prophet’s "cruse of salt." Nothing but life flows from the fountain of divine truth. To all who refuse to drink of that pure and vital fountain there is death. To all who partake of it there is life. Death is to those only who disbelieve and disobey. All who receive and love the truth have life. The word of God is essentially life-giving. Its design is not to confirm and publish the sentence of death, but to show how death may be escaped. The declaration of the sentence of death is only intended to show the necessity, and to impress the importance and value of the tidings of life. Life is the end-the all-gracious end-of divine revelation.

"The snares of death," is a phrase in which allusion is made to nets set for animals meant to be taken and killed. Such are all the temptations of "the Wicked One"-all the allurements of sin; they are "snares of death." He who is taken in them perishes. Now "the law of the wise"-this holy and blessed Book of God-conducts far from these snares all who take it for their guide. It is "a fountain of life, to depart," or to lead "from the snares of death." He who partakes of the healing waters of this fountain, and follows along the course of the stream that flows from it, will escape these "snares." On the margin of that stream they are not to be found. Its course is away from them. It is only when induced by strong temptation to forsake it that we are in peril. If, through the devices of Satan and the allurements of the world, we wander from this "pure river of water of life," our feet are sure to be entangled in the intricate meshes of those toils that are laid for us; and so we may never more find our way back again to its safe and peaceful banks. There all is life. There there is no death.

Verse Proverbs 13:15. "Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard." The meaning is not obvious; and different senses accordingly have been affixed to the words.

1. "Good understanding giveth" or showeth "favour"-say some,-that is to others; it is mild, gracious, kind, and conciliatory, while "the way of transgressors is"-still to others, "hard,"-harsh, severe, repulsive, unyielding, stern.

2. The verse has also been rendered-"Ingenuous manners procure favour, but rugged is the path of the artful"-that is, it is unpleasant both to himself and to them with whom he associates; exposing to incessant troubles, anxieties, and perplexing difficulties; while open, fair, ingenuous dealing makes a man’s way plain before him, and finds him favour and help from all.

3. More probably the meaning in both parts of the verse terminates on the person’s self. "Good understanding"-an intelligent and sound judgment, enlightened by principle and instructed by observation and experience,-by fitting a man to be a wise and able and useful counsellor-procures "favour." Such a man comes to be valued, esteemed, and loved. While, on the contrary, "the way of transgressors is hard"-hard to themselves. Like "by-path meadow" in the Pilgrim’s Progress, it presents at its entrance all that is tempting to allure into it; but it is "hard." It supplies no true enjoyment to the traveller in it at last.

If we take "good understanding" as the same with wisdom-the wisdom that teaches to "fear God and depart from evil;" we may consider "favour" as meaning divine favour. It is on them only who fear him that God "lifts up the light of his countenance." It is to them he gives peace. It is in their hearts that he sheds abroad his love; it is to them he imparts the hope that maketh not ashamed. Them he "guides with his counsel;" them he "brings to glory." "Blessed the people that are in such a case!"-But the way of transgressors is hard; and for this very reason-enough, were there no other-that the favour of God is not to be found in it. He smiles not on that path, nor on a single soul that chooses it. There is no light of his countenance there. And the way terminates-at that world of woe, in which all the ingredients of the curse are concentrated for ever. The wrath of God which is but revealed on earth, is felt in hell. It is revealed here, that you may escape it there. This is the design of the Gospel. It unfolds the "way of salvation." They are fools who disregard it. They are of "good understanding" who consider and choose it. It is the way of favour and life hero. It leads to favour and life for ever. Examine it. Choose it. Press into it. Flee for it "the way of transgressors." Keep in it. Let nothing drive, let nothing draw you out of it. All will then be well. The way conducts to Heaven-terminates at the gates of the Celestial City.

30-Pro_13:16-21

Proverbs 13:16-21

LECTURE XXX.

Proverbs 13:16-21.

"Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly. A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health. Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured. The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repayed." The first of these verses contains a sentiment in reference to conduct, similar to that expressed in Proverbs 12:23. with regard to speech. "Prudent men"-men of discretion, who look before and after-do not either act, or commit themselves to action, rashly. They deliberate. They apply all their sagacity, and all their information, to determine previously how they should resolve, and how they should proceed. And in proportion to the importance of the case-' the magnitude of the interests involved, and the consequences likely to ensue, they are the more solicitous that their deliberations should be enlightened and mature; especially when these interests and these consequences affect not themselves alone or chiefly, but others. On the contrary-"A fool layeth open his folly." His whole conduct exposes him, or shows what he is. Ho leaves nobody at a loss about his character. Even when he tries to be wise,-assuming the air, as fools sometimes do, of an oracle,-he fails. His very airs of wisdom betray "his folly;'' and what is good that he has got from others, ho mixes up with something incongruous and out of keeping of his own, by which he betrays himself He disarranges his borrowed feathers in the very attempt to display them, and lets every one see what is below. Prudence, of course, has no reference to principles, but only to times, and means, and modes of acting. When any principle is in question, and the course prescribed by that principle is clear, prudence is out of place, when allowed to put in a single word to delay, or dissuade from, action. Principle admits of no compromise. Our prudence must never presume to interfere with the dictates, the wisdom, or authority of God. It then becomes an insult to Heaven. The cardinal virtue is converted into a cardinal vice. The province of prudence is only to consider well, and ascertain surely, that the act we are about to do, or the course proposed to be followed, is in harmony with divinely sanctioned principle,-is required by divinely enjoined precept.

Folly and wickedness are often, in this book, found in close alliance, and mutually suggesting each other to the mind. It follows:-verse Proverbs 13:17. "A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health."

"Wicked" and "faithful" stand here in contrast.-When a man is entrusted with any commission, and undertakes for its execution, unfaithfulness, falsehood, treachery, is wickedness; is the wickedness peculiarly belonging to the position he occupies. "A wicked messenger" is one who

betrays his trust,-who, either with intention from the first, or influenced by temptations afterwards, acts a part different from his instructions, and contrary to their design.

Such a messenger, it is said here, "falleth into mischief;" as if the evil results came upon himself And true it is, and what might be expected, that in very many cases he does. His treachery, though meant for present benefit, and even, it may be, bringing it, is ultimately ruinous to his own interests. He is detected, cashiered, disgraced, and punished. But this does not yield so direct a contrast or antithesis with the latter clause of the verse-"a faithful ambassador is health;" which evidently relates, not to benefit accruing to himself, but to those by whom he is employed. On this principle-to bring the two clauses into more direct and natural connexion-the former has been rendered, "A wicked messenger precipitates into mischief"-causes to fall into it. Thus, the result to the prince, or whoever else may have employed him, is expressed. The embassy may be one, in its principle and in its details, eminently fitted for effecting ends the most desirable,-a wise and salutary measure: but the treacherous conduct of the diplomatist to whom it is entrusted,-whether dictated by a regard to his own interest, or by an overweening conceit of his own sagacity,-spoils the plan, and frustrates the object; and, instead of securing the intended benefit, exposes to injury, dishonour, and loss. He acts a double part. He carries a contrary or a different message. He manages in a way of his own, and not according to his instructions. Thus did Ziba to Mephibosheth-misrepresenting, falsifying, slandering; and, instead of procuring favour to his master, seeking favour and profit to himself, at the expense of interest, and character, and honour to him that sent him; and moreover, throwing the king into error, and inducing him to act unkindly and unrighteously to one, who, had the truth been told at the time, would have fared very differently at his hands.

I cannot pass this verse without applying it-as it is capable, in all its force, of being applied,-to the ambassadors of Christ of old, and the ministers of his cross still. Unswerving was the fidelity with which the former executed their trust.* And their example, laying apart the inspiration and authority implied in the idea of an "ambassador," ministers of Christ ought still to follow. "Faithful messengers are," in the highest of all senses in this department, "health." In other and ordinary departments, they are so. They at once please and profit those by whom they are sent; and they promote the benefit of the community. Their diplomatic fidelity contributes to the healthy soundness and prosperous condition of the body politic. In the kingdom of Christ, they advance his glory, promote the progress of his cause, and accomplish the salvation of men; by which, indeed, it is, that both his cause is promoted and his glory advanced. Unfaithful ministers, on the contrary, by whom his doctrine is not fully and fairly stated, and by whom ends are pursued different from that for which he himself came into the world, and suffered and died,-bring dishonour on his name, hinder the progress and influence of his truth, injure the spiritual interests of his kingdom, produce unhappiness to the church, and destroy human souls.

* See Proverbs 3:17; Proverbs 4:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

Verse Proverbs 13:18. "Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured." Had you the opportunity of tracing back to its origin the poverty and wretchedness of multitudes, you would find that origin in the neglect or the spurning of faithful and salutary instruction, admonition, and advice, in the morning of life. How very many of those who come to the gallows, or to the hulks, or to transportation, begin their confessions and

regrets, by lamenting over their early disobedience to parental counsel, their disregard of a father's and a mother's entreaties and tears!-and in all cases in which such unhappy persons, when not utterly hardened, have enjoyed the benefit of early instruction, their first and most earnest entreaty to others is, to beware of the disposition to make light of, to slight and disown such early privileges; their own sad experience giving point and poignancy to their warnings.* * See on Proverbs 5:7-13.

Verse Proverbs 13:19. "The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil." Of this verse various interpretations have been given. Two or three I shall mention; and leave you to choose between them.

1. Solomon has been thought to express this sentiment-that the final attainment and enjoyment of a desired good abundantly compensates for all the self-denial the difficulty, and the privation, endured in waiting for, and in pursuing it. This is a truth of practical importance; holding out, as it does, encouragement to perseverance, through trying and disheartening hindrances, in the anticipation of the recompense. And it is a truth which holds with unfailing certainty, in regard to spiritual blessings, the happiness of true religion, and the everlasting felicity in which these are consummated in a future world. But, notwithstanding all this, infatuated, self-willed fools persist in evil; pursue present pleasure; discover a rooted aversion to all spiritual duties and spiritual enjoyments; and cannot be induced to deny themselves the gratifications and indulgences of the passing moment, even for the sake of the best and highest of blessings and hopes, how affectingly soever exhibited. They "will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so-wisely."

2. Some render:-"It is sweet to the soul to enjoy what we love; therefore an abomination it is to fools to depart from evil."* In this rendering, the reason or principle is assigned, from which it arises that fools will not depart from evil. Their enjoyment is in it. They feel there are pleasures in sin. These pleasures they love. And, as these pleasures arise from sin, sin is what they like;-sin is sweet; and they will indulge their sinful propensities, for the sake of the present pleasure they yield. The present has the entire ascendency. The future is driven from their thoughts, and left to provide for itself, as it best may. They are resolved to take their pleasure now, and take their chance for the future when it comes. They wince, and fret, and are provoked by every admonition to reflection and anticipation. They dislike and spurn their faithful monitors. Their maxim is-" Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

* Hodgson.

3. "Desire" subdued, restrained, or overcome, "is sweet to the soul: but it is abomination to fools to depart from evil." (Schult. and Schulzius.) According to this translation the former clause expresses the inward satisfaction arising from the successful curbing and subjugation of any sinful desire-any evil propensity. This forms a fine and striking antithesis to the second clause. "While the good man can hardly enjoy a greater satisfaction than is imparted by the exercise of selfcontrol, and the overcoming of any powerful and imperative desire that has tempted and endangered his virtue,-on the contrary, to the ungodly the exercise of self-restraint is irksome, the denial of whatever worldly and sinful propensity demands gratification, is misery: it cannot be endured. They "draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope." They give the reins to all their lusts, and, hating all restraint, "say to the Almighty, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." The character is portrayed with great spirit, in the tenth psalm.* * Comp. Psalms 10:1-6; Psalms 10:11-13. The lesson of the following verse is one of the

comparative effects of good and bad company; a subject on which we have found Solomon touching more than once already. He knew and felt its importance:-"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

It is a fair and encouraging symptom of begun wisdom and piety, when a disposition is discovered to "walk with the wise;" to associate with them; to court and frequent their company; to prefer them as companions and intimates. As "two cannot walk together unless they are agreed," such association augurs well. It is one of the ways, and one of the first ways, in which when there is, in any heart, "some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel," it begins to show itself By such association also, good principles will be confirmed and strengthened; virtuous and holy habits formed and established; and all the affections which constitute the spirit and essence of true religion settled and matured. The spirit of the wise, or pious, is imbibed; the encouragement of their countenance felt; and the benefit of their conversation and example, in every way experienced. The interchange of thought augments its useful stores; and the interchange of true sympathy, and prayer, invigorates every right feeling, every pious and virtuous resolve. On the other hand-" the companion of fools shall be destroyed." Let the young mark it. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." "The companion of fools" learns their ways; drinks in their spirit; becomes familiarized with their principles and specious reasonings; loses the shrinking timidity of previous educational virtue; follows their courses; shares their doom. His heart is corrupted, and his soul is lost. Many scriptural illustrations press for notice. We have the family of Lot, suffering the fearful contamination of Sodom, from his "love of this present world" guiding his choice of a residence, instead of higher principles.*1 We have Rehoboam, following the counsel of his young companions, in preference to that of the aged and experienced counsellors of his father, and losing, in consequence, five-sixths of his kingdom.*2 We have Jehoshaphat, associating with Ahab, "helping the ungodly, and loving them that hated the Lord;" "wrath, therefore, coming upon him from Jehovah."*3 *1 See Genesis 13:10-13. rr *2 2 Chronicles 10:6-19. rr *3 2Chron. 18. and 2 Chronicles 19:1-2. The lesson is equally applicable to the prudential knowledge and regulation of secular affairs. The associate of the wise and intelligent in the business-pursuits of the present world will learn, by conversation and example, many profitable facts, and truths, and principles, which may be turned by him to good account; while "the companion of fools"-of the idle, the profligate, the dissipated, will lose all these, and is in the direct road to temporal disgrace and ruin. But the higher application of the words in their bearing on man’s spiritual and eternal destiny, is incomparably the more important.

Let youth take warning. When anything in their situation exposes them to the company of the ungodly, they are in danger. Let them not choose the exposure; and, should it unavoidably come in their way, let them fortify themselves by resolution and prayer. And as parents would not for any earthly consideration, wilfully and knowingly, place their children amidst the infection of the plague, far less should they, for any such consideration, set them down amidst the contaminations and enticements of vice and impiety. Too often, alas! this is little thought of, even by Christian parents, in choosing situations for their children. For the sake of a lucrative place, they will subject them to the most imminent risks of moral and spiritual pollution and death! O beware. You have no right to expect divine interposition to preserve your children from an evil to which you willingly, and wantonly, and from worldly motives, expose thorn. How can you expect to be heard for them? The Lord will shut out your prayer.

Many, as we have seen, are blinded to the dangers of evil company-blinded to the final consequences of associating with men of evil principles and evil deeds, by witnessing the present prosperity, and seeming enjoyment of such men in the course of this world, and the pleasures of sense and sin. The language of the next verse may well counteract any such illusion and forgetfulness:-"Evil pursueth sinners: but to the righteous good shall be repaid." The representation here is very striking. "Evil pursueth sinners." It follows their every step; and will infallibly overtake them in the end. It keeps pace with the progress of time. Each moment it comes nearer. Silent and unperceived, it tracks them through their whole course,-through all the windings and doublings of their wicked career. Insensibly it gains upon them. And at last-it may be suddenly and when least expected, it seizes and destroys them. The stroke of vengeance may be suspended; but it will only fall the heavier when it comes. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God," Ecclesiastes 8:11-13.

31-Pro_13:22-25

Proverbs 13:22-25

LECTURE XXXI.

Proverbs 13:22-25.

"A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children; and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just. Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment. He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes. The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want." Of the former clause of the first of these verses, the sense may be either metaphorical or literal:-that is, it may refer to a better inheritance than wealth, or it may refer to wealth itself. By the careful and pious education of his children,-bringing them up in the fear of God and the habits of virtue-the "good man leaves them an inheritance" of right principles. And these are, in reality, a far more valuable inheritance than the largest amount of riches ever accumulated by human industry or speculation, or the largest number of acres that earthly estate ever contained. By bringing up his children thus, he bequeaths to them the very best of all legacies;-valuable, even as it respects this world; for better surely are the principles of which the right application may, by the blessing of God, acquire wealth, than the largest amount of wealth left to a child, with principles that unfit him for the right use of it, and fit him only for squandering it away: and, when regarded in relation to the world to come, invaluable, insuring the blessings which "cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof." Ye who have been "trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," value-O value this inheritance. Retain it with a miser's care, that none of it be lost. If you throw it not away, it will last you for ever. And more than this-it is an inheritance that may be transmitted, with due reliance on the promises of God, to generations to come. You have had it from your parents; you may transmit it to "children's children."* * Compare Psalms 78:1-7.

There is another sense too, in which "a good man leaves an inheritance to his children "-in the savour and influence of his name. The same affectionate veneration that has attended him in life, attaching to his memory when he is gone, will recommend his family to the sympathy and generous good-will of the community. They will be "beloved for the fathers' sakes." To the sympathy thus divinely secured, the psalmist seems to refer, when he says-" I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed," Psalms 37:25-26.

Important as this is, and general in its application to good men, who may all leave their children this inheritance, if no other, the antithesis in the latter clause of the verse leads more naturally to the literal interpretation. In this view, there are two things implied. First, that the blessing of God on his labours, enables him to obtain the inheritance which he has to leave. The proverb clearly implies this, the inheritance requiring to be made, ere it can be left. The second thing implied is, that with the inheritance the blessing of the Lord descends to his children. What would the

inheritance be without this? an evil, rather than a good-a curse, rather than a blessing. If parents be faithful, affectionate, prayerful, spiritually-minded, and persevering in the religious education of their children, the character and the blessing will generally be found descending with the instruction. Many parents, I fear, are fond of "laying the flattering unction to their souls," when their children fail to evince the influence of the principles of godliness, and to keep their consciences easy by this means-that "grace does not run in the blood." Very true; but it accords with the entire tenor of God's covenant, that grace accompanies means; and that, where the means are rightly used, we may look for the grace.

It is quite clear, that in this and other passages, an inheritance is regarded as a good, and that no blame is attached to "the good man" who leaves it to his children and "children's children." We are to understand it as a good in itself. And so it is. But this is no reason for overlooking the danger associated with it. Christians should not forget it in their own case; parents should not forget it in their children's. What I wish earnestly to impress upon all parents, is this-that, while it may be a good thing to "leave an inheritance " to their children, they will do their children infinitely more service, by leaving them an inheritance of principles without wealth, than an inheritance of wealth without principles; and further, that they must not lay up an inheritance for their children by depriving God, and the cause of God, of their due,-by parsimonious stinting in the promotion of the claims of piety and benevolence; for by doing this, they will forfeit the blessing of the Lord upon their substance for themselves, and prevent the blessing from descending with it to their offspring.

While the "good man" thus "leaveth an inheritance to his children's children"-"the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just." This proceeds on the same great principle with that laid down by the apostle-"All things are yours:" and, amongst other things, "the world." They are so, in the sense that they are all wisely ordered for the ultimate attainment of their highest good. That may most truly be called mine, from which I derive the greatest possible benefit it can be made to yield. It would be strange indeed, were I to wish anything else, or anything more. The assertion here made must be interpreted in a similar manner. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." His, among other things, is "the wealth of the wicked." The wicked man calls it his own. But it is God's. God retains the entire right to it, and the sole disposal of it. He can do with it what pleaseth him. God is the friend of his own children; and holds that property, like every thing else, for their good; so that it is theirs by being his. By the secret arrangements of his providence, he can, whensoever he will, transfer property from one owner to another; and in all cases in which it will be for his people's benefit, He will make the transference. Whensoever anything is wanted for his own cause, he can bring it into the hands of those-" the just"-to whom he has given grace to use it for its advancement.* * Comp. Ecclesiastes 2:26.

Verse Proverbs 13:23. "Much food is in the tillage of the poor: but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment." There seems an interesting connexion, and perhaps a twofold connexion of suggestion or association, between the former verse and this. Talk of inheritances! says the poor man, with his scanty means and hard daily toil.-we have no inheritance, neither from our fathers, nor for our children: all is homely with us, and likely to remain so. Well, says Solomon, the poor man is not without his consolations, even of a temporal nature-"much food is in the tillage of the poor." The maxim, though under a particular form, like many others, is general; not to be confined to the one kind of labour specified, but extending equally to all the different modes in which the poor make their daily bread. The poor peasant, who cultivates his plot of ground industriously and

by the "sweat of his brow," will, through the divine blessing, procure thereby an ample supply of "food" for himself and his family; and, if a child of God, he will have this with the sweet relish of his heavenly Father's smile. Industry and tidy economy will make the cottage fireside and table snug and comfortable; and its lowly tenants will enjoy plenty, though in a plain and homely form, without luxurious delicacies.-On the other hand, how often, in the case of those who obtain inheritances, may the poor see the saying verified, "There is that is destroyed for want of judgment." By prodigality and excess, by careless neglect, by bad management, by injudicious and ill-conducted plans and projects, they waste and ruin their fortunes. Their lands are extensive, but they are unproductive; or if productive, the product is mis-spent and squandered: it goes, no one can tell how. To such persons, the homely comfort of "the tillage of the poor" is a just object of envy; far more so than, in many cases, the wealth of the rich is to the poor.

Verse Proverbs 13:24. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." There is no subject of deeper interest and importance than the EDUCATION OF THE YOUNG. It is so for their own sake; for the sake of their family and kindred; for the sake of society; for the sake of the Church; for the sake of the glory of God. In their systems of education, some are for excluding the "rod" altogether. But such would be wiser than God; for He has sanctioned its use. They, indeed, who consider Solomon as merely giving his own mind, are at liberty, how high soever his wisdom may be ranked, to dissent from his judgment, and to decline following the course he prescribes. This might be somewhat presumptuous; but there would be no impiety in it,-no resisting the dictates of the divine mind. But if Solomon wrote by inspiration, and the truths and precepts delivered by him are the truths and precepts of the Spirit of God, we must beware of gainsaying any of his prescriptions, in any of the various departments of duty. For the Scripture authority, not warranting only, but enjoining the use of the "rod," I might quote many passages besides that before us.*1 I might also refer to such passages as, in speaking of the dealings of God with his people, contain allusions to this part of parental duty.*2 It should be noticed that the "rod" is to be taken for correction or punishment in general; not specifically for corporal punishment. The blessed God employs a great variety of kinds of chastisement in dealing with His children, suiting the correction in nature as well as in degree, to the peculiarities of each character, and the circumstances of each case;-so may Christian parents consider themselves warranted to employ whatever description of punishment experience may teach them to be best fitted to answer the end. Of the observations now to be made, some refer to the "rod" more specifically, and some to all kinds of correction.

*1 Proverbs 19:18; Proverbs 22:15; Proverbs 23:13-14; Proverbs 29:15; Proverbs 29:17. rr *2 Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12:7-8. rr

1. The rod should be the last resource.-In this remark I refer of course to the "rod" properly so called. Perhaps the most suitable season for the use of it may be in the early stages of education, when the mind is but beginning to open, (as soon as the meaning and design of it can be distinctly understood) with the view of forming a habit of subjection, such as may enable you afterwards to rule easily and effectually without it. Still, whenever it is used, it should be as the last resort. If conviction and sorrow, sufficiently pungent and deep, can be produced otherwise; if you can reach the heart, and draw the tears of a tender and contrite spirit to the eyes-it would, generally speaking, in such circumstances, be cruelty to superadd the pain of correction, the end having been gained, in all respects more pleasantly and more effectually, without it. Cases are

supposable, in which it may be necessary to proceed to the correction even amidst the tears and the sobs of submissive distress. I know nothing more acutely agonizing to a parent's feelings than when such necessity exists; and the cases in which it does exist are very rare. To inflict correction in spite of the confessions of weeping penitence,-which may, in most instances, be readily enough distinguished from the affected acknowledgments of a selfish and heartless hypocrisy,-is obviously in the face of the apostle's admonition-" provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged:" for nothing can well be more discouraging,-more calculated to engender a secret sentiment of inward dissatisfaction, as if greater severity had been used than was needed by the offender,-a rising emotion, which checks the full and free flow of affectionate and penitential tenderness, the tenderness which melts into the open bosom of offended but conciliated love.

2. When the "rod" is used, or any punishment inflicted, be sure that a fault has been committed.-Strange direction!-you may say: who requires to be told this? Do you suppose any of us so unnatural, so fond of putting our children to pain, that we would punish them for nothing? My answer is, that there is no parent who does not require the counsel. My full conviction is, that children are often chastened, and chastened at times severely, when they have committed no fault.-A fault I would have you remember, that justifies punishment, should involve the manifestation of some evil disposition. In every other case, correction is wrong; and the parent who inflicts it would himself be a fitter subject for it.-To illustrate my meaning by two or three exemplifications. There is in children, when in good health, a principle of activity,-a restless buoyancy that invites and impels them to lively exercise. It is an important instinctive propensity, intimately connected with bodily health,-with the strength of the bones, the firmness and pliancy of the joints, the tension of the nerves, the energy of muscular action, and the general growth and vigour of the entire frame. The indulgence of this propensity may make them at times a little noisy and turbulent. It may be indispensably necessary, on occasions, to lay it under temporary restraint. But authority should be reluctantly interposed; and, unless when authority is violated, or incumbent duty neglected, it should never be visited with punishment. You would be punishing your child for exhibiting nature's indications of health; which it should rather please you to see, as young people are seldom well, when dull and disinclined to romping and active exercise.-Again, evil is sometimes done in ignorance. The child has no idea that it has been doing any harm. You happen, I shall suppose, to leave a bank-note in your child's way. He finds the bit of paper. He finds it where it should not have been. He has no notion whatever of its value. He takes it up and throws it into the fire; and ho laughs and claps his hands, in innocent glee, at the pretty blaze. The loss, in such a case, is yours; but don't forget that so is the fault. You should not have left anything of the kind thus exposed. You may warn your child strongly, never again to burn any bits of paper he may find, till be Las asked you whether they are of use; and you may impress the lesson by teaching him the extent of the damage he has done. But take care. Let not rising passion at your loss lead you to inflict hasty and summary punishment on the child. He does not deserve it. And let not the punishment and the passion be proportioned to the amount of the loss. One pound or fifty was the same to the child The more valuable the note, the more inexcusable was your own carelessness. A severe infliction, in such a case, would be the extreme of unrighteousness; and it would be the greater culprit punishing the less.-Things, again, may be done by children from want of mature discretion. A child, when you are not at hand, may have his sympathies touched by the tale, and the apparent distresses, of some impostor; and knowing where money is to be found, and thinking, from what he may have seen you do, that if you only knew, you would afford relief,

may give a great deal more than discretion, even in a really deserving case, would warrant. Would you be severe on him for this? It would be barbarous. It is one of the loveliest of principles, operating, as might be expected in a child, without due acquaintance with the acts of imposture or the value of money, to guide the exercise of his charity. I remember hearing of a fine little child who gave a beggar in this way half-a-crown; and, in telling what he had done, called it a white penny. In such a case, it would be right to inculcate the lesson that children should be on their guard in making use, even for charity, of what is not their own; and to teach the offender (if such he should be called) the difference between white and brown. But to correct him with the rod, would be worse than cruelty; it would be selling for half-a-crown a principle which it should be one of the main ends of education to cherish.-Still further, things may be done, that are much to be regretted, by accident. Here too correction is wrong, or should be very discriminatively inflicted. If the accident has happened in doing that which had been previously warned against or forbidden, there may be room for it. But to punish for what has been purely accidental, where there has been no evil principle or intention, is most unjust. Let children be trained, by all means, to caution and care. But O beware of assuming, in such cases, as the measure of punishment, the actual extent of the mischief done. A greater punishment may be deserved, where the damage has been ever so small than when it has been ever so great; because in the one case there may have been evil intention or great and culpable carelessness, and in the other neither..Nay the intention may even have been good; good may have been intended, and harm done. In this latter case, there should rather be reward for the intention,.than punishment for the accidental mischief "Whatever may be your loss, do not add to it an evil much greater,-the evil of spoiling your child by correcting for no fault. For example. Your child, watching your employment, sees by your looks and motions, that you are in want of something. He knows, or he guesses what it is; and with the lively glee of childhood, and affectionate eagerness to serve you, he sets off full speed to fetch it. By and by he comes back-slowly, and in altered mood. He hangs down his head beside you in hesitating silence, and fears to tell what has happened. He has alas! stumbled in his haste, and has let fall and broken the article he ran to bring. You feel your spirit rise at the loss and the disappointment. An article, it may be, of some value, is destroyed, and your process is interrupted and spoiled. But again take care. Lift not your hand. Call not for the "rod." His very eagerness to serve you has occasioned the misfortune. Would you punish him for that? Poor dear child! he is more to be pitied than you. The mortification and shame,-the sudden sinking of his little heart from lively gaiety to sadness and vexation, indicated by the slow creeping step, the downcast look, the tearful eye, and the faltering tongue,-are punishment enough for his undue haste, when that very haste was prompted by a praiseworthy principle. Caress him for his kind intention, whilst you join in lamenting the accident; restore, if you can, the smile to his countenance; and caution him not to be quite so quick in his motions, even to serve you, next time he happens to have brittle ware to carry.

3. Let there always be a due proportion between the fault and the correction. It should be laid down as a general principle, that all punishment beyond desert is punishment of innocence. The just degree of punishment is, in all cases, the smallest degree by which the desired effect may be produced-a proper impression, that is, of the evil done, humble submission, and promise of amendment. The kind and the degree may thus be different with different children. The repetition of an offence may, of course, warrant greater severity than the first commission of it. But in the conduct of some parents, there is an indiscriminate severity, a general system of rigour and harshness, which knows no rules of proportion; which acts as if the greatest punishment in its

power to inflict were little enough for the smallest offence; and whose only reason for not inflicting a greater, in cases of more heinous fault, is its not having a greater to inflict. Nothing can be in more direct contrariety to the important warning already quoted-’’Provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." What could more effectually either spoil their temper, or break their spirit?

4. Never chastise in a passion.-There are few cautions of more difficult observance; but few of more essential consequence. If you are unable to govern yourselves, are you fit for governing your children? Rage may frighten. It may even, by the mere power of terror, keep from outward trespass; but it never will reclaim to right feeling or right principle. Do not, then, deal in furious rebukes and angry blows. If you correct while the fit of passion is on-what is the effect? You are sure to appear to your child to be merely indulging and gratifying your own anger, instead of having in view the only legitimate object of all correction. And moreover, you are quite sure to exceed bounds, and thus at once to "provoke your child," and "to discourage him," while you lay up cause for vexation, and shame, and self-reproach, when you have leisure to cool. If you feel passion rising, lay a firm command upon it; restrain yourself; let the correction stand till you are calm, and fit to do it with judgment. Never forget that correction is for an end; that that end is the conviction, repentance, and recovery of the offender. This end is not to be effected by passion. All must be done, after the example of God, in love; with displeasure indeed, proportioned to the evil of the transgression, but with calm and unruffled dignity. The fuming heat of passion, beating a child, and renewing the beating, for relief to itself, only lets down the parent in the child’s eyes, lessening his filial respect for him; and is thus most injurious. True affection will mingle grief with displeasure, tenderness with disciplinary coercion. This is strikingly expressed in the words-"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." This should teach you the lesson of impressing your child’s mind with the conviction that it is your very delight in him that obliges you to do violence to your own feelings in correcting him. This leads me to notice-

5. The propriety of always preceding or accompanying chastisement with convincing the offender of his fault. Show him, seriously and affectionately, why you chastise him. If you feel yourself at all at a loss to do this, you may be very sure you are doing wrong. Correction must never either be or appear to be, a mere arbitrary display of authority. In all the precepts respecting "the rod," the child’s good is the object; and all should be regulated by a regard to this end. The spirit of it, on the part of parents, should be that which dictates the corrections of God, who chastens, not for "His own pleasure," but for his children’s profit." And in seeking this end, mark the terms of the verse before us-" he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." Oppose the beginnings of evil. Check propensities to it early; before they have time to acquire strength, and to form and settle into habits.

6. That correction may have the surer and happier influence, let it be accompanied with a system of encouragements. It is not fair to correct, and to correct severely for faults, and to express and manifest no satisfaction and pleasure in the right discharge of required duties. Children should be judiciously commended, as well as judiciously reproved; judiciously rewarded, as well as judiciously punished. There is, with different parents, a danger of the opposite extremes-of commendation and reward without reproof and punishment, and of reproof and punishment without commendation and reward. It requires much discretion duly to blend the two. The good

sense of parents must distinguish between just commendation and what would only minister to vanity. But it is evident, that few things can possibly be more dispiriting to a child, than for a parent to be ever prompt to punish evil, but never to reward good; severe and forward to chide, but reluctant and backward to commend. Children should be stimulated by praise, as well as restrained by censure. You may be assured that this will eminently contribute to the right reception of your chastisements, and their salutary influence upon the character. I only add-

7. That correction is one of the most delicate and difficult of parental duties. It is easy to do it; but far, very far from easy, to do it well. Therefore, let parents keep it in their own hands. It must ever, in order to answer its appropriate ends, be associated with the blended faithfulness and tenderness of love. When transferred to improper hands, it is almost sure to produce the very opposite effects to those designed by it.

Let Christians, as the children of their heavenly Father, rejoice that their parental discipline is in the hands of One who cannot err, either in the time, the manner, or the measure of His corrections; who will make every stroke of " His rod" tell upon the best interests of his people; promoting their spiritual, and securing their eternal interests. And let their submission, in all their sorrows, correspond with this assurance.* * See Hebrews 12:5-11. The last verse must not detain us long-"The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want." The two states contrasted in these evidently proverbial expressions, are a state of satisfaction and contentment, and a state of dissatisfaction and discontent:-the former that of the good man-" the righteous"-who enjoys his repast with a true relish arising from the love and blessing of his heavenly Father; the latter that of the "wicked" who in that love and blessing has no share! The particular expression here used respecting "the wicked," implies his never being satisfied; ever desiring, ever wanting, how much soever he obtains. What a fine contrast Paul presents to us in describing his own feelings, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need!" Php 4:11-12. To the possession of this perfect satisfaction there is but one way. It is the enjoyment of God’s Favour. Nothing can satisfy the soul of man but this; and when this is obtained, it will infuse the spirit of satisfaction into every thing. It will enrich every joy; it will alleviate, and sweeten, and sanctify every sorrow. Here lies the secret of true contentment and happiness. God In All Things, And All Things In God, is the sum of the divine lesson. And the lesson, like all the other lessons of Christian virtue, must be studied at the foot of the Cross. There must the grand principles of them all be imbibed and settled in the soul.

32-Pro_14:1-6

Proverbs 14:1-6

LECTURE XXXII.

Proverbs 14:1-6.

"Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands. He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord: but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him. In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them. Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox. A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies. A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth."

There is a fulness in the word of God, of which the conviction grows on every fresh perusal, and becomes still the stronger, the closer and more minute our investigation of its various parts. It addresses itself (though, for the best possible reasons, under no systematic and formal arrangement,) to persons in all the various relations and conditions of life. Sometimes we find important preceptive directions conveyed in simple descriptive touches of character, in which approbation on the one hand, or disapprobation on the other, is manifestly designed to be implied. Thus it is in the first verse of this chapter:-"Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands."

Here we have female wisdom and female folly contrasted, with special reference to their appropriate department-the management of domestic concerns. It is a common saying amongst ourselves, and it is a pithy and a true one, that "a fortune in a wife is better than a fortune with one." From the situation which women occupy in the household, it might previously be supposed (and the supposition is daily verified in fact) that a vast deal depends on them, for the comfort, the independence, the respectability, the honour, and the advancement of families. We understand "house" here, as in many other places, to mean family; the "building" of the house, the raising of the family; and the "plucking down" of the house, the depression of the family, in the various ways just enumerated.

Suppose, what many a time happens, to use the word, of the saying just quoted, "a fortune with a wife," but the wife herself, the owner and bringer of the fortune, destitute of discretion, incapable of managing her domestic affairs, or of keeping account of her expenditure; without home habits; vain, extravagant, fond of finery and show, and rivalry of her superiors; ever gadding about, and ever squandering money with thoughtless indifference,-the fortune will give anything but domestic happiness while it lasts, and that will not be long. It will be the same, indeed, if such a woman have her will and her way, whether the fortune be her own or her husband’s. Many a time have females been the means of bringing families down that before were thriving, and rising in comfort and respectability. This has arisen from their total want of the domestic virtues of activity, economy, and discretion,-of all that passes under the general name of management. "Many a family," says

Matthew Henry, "is brought to ruin by ill housewifery, as well as by ill husbandry." On the contrary, a prudent, industrious, frugal, domestic, managing wife, animated in all her duties by affection, conjugal and maternal, dignified by the graces of true religion, and guided in all her daily course by a wise discretion, has often essentially aided in bringing forward a family, even from a condition of inferiority, to respectability, independence, and honour, and of retrieving its affairs, when by previous mismanagement brought low.

It is at once the duty and the interest of husband and wife, to co-operate in promoting the common benefit of the family. They must be one in principle and in aim. If not, while the one is "building," the other will be "pulling down;" the one will overturn what the other has reared; while the one gathers, the other will scatter. Too often may husband and wife thus be seen counterworking each other; the one doing, the other undoing; the one bringing in, the other throwing out. The verse before us relates only to the wife’s side of the house. Let wives remember, that all the industry and toil of their husbands will be vain, unless, on their part, it is seconded by management and economy. It is wonderful, in the families of the workman and the peasant, to see the difference of appearance and of real substantial comfort, on the same means, between one where the wife is cleanly, active, orderly, thrifty, and cheerful, and another where she happens, unfortunately for her husband and her children, to be an idle, dirty, disorderly, peevish slattern. The latter character should never be seen, nor any approach to it, in "women professing godliness."-Christian wives, emulate one another; and emulate those "godly women" who are commended in Scripture, in sedulous attention to the tempers and duties that become you in your domestic relations. Lot the family, next to the soul be the first care. And beware of allowing even a professed concern for the interests of the soul unduly to interfere with, and jostle out of place, any of your incumbent domestic duties. Everything is beautiful in its place and time. I have no idea of that religion which allows a woman, under pretext of enjoying spiritual privileges, and making the most of time and means for the soul, to gad about, visiting, and calling, and talking, and hearing sermons, and attending committees, when her presence and active superintendence are wanted at home, and imperative domestic claims and duties are neglected. Wives must make their families their first care; and if, by regularity and diligence in the discharge of their respective trusts at home, they can redeem time for the more private or more public calls of general benevolence, or for hearing a sermon, or attending a meeting, or enjoying the benefit of a little Christian society, it is well. When the two are thus made compatible, "her own works will praise her in the gates." But if, by attending to other calls, her husband is left comfortless, and the food and clothing and education of her children are neglected,-she may be "building" elsewhere, but not where she should he; she is "the foolish" woman whose hands "pull down" her own house,-and who is, in the world, a discredit to the religion she professes, and in the church, a stumbling-block to fellow-professors.

Verse Proverbs 14:2. "He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord; but he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him." The pronoun "him," in the second clause is capable of two references. It may refer either to the "upright who feareth the Lord;" or, as is more probable, to the Lord; in which case there will be a marked antithesis between the character of the man who feareth the Lord, and that of the man who despiseth Him. In the first part of the verse, then, we have again the only true, satisfactory evidence of "the fear of the Lord"-of genuine religious principle. It lies not in words or professions, but in conduct. That man alone fears the Lord, who "walketh in his uprightness." "This," says the apostle John, "is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."

This is equally the fear of God. Hear you a man making great professions; wondrously devout; his prayers many and long; his psalm-singing loud; his attitudes and looks and gestures the perfection of acted sanctity? Test him. Mark his conduct. See what he is in the family and in the market,-is all right there? If not, note that man; he is a man of words; his religion is the religion of words; his fear toward God is taught only by the principles of interest and expediency, or by that of compromise; of words for God and actions for himself;-which is the same thing as a compromise, to honour God verbally for liberty to dishonour him practically. Let it be laid down as a settled principle, that whatever be a man's professions of reverence and devotion-" he who is perverse in his ways despiseth God." Disobedience is the sure proof of contempt. You judge of the professions of children to parents not by what they say, but what they do. Thus judge of men's religion. Ask not how frequent, how long, how loud, or how austere and rigid his devotions are;-ask what his practice is. There have been men who in the sanctuary have seemed the very patterns of all that is devout, (only that in general it is overdone) whom, when you follow them into the world, you find in the meanest of its mean and the dirtiest of its dirty doings. This is not to "fear" but emphatically to "despise the Lord." It is the greatest of all the affronts that can be put upon Him-the grossest of insults, the most injurious of wrongs. The child dishonours his father more who speaks fair to his face and rebels behind his back, mocking at the very success of his fair speeches, than if he were openly and consistently hostile and regardless. And so does he dishonour God more who says to Him, "Lord, Lord, but does not the things which He says," than if he made no profession at all. He adds hypocrisy to rebellion. Actual "perverseness," or disobedience, is contempt of God's authority; contempt of God's glory; contempt of God's threatenings; and contempt of God's promises. It shows a scornful disregard of all. They who despise God's Will despise God Himself.

Verse Proverbs 14:3. "In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them."

"Pride" may be regarded as one of the attributes of folly. It was the original folly of man; the principle which Satan succeeded in introducing, and by which he seduced man from God. And it has been, in reference to God, his folly ever since. And from the pride which, in their folly, men too frequently indulge towards one another, comes haughty, contemptuous, violent, abusive language; the language of haughty command, haughty censure, haughty scorn. This is "the rod of pride" which is in "the mouth of the foolish." The foolish smite with it; and by doing so, they expose themselves to many dangers, from envy, resentment, and the spirit of strife. By some the word rendered "rod" is understood of a shoot or branch, from the only other place in which it occurs-"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots," Isaiah 11:1. But even in that passage, there is probably in the shoot springing from the stem of Jesse, an indirect reference to the sceptral rod-the emblem of the royally of which the prophet proceeds to speak;-and the figure of smiting with the tongue as with the "rod of pride" is far more nature (when the mouth is spoken of) than that of a branch springing from pride as a "root of bitterness." The general import of the antithesis in the second clause is sufficiently plain:-" but the lips of the wise shall preserve them." "The lips of the wise" are the lips, not of pride, but of humility-not of the contempt and wrath which arise from pride, but of meekness, gentleness, kindness, and peace. And there are two senses in which the preservation spoken of may be understood. First, by prudent and humble-minded dealing-by language well-weighed and well adapted to the characters of the individuals with whom they have to do, and to the circumstances

in which they happen to be placed,-they preserve themselves from this very "rod of pride," and from its sometimes mischievous consequences. Or, more generally; while by their proud and overbearing insolence the foolish bring severe retaliation and correction upon themselves, by the provoking use of their "rod of pride,"-the discretion of the wise, laying restraints upon their tongue, "setting a watch at the door of their lips," preserves them from many contentions, perplexities, troubles, and wrongs; it gives them favour and good understanding, and thus brings upon them benefit and blessing, instead of ill-will, and angry frowns, and muttered curses-the natural returns of pride.

"Verse Proverbs 14:4. "Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox." The most natural interpretation of these words seems to be that which proceeds on the principle that two things are put in contrast, between which men are left to choose.

If oxen are not employed, " the crib is clean;"-there is no trouble in feeding, and tending, and cleaning, and keeping all in order from day to day. Here, then, is gratification for indolence and the love of ease. "But much increase is by the strength of the ox." Here is the expense at which the indolent love of ease is to be indulged. It must be purchased at the expense of all that the labour of the oxen would produce. He who would have the increase, therefore, must submit to the labour of this feeding, and tending, and cleaning. We have thus again, in a fresh form, the great general lesson of everyday use-Nothing without labour.

Wealth will not come of itself The good things of life do not drop into the mouth of the yawning sluggard. Reputation and honour must be won by deeds that deserve them. Discoveries in science and art must be effected by experiment, observation, reflection, and research. Progress in general knowledge must be attained by reading, conversation and inquiry. And if we would, as believers, grow in the divine life, and in holy meetness for heaven, we must obey the command to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," in the use of all appointed means, "giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure."

Verse Proverbs 14:5. "A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies."

We have had this subject repeatedly before us:-Proverbs 6:16-19; Proverbs 12:17-19; Proverbs 13:5. The statement in the verse before us may be regarded as somewhat stronger in regard to the characters contrasted. The meaning is that a "faithful witness"-that is a man of sterling integrity and truthfulness, will adhere to truth in all his statements, at whatever risk, and at whatever cost. Nothing will tempt him to depart from it-neither the fear of threatened suffering nor the hope of promised reward. On the contrary, "a false witness"-a man addicted to falsehood, regarding merely what is expedient-and what at the time promises most benefit, whether negative or positive,-such a man will utter lies, let the temptation be ever so small;-sometimes from the very pleasure he has in deceiving others, and seeing them perplexed and confounded, and led astray in their judgment and counsels. A habit of lightness in regard to truth is one which, once admitted even in the smallest matters, grows insensibly,-becoming less and less thought of in matters of greater importance. He who lies in little things is only learning to lie in great things.

Verse Proverbs 14:6. "A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth." The "scorner" is the same description of person as in Proverbs 1:22. There are indeed two descriptions of the character. There are "scorners" of truth, from pride of

intellect; and there are "scorners" of authority, from the pride of self-will. They are nearly allied; and they are frequently united. It is the former that is chiefly meant here; seeing the subject is knowledge rather than duty.

There is a certain spirit and frame of mind necessary to the understanding and successful investigation of divine truth. It is the spirit that counts our own wisdom folly-laying it down at the feet of our divine Instructor, and taking our place as listeners and learners. It is the spirit of Samuel, when he said-"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." It is the spirit of the apostles when they said, "Lord, to whom shall we go but unto thee-thou hast the words of eternal life." It is the spirit of Mary, when she sat at the Lord's feet, and "heard his words." It is the spirit of Cornelius, when he said, "Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." To him who submits his understanding to divine teaching,-who, sensible of the many biasing and blinding influences to which he is subject, and by which his mind is in danger of being perverted, looks humbly for promised illumination, and whose mind is disciplined to an implicit acquiescence in all that divine wisdom reveals:-to him "the entrance of God's word will give light;"-and "knowledge will be easy." One truth will lead to another; and "the word of Christ will dwell in him richly in all wisdom." But is not "a scorner seeking wisdom" a species of contradiction'? We answer-in one sense it is. But words must be understood as their connexion will bear. A "scorner seeking wisdom," is a man inquiring after divine knowledge under the influence of a spirit opposite to that we have been describing-a self-sufficient, critical, censorious, sneering spirit. We may exemplify the difference by instancing the case of those who came to Christ, in the days of his flesh, with humble-minded desire of instruction, and that of those, on the contrary, who came to him with questions, not for the sake of information, but for the purpose of "entangling him in his talk," and of "catching something out of his mouth that they might accuse him." These were not inquiring learners, but prying and evil-minded "scorners." The "scorner" is the man who has a high notion of his own understanding; an overweening conceit of himself; trusting "in himself that he is right and despising others;" determined to follow the dictates of his own vaunted reason; having formed his opinions, and holding in disdain whatever contradicts them, and whatever presumes to be above his comprehension;-measuring truth, even should it relate to the infinite God himself, by the line of his own capacity. Such a character, actuated by such a state of mind, may reject divine revelation altogether, and seek wisdom elsewhere without finding it:-or supposing him to have the conviction, from external evidence or from education, that in the Bible we have a revelation from God, he may, in such a frame of spirit, seek wisdom even there without finding it. The man is not in a state of mind to be satisfied with taking the truths made known in their simple and obvious meaning. He scorns that. He must have something of his own; something out of the common course; something that is the product of his own ingenuity and originality. And he who is determined to make something else of the discourses of the Bible than the language of it plainly expresses,-will succeed in misinterpreting and explaining them away.

Beware of this spirit. "Be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong"-the bands of ignorance and darkness, and a self-deluded heart. It was when the heathen "did not like to retain God in their knowledge," and preferred counsels of their own, "that God gave them over to a reprobate mind." It was when the followers of the man of sin "received not," when they had the opportunity, "the love of the truth that they might be saved," that God "gave them up to strong delusion, that they should

believe a lie." It was when "Ephraim was joined to his idols," that God said, "Let him alone." It was when the Jews "heard and understood not, saw and perceived not," wilfully closing their ears and eyes to the truth of the messages of Jehovah, that Jehovah pronounced their sentence of judicial abandonment and blindness. The poet's language is fearful but true:- "Hear the just doom, the judgment of the skies;

He that hates truth shall be the dupe of lies:- And he who will be cheated to the last, Delusions, strong as hell, shall bind him fast."

There is one who is called, by way of eminence, in the Bible, "The Faithful Witness." It is He by whom, in these last days, "God has spoken unto us;" He "whose name is called the Word of God." All that he declares is truth-truth without mixture. He bears testimony for God; and "we know that his testimony is true." He is true in his declarations, and true in his promises. His word is "not yea and nay." "All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen!"

33-Pro_14:7-12

Proverbs 14:7-12

LECTURE XXXIII.

Proverbs 14:7-12.

"Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the tips of knowledge. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit. Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour. The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy. The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish. There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." The counsel in the first of these verses might be enforced on both negative and positive grounds. First of all, the company and conversation of "a foolish man" can do you no good you can derive no profit from it. At the best, therefore, the time spent in his society can be only time wasted and lost. But this is not the full amount of the reason. While he can do you no good; he may do you essential harm: for "the foolish" are the unprincipled; and the "knowledge" not found in their lips is especially the knowledge of the mind and will of God.-Be ye the "companions," as the Psalmist was, of "them who fear Him." From such choose your associates. Let their society be the society you love. They say, "Come with us, and we will do you good." O comply with the invitation, if you would imbibe their spirit, learn their wisdom, and participate in their happiness.

True wisdom is practical. Thus here:-"The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way." He first of all estimates, according to their real worth, those abstruse or airy speculations, which terminate in nothing but diverting the attention of him who is fascinated by them from the consideration of the "way " which he ought to be pursuing. Every man has a way to go; has a department in life to fill up. It is "wisdom" to know how to do this with sense, with propriety, with safety, with honour, with advantage to self. With benefit to others. He who does not thus "understand his way," may have knowledge, but he has not wisdom.

And, to apply the words (as I cannot doubt they were meant to be applied) in the highest of all departments-every man has a final destination before him. The way of all is the way to the grave, and to eternity. But in that eternity in which the present short course must terminate, there are two widely differing states;-the one of perfect purity and perfect bliss, the other of growing sinfulness, and unmingled and unmitigated woe. To these opposite states there are two ways-" the narrow," and "the broad." O the infinite value of true wisdom here!-the wisdom that " understands" both ways, and rightly chooses between them!

"But the folly of fools is deceit." These words may mean that the folly of fools proves to them deceit. They fancy and call it wisdom. But they impose upon themselves. Their confidence in it, and their expectations from it are sheer delusion, and this they will find by bitter experience in the end. Or the sense may be, "Deceit is the folly of fools." The truly wise and prudent man is an

enemy to policy and craft. He is upright and straight-forward; ever acting up to our own established adage-that "honesty is the best policy." Craft and policy mislead, entangle, and ruin men. They are "taken in their own craftiness." "New stratagems," says Lord Bacon, "must be devised, the old failing and growing useless; and as soon as ever a man hath got the name of a cunning crafty companion, he hath deprived himself utterly of the principal instrument for the management of his affairs,-which is trust." Policy, therefore, on this as on other accounts, is "the folly of fools."

Verse Proverbs 14:9. "Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour." This verse has been differently rendered, and of course differently understood. The word for sin signifies either the trespass or the guilt involved in the trespass, and which exposes to penal consequences. Both at the sin, the guilt, and the consequence, "fools make a mock."-The chief difficulty in the verse is the point of the antithesis in the two clauses of it. The general import, however, seems to be, that the friendship of wicked men, of Scorners, and scoffers, is destitute of principle. You can have no dependence on the man who "makes a mock at sin;" and between men of this description there can be no lasting, sacred, confidential attachment. They feel that they can have no sure hold of each other, neither word nor deed being trustworthy. Between them mutual esteem cannot exist, there being nothing on either side on which such a sentiment can find a basis. On the contrary-"Among" or between "the righteous there is favour"-genuine, disinterested, benevolent regard,-attachment founded on principle, and respect for each other’s character. In the former case, each knows the other’s worthlessness; distrusts, and is distrusted; despises, and is despised. In the latter, there is mutual esteem. Each cleaves to the other in admiring and confiding affection. The conduct of the man who "makes a mock at sin," involves impiety, cruelty, and infatuation.

1. That it involves impiety is sufficiently obvious. "Sin is the transgression of the law." It is contrariety to the divine holiness, opposition to the divine authority, ingratitude for the divine goodness, the object of the divine abhorrence, the declared and denounced subject of the divine curse and vengeance. To "mock at sin," therefore, is to despise God’s holiness, to set at nought God’s authority, to abuse God’s goodness, to disregard and slight God’s glory, to make light of God’s curse and threatened vengeance; which implies a denial of God’s truth and a scornful defiance of God’s power. There cannot be a more profane insult on the infinite Majesty, than is involved in every sin, and especially in mockery at this worst of evils.

2. It involves cruelty-cruelty the most atrocious. The scoffer may be a great pretender to humanity and kindheartedness. But there breathes not on earth a more inhuman, a more iron-hearted monster, than the man who "makes a mock at sin." He may profess to feel for the miseries of mankind; for the ravages of disease and death over their bodies; of fire and flood and storm over their means of life and comfort; of melancholy, and idiocy, and "Moody madness, laughing wild Amid severest woe," over their minds; and the vast endless catalogue of ills by which the lot of man in this world is afflicted. But he "makes a mock" of that which is the cause, the prolific and accursed cause of all. There is not an ill that man is called to suffer, that does not owe its origin to Sin. Like the "star called wormwood," in the Apocalyptic vision, it has fallen on every "fountain and river" of human joy, turning all their waters to bitterness. It is the sting of conscience. It is the venom and barb of the darts of the king of terrors. It is the very life of the "worm that dieth not." It is the kindling and fuel of the flames of hell. Oh! the miserably mistaken flattery, that can speak of the kind-heartedness and humanity of the man who laughs at that which is the embryo germ of all the

sufferings of time, and all the woes of eternity! Abuse not language thus. Assail not the unhappy wretch with irony so bitter. Call himself what he will he is "cruel as the grave," who "makes a mock at sin."

3. Such mockery is most infatuated. Sin is the evil that is ruining the poor sinner himself-hurrying him to perdition. It is the disease that, whether he is sensible of it or not, is preying upon his own vitals, and must terminate in "the second death." It is the secret consuming fire, that is wasting his eternal all. Sin has separated him from God. Sin has doomed him to toil, to trouble, to sorrow, to death, and to the grave. And sin will "destroy both soul and body in hell." Yet the deluded victim of its power laughs at it-"makes a mock" and a jest of it! O the infatuation, the self-murderous madness of mocking at sin! Beware of it, my hearers. It is mockery of God, mockery of all the sufferings in the universe, mockery of your own damnation!-And let the mutual "favour" that subsists between the people of God, manifest itself in their keeping each other from sin; in their cherishing in each other's bosoms right impressions of its exceeding sinfulness, and such a holy dread and detestation of it, as shall lead them to seek, with all earnestness and assiduity, its crucifixion and destruction in themselves, in one another, and in all around them!*

* The verse has been rendered, "Sin-offering mocks fools; but among the upright there is ready acceptance," the meaning being, that "when sin-offering is presented formally by fools, it mocks their hopes because it is not accepted;" whereas the offerings of the upright "find good will, that is, ready acceptance." Some consider that the structure of the Hebrew sentence makes this rendering imperative. Be this as it may, it in no way affects the solemn truth so forcibly illustrated.

Verse Proverbs 14:10. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy." We may connect this verso with the preceding; and in this connexion, it naturally suggests the thought of the "bitterness" of a spirit wounded by the accusations of conscience-the stings keen and rankling, of remorse; of the inward, secret, dark anticipations of death and judgment, hell and eternity, unacknowledged, but acutely felt by the fools who "make a mock at sin." His mockings are many a time but the flimsy cover of a spirit ill at ease, and the poor expedient for alleviating for the moment the "bitterness" which his own heart alone knows, and which he is proudly anxious to conceal. And this may be contrasted with the heartfelt "joy" of the righteous-" the joy of the Lord"-the joy of God's salvation-the "peace that passeth all understanding,"-the delightful sense of God's pardoning mercy and paternal love-the cheering "hope of glory, honour, and immortality." Or the words may be taken more generally, as expressing a distinct and independent sentiment.-We are not competent judges either of the happiness or the unhappiness of others. The sentiment is emphatically true of the latter. All is not happiness that bears the semblance of it. How often are there secret griefs concealed in the inner chambers of the heart, and engendering there a "bitterness" unknown but by him who feels it! How often are fondly cherished desires and hopes frustrated!-and, as no one knew the sweetness of the sanguine anticipation, no one can duly estimate the "bitterness" of the disappointment. How many circumstances are there which give special poignancy to sorrow which another cannot appreciate! The remark might be illustrated from the feelings that arise out of the peculiar relations of life. Who but a parent can fully know the "bitterness " of his grief who "mourneth for an only son"-of him who is "in bitterness for his first-born!" O, who but a parent can sympathise with the " bitterness " of the royal mourner's anguish, when over a son that had died in rebellion against his father, and his God, he exclaimed, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I

had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" "Who but a widow can realize the exquisite "bitterness" of a widow's agony, when bereft of the loved partner of her joys and sorrows, her cares and her comforts; and when gazing with tearful eye and bleeding heart on her fatherless babes! "Who but a pastor can know, in all its intensity, the "bitterness " of soul experienced in seeing those on whom he counted as genuine fruits of his ministry, and on whom he looked with delighted interest, as his anticipated "joy and crown" in "the day of the Lord," falling away-" going back and walking no more with Jesus!"-the "blossom of his hopes going up as dust," or ripening into the "fruits of Sodom and the clusters of Gomorrah!" But still, amid all descriptions of secret woe-of heart-felt and heart-hidden "bitterness," the child and servant of God possesses "a joy" with which " a stranger doth not intermeddle." It is a joy imparted to the heart by the Spirit of God. It is many a time most sweetly and exquisitely felt, when other joys are withdrawn,-when the springs of earthly pleasure are stinted or dried. The world cannot give it; nor can the world, blessed be God! take it away. "Who?-what "stranger?"-what creature, in heaven, earth, or hell-can "intermeddle with the joy " of the believer, when, in the darkest and most desolate of the hours that pass over him-his dearest joys all swept away and his fairest hopes blasted,-he can still sit down and sing, "Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation?" Habakkuk 3:17. The language may also be applied to the gracious and divinely awakened convictions of sin, and the secret anguish thence arising, when the conscience is aroused, the "heart pricked," and the cry of distress wrung from the inmost soul. "What shall we do?"-and to the peace and joy, contrasted with this, which arise from the spiritual discernment of the gospel, in the freeness and richness of its grace, and the adaptation of its provisions to all the sinner's exigencies- "When in that trembling sinner's view The wonders of the cross arise, His agonizing fears subdue, And change to joy his hopeless sighs." In the verse following, the "house of the wicked" stands in contrast with the " tabernacle of the upright." The one may be a palace, the other a hut; but, as we had occasion before to remark, the lowly mud-walled cottage of the pious poor is, with the blessing of heaven abiding under its roof and resting on its inmates, incomparably better than the splendid and spacious mansion of the man of the world, who is living without God, and enjoys not His favour and love:-" The house of the wicked shall be overthrown; but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish." * * Compare Proverbs 3:33; Proverbs 12:7.

Verse Proverbs 14:12. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." There are some ways which can hardly "seem right" to any man,-the ways, namely, of open and flagrant wickedness:-although even in these the presumptuous sinner may delude himself, with false, self-flattering views of the divine mercy,-fondly assuring himself that God will not be hard upon him, and that all, no doubt, will be well at last! But many are the ways which, under the biasing influence of pride and corruption, "seem right," and yet their "end" is "death."

There is the way of the sober, well-behaved worldling. He thinks of the law as if it had but one table, the first being entirely overlooked. He passes among his circle for a man of good character. He flatters himself in proportion as he is flattered by others, that all is right, and that there is no fear of him. And yet he lives "without God"-a stranger to the spiritual feelings and exercises of a renewed heart; without regard to the divine authority as his rule, the divine glory as his end, the

divine love as his motive, the divine blessing as his portion. And, with all his earth-born virtues, goes down to the grave "with a lie in his right hand." His way "seems right;" but it is not the way of life, for God is not in it.

There is the way of the formalist. He follows, strictly and punctually, the routine of external religious observance. He reads his Bible. He goes pretty regularly to church and sacrament. He maintains, perhaps, "by tradition from his fathers," a form of family worship, and. even, possibly says a prayer when he rises, and when he goes to bed. But his heart has not been given to God. The world still has it. He compromises the retention of its affections for the things of the world and of sense, by giving to God the pitiful and worthless offering of outward homage. It will not do. The services cannot terminate in life, which have no life in them. The way of mere form is the "way of death."

There is the way of the religious speculatist-or the speculative religionist. Prom education, or as a matter of curiosity, he has made himself an adept in theological controversy-especially, it may be, in the particular questions of the day. He holds by the creed of orthodoxy, and is readyarmed at all points in its defence: and he imagines that this kind of knowledge is religion. "His way seems right to him." And yet there may not be in all his knowledge and in all his talk one atom of religion-one "vital spark" of its "heavenly flame." The heart may not be touched-neither warmed nor purified in any one of its affections; nor the conscience rendered sensitive and tender in its submission to the dictates of the divine will. Speculative opinion is not saving knowledge;-is not the faith which "worketh by love" and "overcomes the world." It is not the way of spiritual life; and the "end thereof are the ways of death."

There is the way of the self-righteous. It is, we shall suppose, a combination of all the other three-of sobriety, formality, and knowledge,-and of self-confidence thence arising. Such was the way of the Pharisees in Christ’s time; on whom, notwithstanding their high pretensions, he denounces the heaviest and most terrific woes. And such was the way of the unbelieving Jews of that age more generally; of whom" Paul in his Epistle to the Romans presents such a graphic and powerful description.* * Romans 2:17-24. In the " way which seemeth right unto a man" may be comprehended, in short, all that bears the semblance of religion and may be mistaken for it, but is not the reality. The "end" of everything of this kind is and must be "the way of death."

God’s way must be the only right way. It is, we remind you anew, the way of faith and obedience; of faith producing obedience-of obedience springing from faith. The way to heaven-the way of life, is measured from Calvary. From the foot of the cross alone can any sinner set out in it. The course of holy obedience commences with the acceptance of mercy there. It is there, through faith in atoning blood and mediatorial righteousness, that the sinner is freed from the burden of conscious guilt and heart-sinking fear; and thence, under the spring and elasticity of a light and joyful heart, he starts in "the narrow way"-the one and only divinely provided way to heaven. "I AM THE WAY," says Jesus; "NO MAN COMETH UNTO THE FATHER BUT BY ME."

34-Pro_14:13-24

Proverbs 14:13-24

LECTURE XXXIV.

Proverbs 14:13-24.

"Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself. The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going. A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident. He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated. The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge. The evil bow before the good; and the wicked at the gates of the righteous. The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends. He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he. Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good. In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury. The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools is folly."

It is, at times, unavoidable, and all but a duty, to assume external appearances not quite in harmony with inward feelings. For the sake of his company, a man is often obliged to keep his secret sorrows in abeyance, and to seem cheerful when in reality his heart is depressed and sad; and often, from the painful effort it costs to maintain the semblance of a joyous spirit, deeper is the dejection into which he sinks. Even thus, "in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness." But such is not the case here intended. The "laughter" is that of violent and boisterous merriment-what Solomon elsewhere calls "the laughter of the fool.* And well might he say of such laughter-the laughter of intemperate mirth-"it is mad." In such a world as this,-in such a condition as that of fallen man, and with such prospects before him, it becomes a species of insanity. It is often, Solomon alleges, but the veil of a heart ill at ease-a heart fretted by the stings of an accusing conscience, and oppressed with the forebodings of futurity which conscious guilt engenders. The jovial merriment of the social board is courted for the very purpose of repressing these-of drowning care, and silencing the inward monitor, whose voice, in solitude and quietness, is too well heard for the sinner’s peace. When the glass, and the jest, and the laugh go round, there is a partial, and to others it may seem an entire suspension of these inward gnawings and secret fears. But even then the success is seldom complete. Could you look within; could you see the inner depths of the sinner’s heart-you might find there something widely different from what outward appearances indicate. You might find the begun tortures of the undying worm, and real sadness in the very midst of the most boisterous revelry.-And when left to himself; when the song and the glass, the joke and the laugh have ceased with the breaking up of the company, and solitude and reflection follow, how emphatically true-" the end of that mirth is heaviness!"

* Ecclesiastes 7:6. And may we not apply the words to the case of the deluded sinner, who attempts to be jocular and merry even on the bed of death? Ah! surely, in such a case, the lips and the heart belie each other. Jesting and levity, in these circumstances can be only the symptoms, while they are the attempted concealments, of internal disquietude. This is what we might naturally and fairly suspect; and many a confession, from those who have been brought back from the gates of death, and have subsequently come to a better mind, has confirmed the suspicion into certainty. There can be nothing more out of all reason,-nothing more affecting and shocking to every pious, and even to every soberly-thinking mind. Emphatically might it be said of such mirth-"it is mad." Even were the system of infidelity and annihilation true, the very thought, were there no more, of the final and irrecoverable extinction of conscious being, might be enough to render any man at least thoughtful and serious.

O how different from the "laughter" and "mirth" of the men of this world the joy of the Christian! that cheerful serenity of soul-that inward sunshine, which diffuses on every hand its benign and smiling influence!

What was before affirmed respecting the wicked and impenitent generally, is in the next verse affirmed specially of "the backslider"-of him who has "left his first love," and declined from the ways of God-"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself."

Temporary backsliding may take place in the true children of God; but the "backslider" here is evidently he who, in the language of the Apostle, "goes back unto perdition." Solomon alludes to such "perpetual backsliding" on the part of those who thus prove themselves to have been no more than professors-" having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Such characters, whatever appearances they present to the eyes of men,-even of the people of God, with whom they associate, never were vitally and savingly one with Christ, and one with true believers in Him. This is as plainly affirmed as it is in the power of language to affirm it: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us," 1 John 2:19. It is of such characters, therefore, that we must interpret other passages that describe final and fatal backsliding.*-O let professors be upon their guard; jealous of themselves; "keeping their hearts with all diligence;" "working out their own salvation with fear and trembling;" "building themselves up on their most holy faith." Let them ever remember, there may be a great deal of what Solomon here calls "backsliding in heart," that does not discover itself to the view of others in the outward conduct:-a declension in the inward vitality of true godliness,-a deadening of the tender sensibilities of the new nature,-the sensitiveness of conscience, the warmth and interest of heart in spiritual things. And backsliding, though temporary and partial, will be the occasion of severe though salutary correction, and bitter distress of soul. Thus it was in David’s case; and thus it was in Peter’s. And the general threatening from the Lord is, "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God. of hosts," Jeremiah 2:19. Even when restored, "the backslider" is "filled with his own ways." He returns through the valley of humiliation, with a burdened, aching, broken spirit, and may, as the merited result of his sin, be allowed to go mourning many a weary day in the bitterness of his soul. Of the final apostate the doom is the most fearful of all that the word of God describes.

*As Hebrews 10:26-30; 2 Peter 2:20-22.

Mark the antithesis:-"The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways; and a good man from himself." For the supplement "shall be satisfied" there is no need. "From himself," some would render "from above himself," and refer it to his receiving from God, from the divine fulness of blessing and grace. This, however, though the original may bear it, seems rather a straining, to insure orthodoxy. It is unnecessary. For as "the backslider" is he who departs from God, the "good man" is he who cleaves to God; and as the one is "filled with his own ways," in their sad results, so are there in "the good man"-in his heart, and in his ways, which are the ways of God,-springs of true satisfaction and delight. He enjoys present happiness,-flowing from a sanctified state of mind; from the holy exercise of its renewed affections; from what the Apostle declares to have been his rejoicing, "the testimony of conscience" to the "simplicity and godly sincerity" of his conduct; from growing evidence of interest in the salvation of God, and in the well-founded hope of eternal life; and from the pleasure, pure and blessed, of pious and benevolent deeds. And, when he acts under the influence of Gospel principles,-having learned what it is to renounce self and to serve God from grateful love and glad devotedness,-he knows that "God is not unrighteous to forget his work and labour of love;" that He will own all at last, and say to every one who, instead of backsliding and apostatizing, perseveres in the right course, "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

Verse Proverbs 14:15. "The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going." The words may first be applied to the concerns of the present world. "The simple"-the thoughtless and inconsiderate, are easily imposed upon by the specious and the artful-by their plausible representations, their confident protestations and assurances, their flattering and fawning speeches, insinuating address, and fair and ’ample promises. Possessing no depth of discernment for the discrimination of character, and no steadiness of observation and comparison to enable them to profit by experience, they are credulous of all. This is a very different thing from the "charity which believeth all things." Charity, assuredly, should be more prone to believe good than evil, and ever disposed, where two views present themselves of any case, to credit that most favourable to the character of another;-but not against evidence; not so as to flatter any one into a false conception of his spiritual state, or even of his temporal affairs. What we have here described is the credulity of the simple, not the candour of the charitable.

Now "the simple," on finding himself often deceived and imposed upon, and thus injured by those in whom he unwittingly confided-"believing every word"-not unfrequently degenerates into the contrary extreme. He has his temper fretted and soured. He becomes universally and without distinction distrustful. From having, in his simplicity, taken the word of all men for honesty and truth, he comes to reckon all men cheats, liars, rogues; and appears in the wretched character of an embittered, jealous, all suspecting misanthrope.

"But the prudent man looketh well to his going?" We may liken "the prudent man," when at all in perplexity, to an intelligent traveller who has lost his way, or is not at least sure of it. He reflects. He brings before his mind the relative positions of places,-the time of the day with the direction of the sun in the heaven; and, laying all things together, considers which of two or three roads is the most likely to conduct him to his destination. Or, if he is in possession of a map, he examines it for

his guidance. He does not, like "the simple," strike at once into the first way that offers itself, or choose without thought, or rashly take the advice of any one who may chance to give it him. In every matter of importance, he "looks well to his going;" first to find the right way, and next to keep it.* * Comp. Proverbs 4:26.

"We may apply the verse, in all its emphasis of meaning, to eternal concerns.-"The simple" hear different persons on the subject of religion, and take it for granted that all they hear is right. They are easily bewildered by sophistical arguments; led away by appeals to feeling; swayed and mastered by false eloquence; seduced by flattering assurances, palatable to the selfishness of the heart. They get thus entangled in error and delusion, or in a strange confused jumble of error and truth, between which they have no clear discernment. They are the sport of all that is novel-" tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." On the contrary, when interests so vast are at stake, as those of the whole man, body and soul, for an interminable existence, the "prudent man" will inquire earnestly and cautiously; will feel his way; will ponder every step; will deliberately examine every statement, and every argument, taking nothing upon trust. He first bends his earnest thought to the question of the divine authority of the Bible-a question next in importance to that of the being of God; and having ascertained its authority, he will go to it, with humble-minded candour and anxiety, to learn its lessons. Having the map, he will examine for himself the way to heaven as there delineated. Having a divine directory, he will trust no human guide.

Verse Proverbs 14:16. "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident." In this verse, the evil from which the "wise man departeth," may mean either suffering or sin. Both may with propriety be included, the one being the cause of the other-all suffering having its origin in sin.

We might take the maxim as only a further illustration of prudence and folly. Thus, in regard to temporal evils, the wise man estimates aright the magnitude of the mischief and the degree of the danger; and, by discreet precaution, shuns impending harm. The fool, on the contrary, sees no danger; dreads no harm; pushes recklessly forward, and falls into mischief. The wise man, again, will take, and will profit by a hint of caution and friendly direction or dissuasion; but the fool, in his self-sufficiency, is impatient of every thing of the kind. He resents it, as implying a reflection on his own penetration. He takes it short and high. He breaks out into passion-as if, forsooth, he could not see that! He calls the adviser, how modestly soever he may have ventured the hint, officious, vain, forward, pragmatical. He frets and blusters. And though sensible of the goodness of the advice, he will go directly against it rather than appear to act by the counsel of another. He prefers being wrong in his own way to being right in another man’s. He "rageth, and is confident."

Then, with regard to evil in the sense of sin. Set before the considerate-"prudent" man the nature and extent of its consequences,-its fearful results-here and hereafter-present and eternal-he thinks, he pauses, he trembles, he "departs from it." If sin is brought home to his conscience, he confesses and forsakes it. The fool, on the other hand spurns all restraint. He is provoked and offended by every tiling in the form of prohibition or threatening. The very commands of God irritate him. He foams, and winces, and champs the bit that checks him in his wild career. The secret stings of conscience goad him to madness. He is galled and chafed by the suggestions of this inward monitor, but not held back. He is only driven to pursue sin with the more headstrong

and frantic avidity. Reproof is like a spark struck amongst combustibles. The man's irritable passions are inflamed; and, in return for the reproof how gently and kindly soever administered, he only repeats the sin in word or act, whatever it may happen to be, with strong manifestations of displeasure at the presumption that has ventured to find fault,-repeats it in an aggravated form, from pure spite and passion. He "rageth, and is confident." Thus too it often is when any one hints at the danger of the way in which he is expecting salvation, and presumes to recommend another-even when the hint is given from an avowed and heart-felt solicitude for the welfare of his soul and his eternal happiness. "What business," he mutters, "have people with me and my soul? Let them mind their own, and leave me to mind mine; impertinent intermeddlers with matters they have nothing to do with!-every man's religion is his own concern I" And thus, the very presumption, as he regards it, that would set him right, confirms him in wrong. He "rageth, and is confident." Suppose he is on the way to hell-that is his own concern; and if he chooses to keep that way, who has a right to hinder him ?-No one certainly, poor sinner. But neither have you a right to hinder us from wishing you well;-that is all. It is duty to give you the counsel, whether you hear or forbear. And when you angrily adopt the poet's words, and say- "'Twere well, would you permit the world to live As the world chooses;-what's the world to you?" we might adopt the poet's answer-claiming kindred and brotherhood with you, and insisting on the privilege of kindred love. You surely cannot but approve the conduct of the servants of Naaman, when their master on receiving the prophet's order-" Go, wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean,"-"raged and was confident," saying, "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." "My father," said these discreet counsellors, "if the prophet had bidden thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean." Now this is all we would say to you. We point you to the divinely appointed remedy for the deadly malady of sin, common to you with us all, and entreat you to avail yourselves of it. If you will" rage and be confident;" if you will rather retain the distemper and die eternally than be cured by any other means than your own; if you will prefer going to hell in your own way than to heaven in God's way-we cannot help it; we have delivered our own souls, and are clear of your blood: but you cannot prevent our still pitying and praying for you!

Verse Proverbs 14:17. "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated." In the Septuagint Greek the verse is otherwise rendered, but without sufficient reason. The antithesis, as it stands in our own translation, which appears faithful to the Hebrew text, is abundantly manifest.

"Foolish" indeed is the conduct of the man of a quick, touchy, irritable temper. O! what would the irascible man many a time give to have his hasty words recalled!-His anger, however, vents itself in the vehement bluster of the moment. He utters rash and mischievous things, it may be; but people come to know him, and to appreciate these. His burst of passion is quickly over. The storm soon spends itself. The calm returns; and perhaps an apology for his haste and violence. How troublesome and unpleasant soever such a temper may be, it is not to be compared with that of the "man of wicked devices"-the man, that is, who studiously conceals and covers up his passion; broods over it; nourishes and cherishes it in the secret recesses of his bosom; waits his most favourable time for vengeance; watches, and contrives plans of retaliation; and all the while, perhaps, shows no external symptoms of the internal ferment, but possibly assumes the very

opposite-is all smiles and courtesy. Than such a character none is more odious; and it is dangerous as it is odious. Such a character cannot but be "hated." In the following verse, simplicity and prudence are again presented in a somewhat fresh point of contrast. "The simple inherit folly." This means not, as some would have it, that folly is theirs by hereditary possession, as part of the heritage of their fallen nature; but that through their inconsiderate and vacant listlessness, folly becomes their patrimony-with its full train of serious consequences-scorn, perpetual imposition, deranged affairs, distress and calamity, bankruptcy and ruin. The very designation of fool is the inheritance of the thoughtless simpleton, with all the derision that accompanies it. He stands as a neglected cipher in the intercourse of life, or becomes the dupe of every unprincipled deceiver.-On the contrary, "the prudent are crowned with knowledge." They acquire knowledge; and this knowledge becomes their crown. It brings them respect and honour; advances and elevates them in society. The language, as in other cases, is equally true of the interests of the world to come. "The simple "-careless sinners, who pursue heedlessly " the course of this present world;" who disregard the gospel message, "the word of truth and love;" who, if hearing it at all, hear it with an ear between which and the mind the avenue is closed-in the end "inherit folly." All they find awaiting them as their portion, is the exposure of their folly, by the verdict of Heaven, before the assembled world,-with the "shame and everlasting contempt " which is the necessary consequence. While the "prudent "-the truly thoughtful and wise in heart-are raised to the most exalted honour-honour far transcending what belongs to earth; have placed on their brows a diadem of glory-the "crown of life that fadeth not away:"-all the result of that divine "knowledge" to which they lent a willing ear, and welcomed to their hearts. "For this is life eternal to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Verse Proverbs 14:19. "The evil bow before the good: and the wicked at the gates of the righteous."

All that Solomon intends by this language, so far as what is merely temporal is concerned, is, that not seldom the real, sterling superiority of righteousness and goodness over vice and impiety is made apparent. It does frequently happen, that " the wicked," by whom "the righteous" were scorned, have come, by a reverse of circumstances, to feel their need of their counsel and aid; to feel the excellence of that which they had contemned-the true nobility of goodness. They have been fain to have recourse to them; to fawn where they had despised; to cringe at the gate of those from whom they would have withheld even a passing look; to petition where dependence would have been disdained, and the very proposal of application for help resented as an insult.

Such instances may be only occasional, but the superiority of the righteous to the wicked is universal. And its universality will appear in the "judgment of the great day,"-the day when the light of eternity shall be thrown upon the honours and the possessions of time. O the agonizing regret with which the miserable mistakes of the past will then be recollected!-and how utterly will every thought be absorbed in the awful present and the still more awful future-the eternal future!

Verses Proverbs 14:20-21. "The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends. He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he."-Taking these two verses together, the connexion shows that the former of the two is not to be understood as if by all his neighbours in every case, the poor were hated. Those there are who "have mercy on the poor," and who are sensible that to "despise " them is to be guilty of sin. But,

alas! for the selfishness of human nature!-the case supposed, and the principle involved in it, are far from rare. From the poor there is nothing to be got. There is not only no share of property to be had from them, by any process of attention and flattery, but no respectability; no distinction arising out of any connexion with them. Nay, even to be seen in their company is to insure being shunned by all who love the honours of the world, and are set upon what the world call good society.-" The rich hath many friends." There is keen satire in these words; but there is no slander. They are words of truth. The rich have friends, on both the accounts mentioned-interest and honour. If they are bountiful, the friends they have are not those who are attracted by the admiration of their benevolence, and become attached to them from love to their amiable and generous spirit. They are the friends who are drawn around them by the hope of sharing in the plunder-of getting something by it-profiting by their generosity and profusion-ever studious to please, and ever hinting, broadly or otherwise as circumstances may require. They are friends, not of the man, but of his table and of his purse. And if the rich man be a miser, his friends are his hangers-on, his parasites-persevering in attentions, fawning, flattering, accommodating, submitting to any indignity, patient of contradiction and insult, anticipating every wish, watching every look, running on every service; and all without one solitary feeling of real regard to aught else whatever but the coffers and the lands. The spirit of the former of the verses is many a time very affectingly exemplified in the case of persons who have been reduced from affluence to poverty by sudden or gradual reverses. How many, in these circumstances, prove, as good Matthew Henry calls them, "swallow-friends, that leave in winter." They become shy of him to whom they had paid court. They find out plausible excuses for avoiding his company, and withdrawing from his house. They put the best face upon it they can, while every one sees the true cause. Poverty has stripped off all the former attractions. There is no longer anything to be had. Their friendship thus ceases at the very moment when it comes to be most needed.-Let not the blame of desertion, however, be put down, without exception, to this score. It does sometimes happen, that persons who are reduced in their circumstances act in such a manner as to bring upon themselves the very desertion and neglect, of which they subsequently complain, and which they are fond to impute, with real or affected selfcomplacency, to the pride, and selfishness, and insensibility of others,-casting severe reflections on those by whom they are forsaken, when the fault lies entirely with themselves; when, by their unbecoming temper and behaviour, they have driven off those by whom they might otherwise have been befriended and succoured. A selfish spirit, however, when that leads to the conduct described, is always a sinful spirit. "He that despiseth his neighbour "-his poor neighbour, "sinneth "-sinneth against God. There is sin against the arrangements of His providence. There is sin against the frequent and express commands of His word.*1 There is sin against the manifestations of His distinguishing love: for God has not only, in the strongest terms, avowed himself jealous for the poor, making their interests his own; but "to the poor the gospel is preached," and of those who become the subjects of God’s grace, and heirs of glory, a large proportion belong to this class.*2 And, finally, there is sin in the contempt at once of God’s threatened vengeance against all who treat the poor with neglect or cruelty, and of His promised special favour to all who treat them with kindness and generous sympathy.

*1 Comp. Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Luke 12:33; Luke 14:12-14. rr *2 See James 2:5-7.

"He that despiseth his (poor) neighbour sinneth;" and in sin there can be no happiness. Hence the force of the antithesis-"He who hath mercy on the poor, happy is he." "Happy is he," for his

conduct is obedience to God’s command;-and in "the keeping of his commandments there is a great reward." "Happy is he," for he hears a voice saying-" Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.. .. The Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not." He is "happy " also because of the pleasure found in the gratification of the benevolent affections-God having so constituted our nature, that in proportion as it is delivered from the disturbing forces of corruption, and restored to its original rectitude, it derives enjoyment from the exercise of kindness. "Happy is he," in a word, for he is God-like-like Him whose bounty supplies the universe.

Verse Proverbs 14:22. "Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good." This may still be applied to the poor.* They who thus "devise evil" against the poor do egregiously err, if they expect to prosper. The hidden curse of God is upon them. But the verse may be understood more generally-of the "devising of evil," of whatever kind, and from whatever motive, whether of malice, resentment, envy, avarice, or ambition. To him who "devises good "-who lays himself out in planning and executing designs of benefit to others, there shall be "mercy and truth." From his fellow-men he shall experience universal love and esteem. He shall find sympathy in his distresses and reverses, faithfulness in dealing (for if anything will secure a man from being cheated and defrauded, it will be a character for disinterested kindness, tenderness, and liberality) and the general exercise of practical gratitude. And the Lord will make him to experience His love, and will fulfil to him faithfully all His "precious promises."

* Comp. Isaiah 32:6-8.

Verse Proverbs 14:23. "In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." It must be obvious that by "the talk of the lips" is to be understood, not the legitimate use of the powers of speech in professional business. This, of course, comes under the description of the "labour in which there is profit." The reference is to vain, idle, empty talk-useless gossip. The character is that of the man whose tongue is ever in motion; who is uneasy till he gets some one on whom to inflict his prosings or his frothy tattle. He goes in quest of such.. He gets them inveigled to hear him. He stands or sits idle with them. His work and his family are neglected. The great talker is seldom a great worker. A busy tongue makes idle hands. If the mouth will be heard, the noisy loom must stop; and he who prefers the sound of his tongue to that of his shuttle, had need, at the same time, to be a man who prefers talk to meat, hunger to fulness, starvation to plenty. The husband’s words will neither make into food nor clothing. Back and belly must alike starve: such talk "tendeth only to penury."

Verse Proverbs 14:24. "The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools is folly." The meaning of the first clause is obvious. When a wise man has "riches" it is a part of his wisdom to know the proper use of them: and by putting them to that use,-by doing with them all the good in his power, they become a crown to him. He thus frames for himself a diadem of beauty more truly glorious than if the most exquisite skill were expended in working up all his gold and jewels into

one as rich and costly as ever adorned a monarch’s brow. O what is the most gorgeous and dazzling earthly crown compared with a diadem of which the component parts are the blessings of the destitute relieved, the ignorant instructed, the vicious reclaimed, the afflicted comforted, the dying cheered with the hope of life, the perishing rescued from perdition and brought to God! This is a royal crown indeed!

"The foolishness of fools is folly," is an expression which, taken by itself, might simply signify, that place a fool in any variety of circumstances, he will still identify himself; his "foolishness" will still be "folly "-never long-concealed: while it is folly, in regard to its ultimate product, to himself as well as to others. Of no benefit to his fellow-men, it leaves him in a fool’s plight at last. Ah! surely that "foolishness is folly" indeed, of which this is the termination! But it cannot fail to strike you, that there is no direct antithesis between the one clause of the verse and the other; there being no reference to " riches" in the latter, as there is in the former. To remove this defect, it has been conceived by some that in the latter part of the verse there is what critics call a paronomasia; the same assortment of letters having two significations, equally arising out of the primary meaning of the root-the one, fulness or wealth, and the other grossness, stupidity, or folly. It will then read-"but the fulness of fools, or the wealth of fools, is folly;"-and what may be called the play on the words has been successfully enough imitated in English-" but the abundance of fools is abundant folly." The sentiment will thus be, that while, by the use of his riches, the wise man converts them into a crown of glory, the possession of riches by the fool only augments his folly, by giving him new and more varied means and opportunities of displaying it. His wealth puffs him up. His foolish and weak mind is inflated by it; and, in the littleness of his vanity, and the trifling, ostentatious, or absurd uses to which he applies his ill-bestowed abundance, he only renders himself the more a fool. In conclusion, let Christians, rich and poor, seek grace so to regulate their whole course that they may put honour upon the Son of God, and that "the word of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." Beautiful is it to see, in all situations, the happy influence of right principle-the faith of divine truth showing itself in appropriate conduct; and appropriate conduct avowing its originating and guiding principle in the faith of divine truth! This is "holding forth the word of life."

35-Pro_14:25-31

Proverbs 14:25-31

LECTURE XXXV.

Proverbs 14:25-31.

"A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies. In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. In the multitude of people is the king’s honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince. He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly. A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones. He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor."

"A True witness delivereth souls." The words might be rendered with greater propriety, and wider comprehensiveness-" a true witness saveth lives." But it may be said, and said justly, that a faithful testimony does not always save life. Such a testimony may evidently condemn a man as well as acquit him. It depends entirely, not on the fidelity of the witness, but on the facts of the case. If the facts are criminatory, a true witness must tell them as they are-" the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,"-and the fault rests not with him that his testimony warrants a sentence of condemnation. The duty of giving such evidence may often be most painful; but the "true witness" must submit to this: the truth must be told.-And while true testimony may condemn, false testimony may acquit; while the former may destroy life, the latter may save it. Many a time has a false and perjured witness brought off a pannel that was guilty and deserved the punishment pronounced by the law against the offence charged.

It is probable, therefore, that the intended antithesis relates, not so much to the actual fact of truth saving and falsehood condemning, as to the dispositions and intentions of the faithful witness on the one hand, and the lying witness on the other. The faithful witness delights in giving testimony that will save life-that will be salutary and beneficial to his fellow-creatures. The lying witness will, in general, be found actuated by a malevolent and wicked purpose, having pleasure in giving testimony that mil go to condemn the object of his malice. The sentiment will thus be, that truth is most generally found in union with kindness of heart, and falsehood with malevolence. And this is natural; the former being both good, the latter both evil; falsehood more naturally akin to malice, and truth to love. "A deceitful witness" is evidently not intended to be understood of a witness who deceives for the good of others. A man may occasionally deceive for such a purpose; but this is the exception, not the rule. The deceitful man deceives for his own advantage:-while the man of truth regards not the results, whether to others of to himself; but, be they painful or pleasant, considers only what fidelity and veracity demand of him: not things as he may wish them, but things as they are.* * Comp. Proverbs 6:19; Proverbs 12:17; Proverbs 13:5.

Verse Proverbs 14:26. "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge."

He who fears God, according to the revelation He has given of himself, may well have "strong confidence." That in which he confides is all infinite:-the truth, the love, the wisdom, the power of his covenant God! What confidence shall be strong, if this is not strong? The God whom he fears and loves (for in the Scripture sense he cannot fear without loving) has given, in the name of his Son, "exceeding great and precious promises;"-precious in themselves, in the fulness of blessing, for time and for eternity, which they contain; precious, as given by divine fidelity; precious, as pledged and made sure of fulfilment by all the resources of divine wisdom and divine power. Whatever the love of God has induced Him graciously to promise, no power or combination of powers in existence can stay from being done. The psalms abound with expressions of confidence, corresponding with the phraseology of the latter part of the verse-"And his" (the Lord's) "children shall have a place of refuge." This does not mean merely that God in His providence will see to their protection and preservation in seasons of danger and calamity-true though that is, but that, to them, as His children, He Himself will be "as a hidingplace from the storm, and a covert from the tempest;" so that they shall fully realize the security; and, in the enjoyment of "perfect peace," say with the prophet, "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in Him," Nahum 1:7.

What is before said (Proverbs 13:14.) of "the law of the wise," is in next verse said of " the fear of the Lord." "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."

There is a perfect and beautiful harmony between the two. "The law of the wise," is the great practical principle by which their whole character is formed and their whole conduct regulated, and that principle is "the fear of the Lord." And if the "law of the wise" be interpreted in the former passage, more generally, of the divine word, which the wise take as the "light of their feet and the lamp of their path," the authoritative guide of all their ways,-what, we still ask anew, is the leading lesson of that very word? Is it not that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and the beginning of wisdom? Is not the very purpose of God's word to reveal Him to guilty men in the appropriate character of the God of their salvation? And is not the very purpose of the manifestation of God's mercy to rectify the state of the heart toward Him? Is there not "forgiveness with Him that He may be feared?"

Now "this fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." From these it effectually preserves; while they who have it not are "broken and snared and taken"-led astray to their destruction-"entangled and overcome." All the streams that flow from this fear are streams of life-waters of joy. And when the principle is perfected above-when every foreign and bitter ingredient is separated from the fountain-when all that is impure is filtered out-how sweet will be the waters! The untainted fountain of holiness will then indeed prove itself "a fountain of life"-a spring of eternal and unmingled blessedness. O! is not true religion, we again ask,-is not the "fear of the Lord" true wisdom? Would you be wise-prudently and practically wise-wise as it respects your own happiness? choose it for your law; disown every other; resist every interfering and counteracting influence, every temptation to throw off its salutary dominion, and say, with full determination of spirit-"I FEAR GOD, AND KNOW NO OTHER FEAR!"

Verse Proverbs 14:28. "In the multitude of people is the king’s honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince."

There is a natural tendency in the population of a country to increase; and, according to the estimates of some political economists, (into the discussion of which it would be inconsistent both with place and time to enter) to increase in a more rapid ratio than the means of subsistence. When, therefore, population, instead of thus increasing, diminishes, there must be some cause or causes counterworking nature. The subjects of the country may be wasted in destructive and depopulating wars; they may be driven by oppression to quit their native land, and to seek a refuge in other and distant regions; they may be starved and reduced by measures that are injurious and ruinous to trade, and especially to the industry and comfort of the artisan-measures that keep up the price of bread, and depress the wages of labour; and may thus be necessitated to seek an easier and a more abundant subsistence for themselves and their families, elsewhere.

There may be circumstances in providence, let it be granted, over which no Government can exercise any control, which may contribute to the production of similar results. But no Government that is desirous of its only real stability;-a thriving, vigorous, well-educated, happy, and loyal population, will trifle with those laws which manifestly and essentially tend either to its production on the one hand or to its diminution and extermination on the other. Such a population, as Solomon here teaches, is the glory and the strength of every Government. Its existence is a mark of freedom, of wise and impartial legislation, of paternal care;-and it is the palladium of all that is desirable in the results of human rule. It is the honour and the security of a country. Such a population will be jealous of the liberties and the blessings they enjoy, and will maintain, with unanimity of resolution and vigour, the throne and the laws under which they are enjoyed. On the contrary, in a thin, diminishing, scattered, discouraged, and heartless people, whence is the power of protection and defence to come? They can feel no interest and no energy in repelling aggression, and protecting from injury and hazard, that from which they derive so very little good. Go where they will, they naturally think, the change cannot be materially for the worse. There may, however, be circumstances, which, even in a free, thriving, and happy country, may at times render the emigration of individuals and families desirable; and when those who take leave of their country itself go to the colonies, more or less distant, of that country, they may still be regarded as belonging to "the multitude of the people"-the "king’s honour." They remain among his subjects, and may contribute more to the prosperity of the land they leave than they would have done by remaining at home; just as a man may do better for himself and family, and better contribute his little quota to the prosperity of the community, by shifting his place and changing his occupation, within the country itself. The prince who reigns over a numerous, thriving, contented, and attached people, may be likened to the proprietor of a vineyard where all is rich, flourishing, fruitful, productive; thus fully rewarding his expense, time, and care,-bringing him at once credit and profit. Whereas the prince who sways his sceptre over a draining, exhausted, and dispirited people, is like the proprietor whose vineyard, for want of cultivation and judicious management, becomes, in its vines, stunted and sapless, and, in its soil, weedy, poor, and sterile,-at once his disgrace and his ruin. The sentiment of the following verse is a kindred one to that in verse seventeenth (Proverbs 14:17)-"He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly." The man whose resentments, instead of quickly kindling are slow of excitement, may, by the men of the world, be censured and despised, as tame and spiritless. But after all, this

self-command is true greatness of mind,-one of the marks of a powerful intellect. Hasty and violent tempers make their subjects often both to say and do things that cause subsequent regret and shame. Thus "he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly." He gives folly for the time being the throne and sceptre of his mind, and fulfils her preposterous and mischievous dictates. And when reason, for the time deposed, resumes her vacated seat, she finds no easy task before her to repair the evils which have been done in the brief but stormy reign of passion. But the subject has been already more than once before us. I dwell not on it.

Verse Proverbs 14:30. "A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones." The word sound signifies healthful; free from moral distempers-the distempers of "the inner man:" such distempers as discontent, malice, and envy. And here "a sound heart" stands in contrast with a heart under the power of the last of these. And the influence of each on the general constitution, and even on the welfare of the body, is strongly set forth.

Strictly speaking, "a sound heart"-a heart entirely free from the evil passions that belong to fallen nature-is not to be found. But in Scripture "a sound heart," and even "a perfect heart," are phrases used to signify the real sincerity and predominant rule of right principles and affections. Of the corruption of human nature, to which I have referred, the passions noticed are parts and modifications; and of all the malignant influences of which the heart can be the subject, that of "envy" is perhaps the most odious in itself, and the most corroding, torturing, and wasting to the spirit of which it takes possession. It is here called "the rottenness of the bones"-not a mere surface sore, but a deep-seated disease; like caries or inflammation in the substance of the bone itself. It burns and destroys inwardly. Its poor agonized victim writhes in misery at every report that reaches his ear of the success or prosperity of the object of his malevolence; or even of the elevation and progress of others in general. And the connexion is intimate between mind and body,-between the spirit and the tabernacle in which it resides. They mutually affect each other. When such a passion preys upon the heart, the body will sicken, pine, and consume-the appetite failing, and the flesh wasting away. On the contrary, there is not a more effectual preservative of the health and vigour of the physical frame, than a contented and cheerful spirit,-a spirit that shares the happiness of all around, and makes every stream of enjoyment that gladdens the heart of others tributary to the river of its own pleasures. This, instead of rottenness, is marrow to the bones.

Verse Proverbs 14:31. "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor."-We had a similar sentiment before us in last lecture. I then mentioned, amongst other views of the sin, that scorn of the poor was contempt of the appointments of divine providence. The idea here corresponds with this.

"Oppression," however, is something more than contempt or neglect. It is the using of superiority and power with rigour and severity; taking advantage of the dependence of the poor to "grind their faces;" exacting then-hard toil for an inadequate compensation; adding to their work, and screwing down their wages; making necessity on their part the reason, not for treating them gently, but for dealing hardly and cruelly by them.

He who acts such a part to the poor, "reproacheth his Maker" For first, he acts as if the poor were of another species-an inferior order of beings; whereas they have all the attributes of the same manhood with him by whom they are contemned. It is kindred blood that flows in the veins of both;

their constitution of soul and body is the same; their sensibilities are the same; the sources of their joys and sorrows, their pains and pleasures are the same; their eternal destinies are the same; their ruin by sin is a common ruin,-the salvation provided for them by Christ a common salvation. And further, because he acts as if the circumstances in which the poor had been placed by his Maker were a warrant for him to imitate the divine conduct, and to depress them still further; which is a reproach of God, as if He dealt with the poor in the spirit of unkindness and partiality, and meant His own dealings as a signal for fellow-creatures to withhold good and to inflict evil, instead of intending to present occasions for the exercise of the very opposite dispositions and conduct. On the contrary-"he that honoureth him"-that is, God, "hath mercy on the poor." The inverse of course holds-that he who "hath mercy on the poor honoureth God." And yet, perhaps, this may be questioned, unless duly explained and guarded. A man may have mercy on the poor who does not "honour God." Humanity may, and often does, exist without godliness. But godliness cannot exist without humanity. Kb man can honour God without "having mercy on the poor: "-and it will be well for both descriptions of persons to examine themselves. The humane and merciful man should examine, whether he has any consideration of the glory of God in what he is doing; whether his benevolence springs at all from, or has any connexion with, piety: and the professedly pious and godly, those who say they have the glory of God at heart, do well to reflect whether this be one of the ways in which their regard for God’s glory manifests itself.

Jesus-who of all that ever lived on earth honoured God most, showed most of mercy to the poor. This was prophesied of him;* and the prophecy was amply verified in his entire life on earth. The poor were ever around him. He was ever dispensing to them temporal good, and ever vouchsafing to them his gracious and saving instructions. It was at once the delight of his heart, and one of the proofs of his Messiahship, to be able to say, in connexion with the enumeration of his miraculous works-" And to the poor the gospel is preached." He, therefore, who most imitates him, most honours God;-for him God "delighteth to honour," and delighteth to see honoured; and those who most resemble him will have most of God’s blessing.

* Comp. Psalms 72:4; Psalms 72:12-14.

Let me close by remarking that they do not imitate aright either Jesus or the Father that sent him, who confine their imitation to mere outward, present, temporal good. Vast was the amount of such good scattered around him by Jesus when on earth; but not for that purpose did he come from heaven. He had a higher errand. That errand was salvation. Men were spiritually poor-destitute for eternity; and herein is the signal "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich,"-not rich in the wealth of this world, but rich in spiritual blessings, rich in the divine favour, rich in the promises of God’s covenant, rich as heirs of "the better country, even the heavenly," rich in God Himself. Do you pity, then, the spiritual destitution of mankind? Do you seek to relieve and supply their wants? Otherwise you honour not God. You dishonour Him. You are not of one mind either with Him or with his Son. It was to provide for the wants and woes spiritual and eternal of mankind, that the whole scheme of the mediation of Christ was devised and carried out. And if, professing to pity the poor, you confine your mercy to their temporal condition, you are really "reproaching their Maker"-reproaching Him as having done a needless thing, as having expended an immense amount of the most marvellous means, for accomplishing an end which you do not think it worth your while to mind, either for yourselves or for others. Your benevolence is spurious. It is not the

benevolence of God. It is not the benevolence of Christ. It is not the benevolence of wisdom or prudence. It is the benevolence of the physician, who should expend all his care and skill on the binding up of a bruised finger, while he left a deadly malignant distemper preying unheeded on the very vitals. If you honour God, you will act as God acts. The souls and eternal interests of men will be highest in your estimate, and first in your attention. To make men "rich toward God" will be your chief concern. And to those who mind their temporal interests, while they overlook those that are spiritual and eternal, we would say, in the terms of Jesus on another subject-" This ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." If you would honour God, you must seek to fill this impoverished world with "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

36-Pro_14:32-35

Proverbs 14:32-35

LECTURE XXXVI.

Proverbs 14:32-35.

"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death. Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools is made known. Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. The king's favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame." The first of these verses might be specially applied to the characters in the verse preceding-on the one hand, the unmerciful oppressor who has for a time succeeded in his schemes of rapacity and iron-hearted avarice, and the merciful man on the other, who, under the influence of the principles of faith and love, has honoured the Lord in the exercise of compassionate kindness.

We take the verse, however, in application to the righteous and the wicked generally. When it is said of the latter-"The wicked is driven away in his wickedness," the contrast in the close of the verse shows to what period the words refer. It is to the time of death. And the contrast, though briefly stated, is very striking. The two characters are brought, as it were, to the verge of eternity. Of one the whole heart, in all its affections and desires, has belonged to the present world. He has lived in the pleasures of sin, "without God," neglecting the salvation of his soul, and in utter destitution of any well-founded hope for futurity. His heart fails him. Conscience sets his sins in dread array before him. Imagination, stimulated by conscience, anticipates the terrors of a coming judgment-the vengeance of a holy God. Yet his heart is still carnal, hard, unyielding; his iniquities are unrepented; his evil lusts and habits remain in their full force. How he clings to life!-what a death grasp he keeps of this world! Unprepared for the world beyond, he shrinks back from it; he dares not look into it. O what would he give-what would he not give for a little longer lease of time! for but a year, a month, a week, a day! But go he must. It is anything but willingly. He goes by force. He is "driven away in his wickedness"-compelled to quit his hold of the world, and hurried into eternity.

"But the righteous hath hope in his death." He is not driven away. The world that is before him, and on which he is about to enter, has been anticipated by him. It is not strange to his mind. It is his country; it is his home. The present world he has not regarded as his world, the world to which he belongs. The next is properly his-the place of his future and eternal settlement. While here, he is a stranger and foreigner,-staying only for a short season, and journeying towards his destined abode. The world to which his hope looks forward has attractions far superior to that in which he now dwells. Not that he is insensible to tender and strong attachments drawing and binding him to the scene he is about to leave. He loves his friends; his wife and children are dear to his heart; and so are father and mother, brothers and sisters; and fellow-Christians,-one with him in the communion of saints; with whom he has "taken sweet counsel," "walking with them to the house of

God in company:" and he feels at the thought of leaving them. But he has friends in heaven too-earthly friends who have gone thither before him-patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs-all the saints of God from Abel to himself; and above all, his best, his divine friend. And there too are better, and higher, and purer blessings-the sinless perfection of those which he has tasted and learned to relish here below.-And then, with regard to all in whom he is interested on earth, he has a covenant God in whose hands he can leave them with firm and steadfast faith, the living faith of a dying hour, and sing- "Ye fleeting charms of earth, farewell, Your springs of joy are dry: My soul now seeks another home, A brighter world on high.

Farewell, ye friends, whose tender card Has long engaged my love: Your fond embrace I now exchange For better friends above!

Cheerful I leave this rale of tears, Where pains and sorrows grow;

Welcome the day that ends my toil, And every scene of woe!"

Many now present can bear testimony to the fact that "the righteous hath hope in his death;" and amongst them some who have been recently called to mourn the departure of one of the oldest members of the Church-one dear to a large circle of affectionate relatives; a Christian of long standing, and approved character; and one whose sun, though it went down somewhat suddenly, yet set without a cloud.-" Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" Is this your wish, my hearers? Then you must live the life of the righteous, under the influence of the faith of the righteous.

Verse Proverbs 14:33. "Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding: but that which is in the midst of fools is made known." The meaning is not, of course, that the man of "understanding" makes no use of his "wisdom" for the benefit of others,-keeping it all to himself-all locked up in his own mind; but that he uses it discreetly. He chooses his time and his company, unfolding his mental treasures at appropriate seasons, to appropriate persons, in appropriate circumstances. The fool has little, and that little he is anxious to show, ever seeking to be thought as wise as possible; and he exhausts perpetually, over and over again, his little stock of common-places, and of such extraordinaries as he has chanced to pick up and remember. The folly of the one is "made known" to all. The wisdom of the other "rests in the heart" of him who possesses it, discovered only by degrees, and by the few with whom he comes into intimate contact.* * For farther illustration see Proverbs 12:23; Proverbs 13:16.

Ver. Proverbs 14:34. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." The sentiment may be applied to riders and to people. Righteousness in the rulers "exalteth a nation;" and the general prevalence of righteousness in the community "exalteth a nation." The true honour of a nation, like that of an individual, lies in character;-and even as to what is too often placed by the thoughtless first-even as to national wealth and temporal prosperity, and the extension of possessions and dependencies, it is character that tends most effectually to their attainment; and it is character, in a special manner, that alone secures their permanence. How often, in the history of nations, has character procured wealth and aggrandizement; and then the wealth and aggrandizement, by their seductive and corrupting influence, gradually, but with accelerating progress, destroyed character!-And again, as the final step, how often has the destruction of character proved the decline and fall of the empire even in its temporal and secular greatness, and

hastened its complete extinction! When there is, in any community, the prevalence of true religion, with its inseparable attendants and proportionals, the personal and social virtues, sobriety, justice, mutual integrity and honour, industry, and practical benevolence,-there are in that community the elements of national greatness,-of true, internal, independent happiness, as well as of advancing prosperity and elevation. The tendency of these to promote such results is manifest. They produce peace, union, stability, and concentration of energies; with personal and social, civil and religious liberty. They are, moreover, the means of bringing down the divine blessing on a country,-without which, what is there that can prosper? "Without which all will be failure, all blight and barrenness, all disappointment and discomfiture, all declension and penury, and slow or rapid consumption. The prevalence of impiety, with its accompanying vices, tends, in the very nature of things, to ruin,-to ruin both personal and national: and the tendency is aggravated by its withdrawing the protection and smile of the Almighty,-the "righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness."

We find the great general principle of divine providence, in regard to nations, thus laid down by Jehovah himself to the prophet Jeremiah-"At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them," Jeremiah 18:7-10. This was a principle, not applicable to Israel exclusively:-for we find it expressly applied to the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the inhabitants of Sodom and of Nineveh. And, the Old Testament bringing before us specimens of the divine administration,-the Spirit of God letting us so far into the secrets of its principles and laws,-we have every reason to believe that in the government of God over the world, the same principle is still in operation, though we may not be able to trace it,-that, had we only an inspired record of what takes place now, we should see it clearly in all cases; and, even without such a record, there are cases in which it would be equal impiety and blindness not to discern and own it.

Let us all be assured, then, that we do most efficiently promote the security and prosperity-the true glory and the true happiness of our country, in proportion as we contribute, in any way, to the advancement of the interests of religion amongst its inhabitants. Of the contrary, alas! there is a vast and growing amount in the British Isles; and it is aggravated by the greatness and abundance of our privileges,-of the light of divine knowledge and the varied means of piety and virtue. There are systems in operation, of which the tendency is to the deterioration of all that is good, and the introduction of all that is evil. By every legitimate means we should seek their counteraction. But by legitimate means, I am not to be understood as intending the interference of the strong arm of law,-the staying even of irreligion and immorality themselves by prohibitory statutes and penal enactments,-unless in cases where injury is done to person or property, or to the peace and safety of individuals, neighbourhoods, or the country at large. I mean, the personal and the combined activity of the friends of the truth, and of true religion, to diffuse right principles, and thus to counterwork the spread and influence of wrong ones. In proportion to the zeal and efforts of the abettors of error, let the adherents of truth bestir themselves. If the agents of the enemy of souls be busy, let the agents of the Redeemer of souls be busy too. Let all moral means, especially, be put diligently into operation for circulating the knowledge, impressing the importance, urging the obligation, and promoting the influence of principles in accordance with the word of God; in

suppressing intemperance; in checking all descriptions of vicious indulgence; in diffusing education; in promoting, by Sabbath-schools, by Bible and Tract distribution, by visits of mercy to the poor, the knowledge and the leavening influence of religious truth; by town missions and country missions, circulating light and dissipating darkness; and, at the same time, it should be added, by such measures of private philanthropy, and by countenance and aid to such measures of legislative authority, as are fitted to augment the independence and comfort of the inferior classes of society, and thus to repress the spirit of discontent and turbulence, and to encourage that of satisfaction, quietness, and peaceful industry, and to engender a disposition of greater willingness to attend to those means which may be used for their higher and better interests. And let it be our prayer, that the "righteousness which exalteth a nation" may ever be found in the administration of its government;-that its great men may be good men-men "fearing God and hating covetousness"-not actuated by selfish but by truly patriotic and disinterested principles:-of which, though there are honourable exceptions, we have always so much reason to lament that the amount to be found on any side of political partisanship, should be so sadly small!-Let it be our prayer, that "the throne may be established in righteousness,"-and that, from the throne downward, righteousness, in principle and practice, may pervade the nation. "While we bewail the amount of varied wickedness in our own land, let us not be unmindful of the good, nor unthankful for it. There is much. There is much of true religion. There are many renewed and praying souls; many who are the salt of the earth; many objects of divine love; many who imitate that love in active benevolence, and who benefit the community, both by example, activity, and prayer. By this salt is Britain preserved from universally pervading corruption. By this shield of prayer is Britain protected from divine vengeance. This is Britain’s glory; this Britain’s security.

There is a close connexion between this and the following verse, as nothing has a better tendency to diffuse righteousness in a community, and to maintain and perpetuate it, than the character of the reigning prince:-"The king’s favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame."-These words state what ought to be. No one ought to be the king’s or the queen’s servant who is not wise; and toward every such wise servant the royal favour should be specially extended. And who is a wise servant? Not a servant who flatters royal vanity; accommodates itself to royal foibles; indulges royal prejudices; chimes in with royal caprices; tolerates and connives at royal vices, whether personal or official. No. A wise servant must be a servant of conscientious principle, and of bland but unflinching fidelity. He is one who gives prudent and faithful counsel; who "speaks truth as he thinks it in his heart;" whose counsels are dictated by a right understanding of the times and knowledge of what such times require,-not by a wish to ingratiate the minister with the prince, and so to promote his own personal advantage, but by the principles of genuine patriotism as well as loyalty. Such a public servant is a blessing to the throne, and through the throne to the country. Such a servant will, unquestionably, on the supposition of his being under its influence himself, do all that lies legitimately in his power to promote the interests of true religion; and he will avail himself, for this purpose, of the augmented influence which his high station gives him. This is quite a distinct thing from exerting official authority in religion. I have spoken of what may be legitimately in his power. But the exercise of such authority is not legitimate. The principles and laws of true religion are in the Bible; and in the Bible alone is their authority; and in the Bible alone are the gracious rewards and the penal sanctions, by which obedience to them is encouraged and the infraction of them restrained. Every interference of human authority in such matters is an interference with the exclusive prerogatives

of the Most High. But influence may be more than legitimate: it may be incumbent. On every man, in every station, who knows the truths of religion and feels their power, it is incumbent. He will use it in every way that is in harmony with freedom of conscience, and with the independence and spiritual character of the kingdom of Christ. The expression "causeth shame" corresponds perhaps to the word "reproach" in the verse preceding. That servant "causeth shame," by whom that is encouraged from which reproach arises; that is who encourages sin. Against a minister of this description the king’s wrath ought to be directed: he should frown him from his presence.-That servant too "causeth shame," who, from whatever motive, gives counsels to his prince which, he has reason to believe, must prove either prejudicial or abortive;-such as can hardly fail to render him unpopular with his people, and expose him, by their failure, to the derision of foreign states-a derision in which the kingdom as well as the throne-the people as well-as the monarch, are involved.-That servant too "causeth shame" who is the enticer and tempter of his royal master to evil, to vicious and licentious indulgences, from which, ultimately, he finds himself involved in personal infamy, and in official disgrace and embarrassment. He then awakes, but too late, to a sense of his folly in allowing himself to be thus seduced and duped; and then his bitter reflections awaken his wrath against the unprincipled and faithless servant who has brought him to shame. The example of the Court necessarily spreads downward to the very lowest, through all the intermediate grades of society. We find this strikingly exemplified in the recorded history of the kings of Israel and Judah. According to the character of the prince was, to a great extent, the character of the people. And indeed, we might select many hardly less striking exemplifications of the same thing from the history of our own country. So that, in every view, it is of eminent consequence, that the throne should be based on righteousness; and that those around it should be men of righteous principle-wise, faithful, upright, fearing God. Let Christians, then, comply with the apostolic admonition-" I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth," 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

If the character of the reigning monarch thus affects and moulds the character of his people, let the subjects of the King of Zion consider the character of their Prince. Let them set that character, in all its perfect beauty and glorious excellences, ever before them. The more closely they imitate it, the more complete will be their own personal honour and happiness; and the more complete too will be the honour and happiness of the collective spiritual community. When that community is finally assembled in the heavenly city, all shall be fully conformed in character to their King and Head, and the glory and blessedness of the community shall thus be perfected. O my brethren, let us show that our hope of likeness to Him then is no delusion, by a growing earnestness of desire to be like him now.

37-Pro_15:1-6

Proverbs 15:1-6

LECTURE XXXVII.

Proverbs 15:1-6.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit. A fool despiseth his father’s instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent. In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble." In the words "a soft answer turneth away wrath," anger is supposed to have been already kindled, and to have expressed itself in terms of passionate irritation. In such circumstances, the offended pride of our nature prompts us to return an answer in the same strain,-not "soft" but high and harsh. We wish to show, especially if others are present, that we are not afraid, and that we are not the persons to be provoked and abused with impunity!-The answer which natural feeling would thus dictate, would be one in "grievous words" adding to irritation, and further "stirring up anger"-one which would be only as fresh fuel to a burning and blazing fire, or as a fresh gust of wind on the already raging deep. In this there would be double wrong: it would be giving indulgence to an evil temper in ourselves, as well as stimulating and increasing it in others. Our incumbent duty, when so situated, is self-restraint. Such restraint, though often regarded as mean-spiritedness, and want of becoming and manly pride (accustomed as we are to give gentle names to ungentle things) is true greatness of mind-true dignity.* But how much soever our judgments are convinced of this, how entire soever our concurrence in the abstract sentiment, we feel how impotent too often such conviction is in the moment of temptation, when exposed to the angry menaces, or the scornful and defying words, and looks, and gestures of an adversary! And yet that is just the moment for the exercise of self-restraint. At other times there is no trial of it and no need for it. It is easy to be calm, and sweet, and gentle, when there is nothing to provoke. Tempers are only known when brought into contact with some antagonistic element: as certain chemical substances when apart remain still, cool, and motionless; but when brought together, discover the heat and fume and noise of violent effervescence.

* Comp. Proverbs 14:29.

Christian brethren, let us look to our great pattern: "When he was reviled, he reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not." Yet never surely was there such true dignity of character-the sublimity of composure, the majesty of meekness! The verse before us states a fact:-"A soft answer turneth away wrath." In some instances, indeed, a soft answer is the surest way to irritate,-to stir up wrath even to the highest pitch. There are persons of so peculiar a temper, that they will be provoked by our very calmness,-roused to perfect fury, because they cannot get us into a passion like themselves. The failure of their attempts to provoke us increases

their own rage, and the very contrast between our self-command and their want of it, adds to the madness. Generally, however, the effect will be as here represented. And even in the cases referred to of apparent exception, the exception, after all, relates only to the period of excitement,-the moments of actual irritation. On subsequent reflection, the remembrance of the "soft answer;" of the manner in which their passion was met, of the contrast between their own undue heat and our coolness, will produce the relentings of shame, and lead to acknowledgment of error. The sentiment is-and it holds to reason as well as accords with fact-that meekness will allay the fury of the flames of passion. By pouring on oil we may calm the wave, which we should lash and rebuke in vain.

I might illustrate the proverb by Scripture instances. Look at the effect of the quiet and dignified reply of Gideon to the exasperated "men of Ephraim" by which "their anger toward him was abated." Look again at the case of Abigail and David-the calm prudence of the former turning away the wrath which had been excited by the surly and ungrateful churlishness of the besotted Nabal, and which had armed David and his men for vengeance. And as an exemplification of the effects of an opposite style of answer, you may be reminded of the contention between the men of Israel and the men of Judah, at the time of David’s restoration after the death of Absalom, when the fierce words of the latter drove off the former under the rebellious standard of Sheba the son of Bichri; and of the case of Rehoboam, who by refusing the counsel to give "a soft answer" to the people who came petitioning for a mitigation of their burdens, and adopting one harsh and repulsive, deprived the house of David of the subjection of the ten tribes, which attached themselves to "Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin."

Verse Proverbs 15:2. "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness."

Similar sentiments have come repeatedly before us;* but though similar, not the same. "Knowledge" is the possession of information, and we have here the correct idea of wisdom; which, practically considered, is the right use of knowledge, and, in regard to character, the ability so to use it. The wise man makes a right use of knowledge in the mode of communicating it--"the tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright"-as regards times, persons, places, company, and the spirit in which it is used: and in proportion to the degree of knowledge, both wisdom and principle become desirable, to enable and to dispose its possessors to use and to improve it.-" But the mouth of fools pours out foolishness." Their words are uttered without discrimination while the character of the words corresponds with the character of their minds. If we take wisdom and folly in their higher sense, as meaning religious principle on the one hand, and the want of it on the other,-then "using knowledge aright," will be using it for the glory of God and the best interests of men; and "the pouring out of foolishness," the presumptuous utterance of what is worse than light, and frothy, and unprofitable,-even the sentiments and words of irreligion and profanity.

* See Proverbs 12:23; Proverbs 13:16; Proverbs 14:33.

Verse Proverbs 15:3. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

I need hardly say that all such language is figurative. "God Is A Spirit." The ascription to Him of corporeal organs must be understood in harmony with this declaration. By "the eyes" of Jehovah, we are to understand His capacity of discernment. By us, the manner of that discernment is

altogether incomprehensible. From this, indeed, arises the necessity for the use of such figures. Were language used directly expressing the functions and operations of spirit simply as such, we should be utterly incapable of understanding it. How God, the eternal Mind, is present every moment in every place, in the exercise of all His infinite perfections, is a matter which involves mysteries far beyond our powers of comprehension,-far deeper than the short line of our intellect is sufficient to fathom. The attempt to understand them will ever force from us the devout exclamation-"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it!"

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place," expresses the unceasing inspection, on the part of the divine Being, of all creatures in the universe at the same moment; there being no person or object; nothing whatever that exists-alive or dead-spirit or matter-intelligent or unintelligent-active or inert-that is ever, even for a single instant, from under His gaze.

Without expatiating on the attribute of omniscience generally, I would confine myself to the light in which it is. here brought before us,-the light most immediately and practically useful to us-the divine acquaintance with the ways of men. This is indispensable to God’s either governing or judging the world. His administration could not go on without it. There would be immediate and inextricable confusion. Equally essential is it to enlightened and impartial judgment. God must know that He may judge. He must know all that he may judge all; and He cannot know all otherwise than by a constant, universal, unintermitting supervision, and the most perfectly intimate acquaintance with the minds and hearts, as well as the words and actions of men.* * Comp. Jeremiah 32:19 and Hebrews 4:13. The knowledge of God, arising from His universal presence and inspection, extends, we are here reminded, to both "the evil and the good." Nor is the difference between the two ever overlooked by Him. It may at times appear as if it were. He does not always mark it in the distribution of temporal blessings, or crosses and trials. But "the evil" are not at all the more the objects of His favour that at times they prosper; nor are "the good" the less so that at times they suffer. His eyes still look with favour upon the one, and with displeasure upon the other. On the one He smiles, when to their unbelieving minds He may seem to frown; on the other He frowns, when to their self-flattering but deluded fancy He may seem to smile. The days of darkness through which the one are called to pass shall all terminate in the light of that "blessed day that knows no morrow;" while the light of the other’s temporary prosperity shall end in "the blackness of darkness for ever."* * Psalms 11:4-7.

What a solemn thought, then, to "the evil,"-to them who are living "without God"-that from Him nothing can be concealed! When successfully hiding their misdeeds from the view of men, they forget this. How often realized is the description of Job-" The murderer rising with the light killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me: and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death!" Ah! sad and fatal mistake!-" No eye shall see me!" There is an eye that seeth him;-an eye that is of incomparably greater consequence to him, did he but think of it, than the collective eyes of a peopled universe. Yes; and there is one morning coming, that shall be infinitely more alarming to him than any that ever dawned upon him in the prosecution of his wicked courses here:-a morning when he shall indeed be "in the terrors of the shadow of death;"-that eventful morning when the trump of God shall sound the summons to His bar; "when all that are in their graves shall

hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation;" when "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." The truth stated in this verse is, at the same time, a source of joy unspeakable to the "good"-to the people of God. Is it not, Christian friends, a delightful thought, that the ever-watchful eye of your heavenly Father is over all your concerns?-that His gracious and all-wise providence superintends unceasingly everything relating to your present and your future well-being? In the strong terms used by your divine Lord and Master,-the strongest in the Bible, to express the minute particularity of the divine regard to his people's interests,-" The very hairs of your head are all numbered." God's eyes, when on His children, are the eyes of faithful love and vigilant care; not the eyes of keen scrutiny, in order to detect guilt, but the eyes of tender kindness, in order to afford supply in need, guidance in perplexity, and protection in danger. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry." Is not this a comfort? You feel sympathy with the crying and tears of a strayed child, and with the joy of that child when it comes again under the parental eye. But no child of God can ever, in reality, be from under His eye, whatever the unbelieving doubts and suspicions of that child may tempt him to fear. When a child of God wanders, it is not from God's ceasing to see him, but from his, for a time, ceasing to see God. It is our duty to maintain a firm faith in the constant superintendence of our heavenly Father, and to "delight ourselves in God."-Yet while there is reason for rejoicing, there is reason, at the same time, for solemn awe. O, the thought, of having God's eye unceasingly upon us-the eye of Him who is the "high and lofty one, that inhabiteth eternity," who is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon sin,"-who "is fight, and in whom is no darkness at all!"

Verse Proverbs 15:4. "The wholesome tongue," or literally, as on the margin-the healing of the tongue, "is a tree of fife: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit."-The verse may be compared with the second. The tongue which "useth knowledge aright" has a morally and spiritually healing influence. It imparts instruction to the ignorant. It speaks peace to the troubled conscience. It soothes the anguish of the afflicted. It subdues the swellings of passion. It allays the self-inflicted tortures of envy. It heals divisions and animosities,-conciliating to each other the discordant and alienated, and converting enemies into Mends. These and other blessed fruits of "the wholesome tongue "-the "tongue of health "-entitle it to the designation, "a tree of life;"-productive as it is of genuine, varied, valuable joys to all within the reach of its influence. And when the tongue makes known God's "saving health,"-the salvation revealed by Him in the gospel,-it then gives "life" in the highest and most important of all senses; bringing the outcast and undone sinner to "eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God!"

"But perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit!' Its being, or producing, "a breach in the spirit"-may be variously understood. It disturbs and irritates the spirit. It destroys tranquillity and peace of mind. It brings guilt upon the conscience, and distress in various ways upon the heart. The continued unkindness and bitterness of the tongue may so wear out the ever pained and pining heart as to sink it at length prematurely to the grave, especially when, from the nearness and tenderness of any relation, there ought to be in the tongue "the law of kindness"-a sanatory, cheering, soothing, healthful influence.

Verse Proverbs 15:5. "A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent."* * Comp. Proverbs 1:23; Proverbs 6:20, with Proverbs 6:23; Proverbs 10:1; Proverbs

13:1; Proverbs 13:18.

O how signal the folly, how flagrant the imprudence-apart from all consideration of its wickedness and guilt-of "despising the instruction" and scorning the counsel, whether of a father or a friend, that would lead to the attainment of eternal happiness, for the sake of a good infinitely inferior, and that lasts but for a moment!" Eternity for bubbles "-the light, empty, airy, glittering bubbles that are blown by the breath of this world’s vanity-" proves at last a senseless bargain."

Verse Proverbs 15:6. "In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble."* * Comp. Proverbs 13:22-23; Proverbs 14:11. The "treasure in the house of the righteous," as here contrasted with the "revenues of the wicked," may be understood, not of mere wealth, but of whatever is possessed with contentment and cheerfulness,-with gratitude to God-with confidence in His wisdom, faithfulness, and love,-with an assurance of His fatherly regard,-with the peace that passeth all understanding,-with resignation of spirit to the divine will.-with the present enjoyment of spiritual blessings, and the well-founded "hope of glory, and honour, and immortality." Even the good things of time, how moderate soever in their amount, when enjoyed thus, become "treasures" indeed of inestimable preciousness; realizing the saying of the psalmist, "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked."

It is added accordingly-"But in the revenues of the wicked there is trouble." These revenues we may suppose to be acquired wickedly, and enjoyed wickedly. But whatever the means of their acquisition, and although in the manner of their enjoyment and use there may be no direct injury to men,-yet if possessed and expended without the fear of God, and if the means themselves of banishing that fear, and preventing the choice of a better portion, it may truly be affirmed that in them "there is trouble." How often do they engender fears and jealousies, anxieties and apprehensions, that drive sleep from the eyes, and slumber from the eyelids! How often do they inspire and nurture pride and passion, impatience of spirit, selfishness, and temptation to thoughtless and sinful indulgence,-such indulgence producing even at the time, and especially in the end, remorse of conscience and the fearful looking-for of judgment! How often do they thus, without imparting real happiness while they last, aggravate condemnation at the close! How often, too, do they render their possessor the object of envy, and of malicious detraction and slander, by which he is wronged even beyond what, on the part of fellow-men, he deserves,-how deep soever his guilt before Heaven! When "the revenues of the wicked" have such effects upon their possessor, tempting him to live and die without God-inserting stings in his conscience, and awakening forebodings in his heart-well may the saying of Samuel Johnson to the celebrated Garrick be applied to them-" These are the things that make a deathbed terrible." It is terrible to leave them, for to the wicked worldling it is leaving his all; and it is more terrible still to enter on the dread unknown-on a world for which no provision has been made, and over the entrance hang "shadows, clouds, and darkness." When he dieth he can "carry nothing away;" and he has nothing in hope beyond-no "bright reversion in the skies," to compensate for the loss of all he is obliged to leave! His glory descends not after him. He has "trouble" with his revenues; trouble in leaving them; and trouble for ever in the fatal consequences of their seductive influence over him.

38-Pro_15:7-12

Proverbs 15:7-12 LECTURE XXXVIII.

Proverbs 15:7-12.

"The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness. Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die. Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men? A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise." Of "knowledge," as of wealth, the true value depends upon its use. Laid up, under lock and key, in the coffers of the miser, the largest amount of riches, in bags of rusting gold and silver, serves no good end. Its owner may please him, self with the thought of having it, and of being known to have it. He may take delight in opening his chests and gloating his eyes, from time to time, on his accumulating heaps; but how mean and pitiful such a gratification even to a reasonable, and how much more to a morally responsible being!-Yet, in a similar way a man may plume himself on the extent and variety of his "knowledge." He may feed his vanity in enumerating to himself its subjects and the amount of it on each. And the gratification arising from the possession of it-apart from the thoughts of vanity-may be of a far higher and more rational kind than that of the former; but if its possessor keeps it all hidden in the depths of his own mind,-shut up in the coffers of his memory, uncommunicated, unapplied to any useful purpose,-he bears the character of an intellectual miser.

"The lips of the wise disperse knowledge." The lesson was finely exemplified by Solomon himself-"Moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth," Ecclesiastes 12:9-10. Solomon’s wisdom, we know, related to science, as well as to what are more properly called "the things of God." We need not doubt that he "taught the people knowledge" in various departments; but from the special mention here made of his proverbs, we are warranted in considering his teaching as having special reference to the truths most essential for their present and eternal well-being. Thus too it was with all the prophets and apostles. The treasure was put into these "earthen vessels," not to be kept there, as a personal and private deposit, but as one to be imparted-to be extensively diffused among mankind. "Their lips dispersed knowledge." And it is the incumbent duty of all whom God has made "wise unto salvation," with all zeal for God and compassion for fellow-creatures, to communicate the knowledge which may make others thus spiritually, substantially, eternally wise. The antithesis in the verse-"but the heart of the foolish doth not so"-where we should naturally have expected the lips or the mouth-corresponds with that in the 20th verse of the tenth chapter (Proverbs 10:20), and the principle of explanation is the same. The knowledge dispersed by the lips of the wise, comes forth from "the treasures" that are in "the heart." But in the heart of "the foolish" the "knowledge" is not to be found:-and that which is not in

the heart, cannot of course be "dispersed by the lips." If his lips disperse any thing, it must be folly.

Verses Proverbs 15:8-9. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness."

Between these two verses there is a very close and important connexion. The latter of the two may be considered as containing the reason of the former. It is said of Jehovah-"Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity," Psalms 5:4-5. It is not their persons God hates; for He swears by himself-"I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." He hates their doings; hates their evil courses. These, as the second of the two verses states, are "an abomination" to Him, and so, therefore, are their religious services. Their persons are not accepted; and while they themselves are rejected, their offerings cannot be graciously received. This, brethren, is the true order of things. The sinner himself, believing the glad tidings of the gospel, is first "accepted in the Beloved;" and then, his person being accepted, and, on Christ's account, in favour with God, his services are accepted also on the same ground. Intimations such as this, it has been said, might indicate to the then existing generation the approach of another economy, more pure and spiritual than the introductory and comparatively carnal one under which they lived. But this idea of the difference between the two dispensations has, at times, been pushed to an untenable and mischievous extreme. Why should such intimations be considered as only indicating a spiritual dispensation to come? Why not as indicating, or rather directly and pointedly expressing the necessity of spiritual worship-of heart-religion even then? I apprehend there never was a period, never a dispensation, when this was not required; or when any thing short of this was acceptable. What is the reason assigned by the Saviour himself for the necessity of spiritual worship?-"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," John 4:23-24. The first of these two verses must not be understood as meaning that before that time the Father did not "seek such to worship him." Against any such interpretation we might plead the verse immediately before it-"Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews." That the Jews, as distinguished by their special revelation, "knew whom they worshipped," can mean nothing less than that Jehovah had been revealed to them in the character in which Jesus speaks of him, namely as a Spirit-in the essential spirituality of His nature. God was always a Spirit. The same reason, therefore, always existed for the necessity of spiritual worship. He was always the Searcher of hearts; and always required, and could not but require, the devotion of the heart. Bodily service-the religion of posture-the religion of the lips-the religion of mere outward act, irrespective altogether of the character or the state of the heart, never could be well-pleasing in His sight. The Psalmist surely understood this, when he said-"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The service presented by one man and by another may be, in all that meets the view of fellow-creatures, undistinguishable. But if, in the all-perfect knowledge of God, the characters of the parties are different, the services will be regarded accordingly-the one accepted, the other refused. It is the wickedness of the wicked that renders the "sacrifice of the wicked an abomination." The bullock or the lamb might be the same. The rites observed in the offering of it might be the same; and all might be attended to with the same rigidly scrupulous exactness. Yet in

the one case, it might be a sweet savour unto the Lord, and in the other "a trouble unto him which he was weary to bear." That such was the case then as well as now, we are not left to infer from such premises as those given us by our Lord in the passage referred to. It is plainly and explicitly declared.*1 And the sentiment suggested by the connexion between the two verses before us, is no other than that which is stated with greater expansion in the divine expostulation with Israel in the opening chapter of Isaiah's prophecy,*2 where in striking language the connexion between approved character and accept able worship is expressed with the utmost plainness, and with divine force. And the same is the sentiment, uttered, if possible, with even greater emphasis, in the language-"He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol."*3 I am aware that these expressions have been interpreted as meaning, that under the future dispensation all the existing and prescribed offerings would be abolished, and that it would be as much a sin to offer them as it was then a sin to withhold them. But I can see no sound reason for not interpreting the language as relating to the time then being. The connexion of the third and fourth verses brings out the same sentiment with that before us, that "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." Why was the slaying of an ox in sacrifice as unacceptable to Jehovah as the murder of a man?-the offering of a lamb as the slaughter of an unclean dog?-the presenting a prescribed oblation as a libation of swine's blood?-the burning of the sweet incense, compounded according to divine prescription, as the blessing of an idol? The reason follows:-" Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations." Thus the different passages speak the same language. They remind Israel, not merely of a coming time when worship of a more purely spiritual character should be required by Jehovah from His people, but of the then existing obligation to give Him the homage of a devoted heart, and of a life of obedience in harmony with nominal and ceremonial distinction,-and of the aversion of Jehovah, the heart-searching God, to worship of a different description,-to worship "coming out of feigned lips," or unaccredited by a consistent life-that God has always looked, and could not but look to the principle within, and never would regard otherwise than with loathing "the sacrifice of the wicked." I state these things strongly, because I am persuaded that very false conceptions prevail about the difference, in this and in some other respects, between both the worship and the morality of the old and the new dispensations.

*1 See Deuteronomy 10:12-16. rr *2 Isaiah 1:10-18.

*3 See Isaiah 66:3.

Let us remember that the sentiment before us is applicable now, in its full force, to all merely external acts and forms of worship. They can never be pleasing to the Lord. How should they? The principle of His dissatisfaction with them we feel in ourselves. If any of us were to receive a present, accompanied with many verbal professions of attachment, and we were afterwards to discover that the person from whom it came had been acting a part utterly at variance with all his professions, indicative of a heart that hated instead of loving us, and that the present with its accompaniments, was sent with no other view than to answer some selfish end of his own,-would not that which had at first gratified us be instantly loathed and cast away? Thus it is with God. No oblations, no acts of worship, no alms, can be acceptable in His sight, when He knows them to come from one whose heart, instead of being "right with Him," is in a state of alienation and enmity,-in hostility to His authority and grace. They are either offered without principle or

consideration at all; or for the purpose of covering sin, or of compensating for past transgressions, or of obtaining indulgence to conscience for the future-as a kind of bribe to the supreme Judge. They can be regarded by Him in no other light than as an awful insult to His holiness and justice and truth! Are ungodly men, then, some may be ready to ask, to be forbidden to pray?-Forbidden to pray! Who and where is the man that will be presumptuous enough to lay such an interdict? Forbidden to pray! The very thought is shocking. Who will come with such a prohibition between even the chief of sinners-the veriest wretch on earth-and his God? Prayer, if the duty of one, is the duty of all. Abstinence from prayer is positive sin. At the same time, it ought to be equally plain, that every duty presupposes, in the injunction of it, whatever is necessary to its right and acceptable performance. If the act of prayer cannot be acceptable without the spirit of prayer, then, when we affirm it every man's duty to pray, we affirm it every man's duty to have the spirit of prayer. If, in order to acceptable prayer on the part of a sinner, it behooves to be presented in the name of a Mediator, and in the exercise of faith in that name,-then, when we call upon a sinner to pray, meaning, as we must, that he should pray acceptably, we call upon him to exercise that faith which is necessary to acceptable prayer. This is clear. In calling a man to the discharge of any duty, we call him, of course, to whatever is included in the right discharge of that duty; and among other things, to the motive or principle from which the lawgiver requires it to be done. When an ungodly man prays, it is not the act of prayer that constitutes the sin; it is the want of a praying heart. The sin is in him, not in his prayer. The prayer in itself may be very good; but, as coming from him, it may be worse than worthless.

We might apply the same principle more generally, extending it to all duties whatever. They ought all, without exception, to be done from the principle of love to God-the elementary and pervading principle of the whole law. An ungodly man is rightly called upon to the fulfilment of the personal and the relative duties which the divine law inculcates. But it is, at the same time, right and necessary to remind him, that, so long as his heart continues in a state of enmity against God, there is not one of them that can be fulfilled acceptably to Him. The principle of all acceptable obedience is wanting. It is in some such sense as this that it is said-" The ploughing of the wicked is sin." And it is one of the most affecting circumstances in their condition, that there is nothing they can do that has the approval and acceptance of God! Are they therefore to be forbidden to perform these duties? No, assuredly. But they are to be faithfully reminded that the right discharge of them involves and requires the exercise of the right principle; and to be urged by this, and every other consideration fitted to excite a salutary alarm, to turn unto God. Such is the use *-e would make of the sentiment before us. Is it not an affecting thought to you, fellow-sinners, that while you continue impenitent and unbelieving, all your duties together-those even on the strict performance of which you may be most pluming yourselves-your very prayers-are "an abomination" to God! He invites you to come to Him, but not to come continuing in your evil ways. That is not coming to God; for coming to God is forsaking evil. To come to God, and to cleave to sin, is a contradiction in terms. The sinner who comes to God comes in prayer; and the sinner who comes in prayer must come in faith and in the renunciation of self and sin, to serve God thenceforward "in newness of life," with "his body and with his spirit which are God's."

Verse Proverbs 15:10. "Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die." The word rendered correction is, on the margin, translated instruction; but the principle and spirit of the statement remain the same. Retaining the former translation there are

two interpretations given of it.

1. The word "is" being supplementary, the rendering may be-"Severe correction to him that forsaketh the way;" that is, shall be to him that forsaketh the way. This again is capable of two meanings. It may either, on the principle of parallelism, be understood as of similar import with the second clause of the verse, and explained of the punishment of the impenitently wicked: or it may be understood in reference to present suffering or chastisement, as a means of bringing back from error to a right course. Then the second clause will mean, that if any who has appeared, walking in the right way, and has, through temptation, gone astray from it, shall, notwithstanding correction, persist in hating reproof and spurning the admonitions of Heaven, he shall die, and his blood shall be upon his own head. God has said-"The just shall live by faith;" but "if he draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

2. Understanding the word "grievous" in a sense quite familiar to our ear, the verse has been rendered-" Correction is irksome to him that forsaketh the way." The child that loves instruction, and is really attached to the ways of God, may err, and need correction. But to such a child it will not be irksome or "grievous." It will melt, and shame, and humble, and restore him. But if a child has submitted to instruction and to the ways of virtue by constraint rather than from principle and with a willing mind,-when for a time he has "run well," but has tired of the right course, and wilfully forsaken it, for ways of his own, more congenial with the real likings of his heart,-to that child correction will be irksome; it will fret and provoke, instead of reclaiming him; will render him sullen, stubborn, and passionate, instead of bringing him in tears of penitence and submission to the feet of the parent whose counsel he has for the time been disregarding. It will have such effects, just in proportion as conscience tells him he is in the wrong, while yet his heart continues to hate the right;--his inclinations resisting conscience, and cleaving to sin and the world. And what has place in the family of a pious earthly parent has place among the professed children of God. In the heart of a true spiritual child, the heavy but kind corrective visitations of his heavenly Father will produce contrition, and all the meltings of penitential sorrow; and they will lay him prostrate before the footstool of the divine throne, with the humble prayer-" Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit," Psalms 51:9-12. But in him whose "heart departeth from the Lord," having never in the fulness of sincerity and truth, been given to Him, the effect will be very different. They will irritate and gall his spirit; drawing out the evil that is in the heart more and more, and occasioning the further and further spurning of the divine yoke,-the yoke of God’s authority. The consequence of any one’s "hating reproof"-and spurning the correction that is designed and fitted for his restoration, is death:-"he shall die." He shall suffer his due punishment, in that "second death" which is "the wages of sin."* * See Proverbs 1:30-31; Proverbs 10:17. In connexion with such truths as we have been considering from these verses, it is of importance for us ever to remember, that there is no imposing upon God by outward professions and appearances. Such is the lesson of the eleventh verse:-" Hell and destruction are before the Lord; how much more then the hearts of the children of men?"

Sheol, the word here rendered "hell," may sometimes, as well as its corresponding term Hades in Greek, signify the place of woe. Its general signification, however, is the unseen world-the state of the dead. The secrets of that invisible state, and especially of the prison-house of despair itself,

are all "before the Lord," though hidden from the eye of man. The original word for "destruction" here is Abaddon. The’ designation is given to the wicked one, as the destroyer.* "The verse may denote," says Mr. Scott, "that the deepest machinations of the prince of hell. and of all his legions of fallen angels, are open to the Lord’s inspection, and must end in their disappointment and deeper torment:-how, then, can man, who is so inferior in sagacity and subtlety, expect to hide his counsels from God, or to prosper in rebellion against him?"

* See Revelation 9:11.

Verse Proverbs 15:12. "A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him; neither will he go unto the wise." The "scorner," the despiser of God and divine things, cannot bear reproof; winces, with rising resentment, at every thing that touches and wakes his conscience; dislikes his faithful monitor-receiving him with sullen coldness, with disdainful smile, or with abusive contumely,-spurning his salutary advice, and possibly traducing and calumniating his character. He "will not go to the wise"-the truly wise who "fear God"-either through proud contempt, or the consciousness of being wrong, and inability to bear having the wrong exposed and condemned.* Alas! that this principle should be in our fallen nature so strong and inveterate!

* Comp. 2 Chronicles 18:7; Isaiah 30:8-11; Amos 5:10; John 3:13; John 7:7.

Careless sinners, your aversion to the word of God, which you secretly feel to be living, powerful, penetrating; your dislike of sermons that are too searching, that come too close to the conscience, that lay open the secrets of the heart, that press upon you the spirituality and damnatory character of the divine law; and your disposition to pick faults, wherever you can find them, in the characters of the godly, because you are sensible that their example condemns you-are all traceable to this principle. O beware of it. It will ruin you. It will be death to you in the end. Listen to conscience. Listen to God. He speaks to you here-in the Bible. You may try to throw it aside, and to parry for the time its piercing thrusts. But in your conscience you know and feel that it is divine. O comply with its invitations, that you may escape the execution of its fearful threatenings. "BELIEVE AND LIVE."

39-Pro_15:13-20

Proverbs 15:13-20

LECTURE XXXIX.

Proverbs 15:13-20

"A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness. All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast. Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where lore is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith. A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife. The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain. A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother." The countenance is the natural index of the mind. Each passion and emotion has its appropriate expression there. It can never be natural for a man to smile when angry, or to weep and frown when happy. The tear is appropriated to sorrow; the frown to anger; the smile to satisfaction and pleasure. He is the most accomplished hypocrite, who has most successfully learned the art of substituting the one for the other, and so disguising the real state of his feelings: the most unenviable of all accomplishments.

Yet true it is, that "a cheerful countenance" is not always (and that in other cases than criminal dissimulation) the indication of a "merry heart "-a really happy spirit; for, as we have seen, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness."

"A merry heart," in this verse does not mean the false, boisterous, temporary merriment, so frequently alluded to in Scripture, arising from worldly company, intemperance, and dissipation. Neither is it mere light-heartedness-mere thoughtless vacant good humour. It is something far higher and better than either. It is the inward peace and joy imparted by the light of true religion in the soul-the happiness expressed by Solomon in similar terms elsewhere, " Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works," Ecclesiastes 9:7. Such was the happiness so delightfully exemplified in the primitive church-when they "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." And what imparted this personal and social cheerfulness then is sufficient to impart it now and to the end. True religion, as we have already said, but cannot say too often, is the only spring of substantial and satisfactory joy. It is fitted to give it; it is designed to give it. It is light-sun-light, gladdening every heart into which it finds admission. And this joy, this inward cheerfulness, this "sunshine of the soul," ought to appear. It should be manifest in the religious man’s looks and behaviour. It should smile on his lip, and beam in his eye. It should characterize his whole conversation and course of life. It ought to be so, for the credit of religion. That professor gives not a fair and faithful representation of it, who wraps his profession in the mantle of melancholy.-It should be the aim of every believer of God’s truth to show that the faith of it has

made him happy:-not inspiring a mirth that is either frivolous or boisterous; that expresses itself in the song of the intemperate, the sportive gaiety of the vain, or the "laughter of the fool;" but shedding over the soul the light of heaven, a light which "makes the face to shine" and throws the radiance of joy on even the darkest steps of the Christian's path through life. By "sorrow of heart," in the latter part of the verse, I would not understand mere grief on account of the bereavements, disappointments, and various trials of life,-to which the truly godly as well as others are subject. No doubt the tendency of these, especially when long continued and accumulated, is to "break the spirit"-to unnerve it, to deprive it of its tone and vigour, and to unfit for active exertion. Still, it is the excellence and recommendation of true religion, that it gives light even in darkness; that the joy which it imparts remains even in sorrow, and cheers the spirit when otherwise it would sink and break. "The sorrow of heart" here spoken of, we may consider as that which arises from an evil conscience, from envy, discontent, and other similar sources. Or, if the distresses of life are to be considered as among the causes of the sorrow that "breaks the spirit," we must regard the language as spoken of those who have the sorrow without the sustaining and cheering consolation.-And in this we may be countenanced by the terms of the fifteenth verse, which, for the sake of connexion of subject and sentiment, we take in here:-" All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast." "The afflicted" are evidently the afflicted in situation, without the cheerful spirit or "merry heart" to support them. To such the days are indeed "evil." They pass away very drearily. There is no relief; no light in the gloom; nothing to counteract or counterbalance the woe. "But he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast." The spirit of cheerful piety bestows a feast richer and better than royal dainties. These will not procure true happiness. There may be perfect wretchedness at the best-furnished table. The "rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day," may be-too often has been-discontented, envious, anxious, gloomy, melancholy; his feasts not enjoyed; his wines, and his delicate and costly viands not relished. Even in poverty, with all its attendant ills, a spirit such as that we have before described will be "a continual feast." A crust of bread and a mouthful of water, with a contented and cheerful heart-especially a heart sustained and gladdened by the "joys of God's salvation,"-a heart in which the fountains of peace and delight have been opened by the Spirit of God--will be partaken with incomparably more enjoyment than all the luxuries that wealth can procure.-"All the days of the afflicted are evil;" for affliction is not in itself "joyous but grievous." But the feast of him who is of "a merry heart,"-who has within himself the sources of true joy, is not terminated, is not even suspended in the season of affliction. His feast is independent of changing condition. He often relishes it most, when other sweets are embittered. Often is his inward spiritual festivity the richest, when the supply of his outward and earthly comforts is scantiest. Yes; and to those who enjoy this "continual feast" on earth, it is but the prelude and the foretaste of the everlasting feast of heaven.

We may fairly consider the next verse as indicating the nature of the feast-the mental, the spiritual feast-of which the verses we have been expounding affirm the excellence: "The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge; but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness." It is the feast of "knowledge "-above all. of divine knowledge. He who has "understanding"-who is enlightened of God, and discerns the excellence and glory of divine truth-" seeketh" such knowledge. From experience of the enjoyment already imparted by it, he seeks more, and still more-the appetite growing by gratification, delighted with every new discovery, yet never tiring of the old.*-And that in "seeking knowledge" the idea of "feasting" on it is included, is evident from the

terms of the antithesis:-" but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness." That is what they like; that is, therefore, what they seek, and from which they have their own poor and pitiful enjoyment. What feasts the very soul of the wise and good, to him is tasteless and even nauseous.-In regard to religion itself, they "feed on foolishness." They are taken with everything, how absurd soever it may be, that serves the present purpose of keeping all quiet within; that lets conscience alone; that dispenses with serious thought, and, preventing inward disturbance, allows them to go on easily and comfortably in "the sight of their eyes and the imagination of their hearts."

* 1 Peter 2:1-3.

They have a relish for all doctrines of this easy un-annoying description,-that "prick not their hearts"-that embitter not present sweets by any forebodings of the future-that "prophesy smooth things, and cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before them "-the scarer of their thoughtless mirth and sinful gratification. They have an appetite for everything of that kind, and cry up to the skies the preachers who dispense it. But it is indeed "feeding on foolishness;" and the folly shall be manifest at last, when that on which they have fed "shall be turned to the gall of asps within them." The idea of a feast is evidently in Solomon’s mind through the whole passage:-and that, in the fifteenth verse, he designs a contrast between the godly and contented poor man enduring the afflictions of a state of privation and want, and the ungodly and discontented rich man, in the enjoyment of all the world’s fulness, is the more probable from what follows:-" Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure arid trouble therewith." Here we have the source and character of the mirth intended. It is, as we have been assuming, the happy serenity and cheerfulness springing from true religion-from "the fear of the Lord." And this too is the "understanding" meant in the fourteenth verse (Proverbs 15:14), as this fear is "the beginning of wisdom."

"Trouble," in the latter part of the sixteenth verse (Proverbs 15:16), may be understood in various senses, either of which yields a meaning to the verse in harmony with truth.-It may signify bodily affliction: in which case, the explanation of the verse will be, that poverty with health and cheerfulness is better than wealth with such corporeal trouble as incapacitates for its enjoyment.-It may signify trouble of mind and conscience: and then the sentiment will be, that poverty with peace of mind is far preferable to riches with the disquietude of conscious guilt and self-dissatisfaction;-poverty with a good conscience better than wealth with an accusing and evil conscience;-poverty with a conscience pacified by the blood of sprinkling, better than abundance with a conscience to which that peace-speaking blood has never been applied.-Or it may signify, the trouble of domestic discord and broils: and then the lesson will be that poverty with domestic union and peace, springing from and hallowed by the influence of true religion, is incomparably superior to riches the most profuse connected with the absence of such love and harmony,-with alienation, hostility, and strife. What a wretched compensation are "thousands of gold and silver" for the want of affection and peace-the absence of what the poet calls "that only happiness which has survived the fall"-domestic happiness! This last view of the sixteenth verse (Proverbs 15:16) is specified in that which follows:-"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." Some, indeed, would explain this verse in reference to the entertainer and his company-the "master of the feast and his guests,"-and to the company and guests among themselves;-making the meaning (and it is a true one) to be, that slender cheer, with a cordial welcome, is sweeter far than the costliest profusion with a manifest grudge, or with sentiments of

mutual distrust and strife among those who partake of it. But the sentiment is applicable, with a special force of emphasis, to domestic life. In proportion to the delightful sweetness of the concord in which the fond affections of nature and grace bind the members of a family in one happy social circle-all being of one heart and one soul-dividing the cares, and more than doubling the enjoyments of life by mutual participation and sympathy,-all bosoms throbbing with a common pulsation,-all lips wearing a common smile,-and all eyes filled from a common fountain of tears-in proportion to the delightful sweetness of such a scene, is the wretchedness of its reverse:-and there is no one who has experienced either the sweetness or the wretchedness-especially the former-that will not subscribe to the sentiment so simply yet in effect so strongly expressed in the verse before us.

There is much in the Bible that bears most kindly on the condition of the poor. Throughout it, the Lord is ever expressing towards them His special sympathy and care. Is not this the case here? Are not the sentiments of these verses deserving of their special attention and interest? If you have not the wealth of this world, but are doomed to toil and to comparative penury-think of what is here so truthfully affirmed. If you have in you the fear of the Lord; if you have a sense of His love, and the assurance that that love orders every particular in your lot; if you have the contented and happy spirit which the conviction of this is fitted to inspire; and if to you the domestic scene is one of affectionate and delightful harmony, all hallowed and blessed by the same holy and heavenly principle of "pure religion and undefiled "-O why should you be "envious at the foolish, when you see the prosperity of the wicked?" If the abundance of the man of this world is associated with trouble, or with discord, or with hatred-and above all with His displeasure who "hateth all the workers of iniquity"-would you exchange conditions with such? No, my "brethren of low degree, you would not." Never was there a spirit that enjoyed such perfect peace as His who said-" Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." And He says to every one of his followers-"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." That peace may be found in the bosom and at the board of the poorest among you; and, possessing it, you will let the man of earth enjoy his "stalled ox," and sit down in contented cheerfulness to your "dinner of herbs"-your scanty but divinely provided and blessed feast of love. And well were it if the minds of the young were early and deeply imbued with the spirit and sentiment of these verses;-if they had early instilled into them just conceptions of the nature and sources of true happiness, lest they fall into the fatal but sadly prevalent delusion that wealth insures it; and thus make wealth their leading star-their first and unceasing aim!-My young friends, these verses contain truth-divine truth-truth authenticated by the recorded experience of ages-truth that cannot fail, so obvious is it, to come home fully to the convictions of your judgments. It is the same truth as that so forcibly stated and illustrated by "the faithful witness"-the Lord Jesus himself.* And with what self-evidencing simplicity is the sentiment expressed by the apostle, when he says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content," 1 Timothy 6:6-8. They who have "godliness with contentment," "have all and abound." They have a treasure in the heart-a treasure in the house-and a treasure in heaven;-a treasure for time, and a treasure for eternity!

* Luke 12:13-20.

Verse Proverbs 15:18. "A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth wrath."-Some would connect this verse with the preceding; and, according to this supposed connection, the meaning is, that a passionate man is a disturber of the peace and enjoyment! of the quietest and happiest company. It may, however, be understood more generally, as depicting the hasty, hot, resentful spirit, which startles touchily at every word or look; finds meanings in them that have no existence but in a perverted fancy; catches fire in a moment; breathes vengeance; and by high words stirs up the spirits of others, and kindles the flames of discord. In contrast with which is the spirit that is "slow to anger" and appeaseth wrath-the meek and quiet spirit which "is in the sight of God of great price."

Verse Proverbs 15:19. "The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns; but the way of the righteous is made plain." The meaning is sufficiently obvious. "The slothful" fancies, as apologies for lazy inaction, innumerable obstacles and difficulties-anything as a reason for sitting still. And not merely does he anticipate obstacles to beginning, he is ever discovering them as reasons for desisting; finding out that further exertion is vain,-that there is no getting on,-that all is "a hedge of thorns," at once annoying and impracticable,-that the expectation of ever accomplishing his end is quite utopian,-that he must give up at any rate some time or other, and therefore better now, seeing if the thing cannot be satisfactorily carried out, it is wise not to expend more useless toil. And he will argue this with no little plausibility; for "the sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason." On the contrary, "the way of the righteous"-of him whose heart, under the influence of right principles, is set on the right discharge of duty-" is made plain." It is cast up; it is paved. God whom he serves, makes obstacles diminish and disappear before him. Those he feared might prove insuperable, lessen and vanish as he nears them. He is surprised to find how they give way. When obstacles are previously seen, he sets his heart to them; looks at them in all their discouraging magnitude, and looks at the same "time to God-to Him "who giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might increaseth strength;" and in this strength-" the strength of the Lord God," he goes on and perseveres unto the end. Difficulties are thus surmounted. The way becomes increasingly "plain." The "hedge of thorns" is cleared away. "Darkness is made light before him, and crooked things straight." In the whole of your spiritual warfare, brethren, put your trust in God-in the divine "Captain of your salvation." He leads you to victory. Shrink not to follow Him. He will never leave you; let no unworthy and dastardly fears tempt you to leave Him. Let no indolence embrace your loins. Let no difficulties or dangers in the way daunt you. Press after His banner. Through Him you shall do valiantly. Let your encouragement be-" In Jehovah have I righteousness and strength." With His righteousness to justify you, and his strength to protect and save you, you shall be more than conquerors!

Sinners, beware of indolent supineness in "the things that belong unto your peace,"-in the concerns of your soul’s salvation. I call not upon you to be "up and doing," that you may work out that salvation for yourselves. Thai is a work of which the honour belongs to another. The Son of God is the only Saviour. You are not to save yourselves, but to come to Christ for salvation. Defer not this under any false impression of difficulties and intercepting obstacles in your path, frightening you from the attempt. There is no such thing. It is all illusion. If there are obstacles in the path, they must be put there by yourselves; for there are none-no not one-of God’s interposing. He has cleared all away. There is no "hedge of thorns" between you and Christ. On the ground of his finished work-the work that justifies the ungodly-he stands ready to receive you; and God

stands ready to receive you for his sake. Believe what this divine Book testifies of him as divinely true; and, in the spirit of felt necessity, of simplicity, of confidence, of self-renouncing humility, of grateful joy, cast yourselves, without fear or misgiving, on the riches of his grace:-"for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."

40-Pro_15:21-33

Proverbs 15:21-33

LECTURE XL.

Proverbs 15:21-33.

"Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom: but a man of understanding walketh uprightly. Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established. A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth; and a word spoken in due season, how good is it! The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath. The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow. The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord: but the words of the pure are pleasant words. He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live. The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things. The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous. The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart; and a good report maketh the bones fat. The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise. He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility."

"Joy" in "folly!"-in the frivolous and wicked pursuits of a frivolous and wicked world! O the miserable pleasure!-the sorrow-breeding joy! Who seeks such joy is emphatically "destitute of wisdom" The truly wise-" the man of understanding, walketh uprightly;" adheres closely and steadily to the dictates of divine authority, with a single eye,-a "heart right with God." He has no delight in folly; no joy in seeing, or hearing, or doing, or uttering it. He "abhors that which is evil, and cleaves to that which is good." When witnessing folly in others, he feels with the Psalmist-" Pavers of waters run down mine eyes because they keep not thy law."

Verse Proverbs 15:22. "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."* This verse has been rendered, according to its true spirit-"Designs not well weighed shall miscarry; but when many have well deliberated, they shall succeed."

* Comp. Proverbs 11:14. In these words there is still a connexion with folly. Hasty schemes-projects of crude and rash formation, and precipitate execution-bid fair to prove abortive. Such projects and schemes characterise the fool. They are the product of his self-sufficient conceit, and contempt of counsel. The miscarriage of them, anticipated by all but himself, covers him with confusion, and involves himself and others in difficulty and distress. Self-diffidence is always becoming. Even when we must rely on our own judgment, from a calm conviction of our better acquaintance with the principles, and facts, and likelihoods of any case-still it ought to be with humility. The word translated "counsel" is by some rendered secrecy. And, on very many occasions, few things are of more consequence to success;-secrecy of consultation as to the best

means of accomplishing important purposes, and secrecy among those concerned in their actual prosecution. For want of this, how many designs of the utmost moment have been doomed to frustration! But when there is faithful fellowship in consultation and execution, and no one left unconsulted whose knowledge might be turned to good account, and whose advice might preclude one or other of the possibilities of disappointment-this is what, by the blessing of God, is most likely to ensure success. I say by the blessing of God. O let it never be forgotten, that without that all is fruitless-even the union of the soundest judgments, and the best concerted and best adjusted plans. The two words of the late lamented and martyred Williams must never be separated, TRY and TRUST.

Verse Proverbs 15:23. "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth; and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!"

Some would connect this verse with the preceding. He who, among "a multitude of counsellors," suggests a happy thought-a wise, prudent, sure, and safe expedient that had not occurred to the rest-that man "hath joy by the answer of his mouth:" he has the joy of gaining the approbation and thanks of others, and of seeing happy results from his advice being followed.

More generally:-when a wise, prudent, and pious man is enabled to give a salutary advice, in a matter of moment, at a seasonable time, in a manner at once convincing and persuasive, intelligent and winning, so as to conduce to the desired effect,-in preventing the adoption or arresting the prosecution of mischievous measures,-in keeping back or reclaiming from error and sin,-in supporting the distressed,-in supplying the destitute,-in confirming the irresolute,-in turning and strengthening the tempted,-in directing the rash and improvident,-in promoting, in whatever way, the benefit of others-immense good may be effected;-and this, having sprung from his suggestion, will give joy to his heart.* * We have an apt illustration in the case of David and Abigail-1 Samuel 25:32-33.

We are reminded afresh, that "the word spoken" must be not only "good," but "in due season"-when circumstances are such as, instead of hindering the desired effect, will second and help on the advice. To be really "good" indeed, an advice must be good in the time and the manner, as well as in the matter of it. Persons who overlook this, wonder that they should fail;-they can’t understand it. Yet they might. If they would only look within and reflect whether, were the same counsel given to them at such a time, in such a manner, and in such circumstances, it would not equally fail. The remark as to "due season," holds with special force in regard to admonitions to the men of the world bearing on religion-of all subjects the most unpalatable, and respecting which they are most jealous and sensitive. How often do well-meaning but injudicious Christians do mischief, by obtruding their sentiments and their counsels, without in the least considering when or how!

Yet, let us again be warned against covering ourselves from the reprehensions of conscience under the convenient shield of necessary prudence, and thus lose, as alas! we too often do, many an opportunity of which, without the violation of any rule of propriety or delicacy, we might avail ourselves for the good of others. Let us be jealous of ourselves on the side on which we are most in hazard of erring-the side, generally, of undue reserve and dastardly timidity.

The word in the following verse translated "above" may, without any material alteration of its meaning, be rendered upwards: "The way of life is upwards for the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath."

There is a way of life, and a way of death, an upward and a downward way. "The way of life" it is the great purpose of the Bible to reveal. That way has been the same from the hour when "sin entered into the world." Then God made it known. Whatever was required, in vindication of the divine character in human forgiveness and salvation, must have been required from, the first. Whatever was required at "the fulness of time" must have been equally required at the expulsion from paradise. The character of God was at both periods the same. The principles of His government, and the demands of His law were the same. The way of life for sinners, therefore, must have been the same. Though the atonement was not immediately made it was immediately needed, and it was immediately announced and promised. It was quite competent for that God who "knoweth the end from the beginning," to proceed immediately upon the credit of what was afterwards to be done. The words of Jesus-" I am the way" were true not only when he uttered them, but for all past and all future ages. That way, announced in the first promise, and "witnessed by the law and the prophets," was, at the "fulness of time," clearly made known as a way open for sinners, and to remain open to the end. "Righteous Abel" went to heaven by this way, as aged Simeon did, as Stephen did, as every dying believer has since done, and as the last sinner saved from the earth must do. This "way of life"-the way of faith and holiness-is upwards. It leads to heaven-to the celestial world, with all its "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore."

It is "for the wise." The foolish are not found there. They despise the way, and refuse to walk in, or to enter it. They shut their ear. They turn away their foot. They choose counsels of their own. But all who are "wise,"-all who do not, in the spirit of infatuation, "forsake their own mercies," are found in this way. And they are wise; for it is set before them, "that they may depart from hell beneath." Fools take the downward road. It is easily found, and easily kept. It is full of company. It is full of allurements-bewitching, fascinating allurements, whose true nature is concealed under all that is tempting in appearance and promise. It is in accordance, alas! with the inclinations and tendencies of corrupt nature. The "upward" road is to that nature unattractive. It presents obstacles, privations, and hardships. It seems, as in the Pilgrim’s Progress it is designated-" the hill of difficulty." But the truly wise will disregard the hindrances by which the way is ever, on the part of Satan, most artfully beset. He will press into it; he will deny himself; he will "go in the strength of the Lord God." He knows it to be the way of life;-that were there nothing else in it to the end than hardships, toils, and trials, still it leads "upwards"-away from the pit beneath to the paradise above,-from hell to heaven. And he finds, by sweet experience, that in this way there are present compensations, far more than sufficient to counterbalance all with which he is required to part; blessings,-and joys, and hopes, incomparably better than aught the downward way offers to its deluded frequenters. It is "the way of life" even now-the way of present pleasantness, the path of present peace!

Verse Proverbs 15:25. "The Lord will destroy the house of the proud: but he will establish the border of the widow." From the style of the antithesis, between the proud and the widow, we are naturally led to conceive a special allusion to the haughty oppressor of the desolate and unprotected-to the overbearing worldling who insolently abuses his power, in lording it over his poor dependents. Jehovah gives ample warning to all of the interest He takes in the cause of " the widow and the fatherless," and of his deep displeasure against all their oppressors* We may well

tremble to think of promoting our own advantage, in any way, or in any degree, at their expense. Woe to the man who does so! God will see to it. What is so acquired cannot be enjoyed with either a quiet conscience or the smile of heaven. It is an accursed thing. It is the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment, by which the blessing of righteousness and mercy is turned away.

* See Deuteronomy 10:17-18. et loc. al. Psalms 68:5-6; Psalms 146:9; James 1:27.

"The proud," just alluded to, are but one description of the more general character in the next verse-" The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord: but the words of the pure are pleasant words." Or thus, "Hateful to the Lord are the thoughts of the wicked; but pleasant are the words of the pure"-pleasant, that is, to the Lord. It is said, "The Lord is a God of knowledge; by him actions are weighed." But His knowledge goes further than to actions. "The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." Not one thought, sinner, passes through your. mind, though fleetly as the "arrows of light," that escapes His notice. Your most secret imaginings; your most momentary wishes and purposes; ideas never uttered; designs never executed-"all are naked to His view."-That circumstances have prevented the execution of any purpose, does not in the least interfere with or mitigate the criminality of the intention. Of the good that David intended to do, God said, "It was well that it was in thy heart:" and so the evil that is in the heart of the sinner brings upon him guilt, rebuke, and condemnation. "The law is spiritual:"-" Whoso looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart;" and that unchaste thought is "an abomination to the Lord."-" He that hateth his brother in his heart U a murderer;" and that thought of malice and envy, the embryo of murder, is "an abomination to the Lord." The heart may thus be steeped in impurity, and indictable for a brother’s blood, while no overt act has discovered its hidden secrets to men.

"But pleasant are the words of the pure." The pure stand in contrast with the wicked. They have been the acceptable worshippers of Jehovah in every age.* In them the promise of the New Covenant has been fulfilled-Jehovah having "written his laws in their hearts,"-having "taken away the stony heart out of their flesh, and given them a heart of flesh,"-having "given them a new heart and put within them a right spirit." They have "purified their souls in obeying the truth." They have been "washed and sanctified." The "words" of such, evidently supposed to be in harmony with their character-pure words, are "pleasant" to the Lord. The child of God may have little else in his power than holy discourse. Other means of usefulness may not, in providence, have been conferred on him. He may have little wealth, little authority, little influence. The very attempts which, by the only means in his power, he makes at doing good, may fail. But even the attempt is "pleasant," being made with an eye to the divine glory, and a benevolent wish to advance the happiness of fellow-creatures. "What he speaks for God, however humble the manner of it, and however lowly the company amongst whom it is uttered, God approves and records. "A book of remembrance is written before him for them that fear him and think on his name." Their words may not be uttered in the society and in the ears of the great; but if they are pure words, proceeding from a pure heart, they are more acceptable to God than the words of the mighty and the noble coming from hearts not "right with Him." As "the filthy conversation of the wicked" is not the less offensive and hateful to God, because it comes from the lips of high-born nobility, so the conversation of his sanctified children sounds not less pleasing to his ears for the meanness of their birth or the poverty of their condition. See to it, rich and poor alike, that all your words are words of purity. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." "Let no corrupt

communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

* See Psalms 24:4; Psalms 73:1; Matthew 5:8.

Verse Proverbs 15:27. "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live." A man may be "greedy of gain" for two opposite purposes-to hoard or to spend. He who hoards "troubleth his own house." He pinches both himself and them. He allows them to starve in the midst of plenty. He frets at every outlay. He grudges every comfort. Even necessary food and clothing are furnished in the scantiest measure, and of the meanest kind. He is hardly reconciled to the constitution of nature, which makes these requisite. He would fain make out living without them; but since this cannot be, his next best is to find out the minimum-the least on which nature can subsist. A poor, famished, troubled household truly, is the household of him whose great aim is to gripe and to keep!

Then, many a time, the man who, in his "greed of gain," "hastes to be rich," is one who "troubles his own house." He plunges into rash and hazardous speculations-incessantly varying and precipitately executed schemes-anything that holds out a promise, although ever so precarious, of a quick and large return. It is luck or ruin. Hence perpetual apprehension, inordinate anxiety, carking care-care often too well founded, and ending in sudden loss, and wreck of fortune. The "greed of gain" may lead a man to worse still-to the use of questionable, and even of flagrantly dishonest and iniquitous methods of acquiring it: which, when detected, (and how rarely do they escape detection!) bring on him utter disgrace,-disgrace too often unjustly and cruelly attaching to his family; while they must endure the distress-to many sensitive minds amounting to agony-of witnessing his exposure and dishonour. Often, alas! has the man of avarice been the "troubler of his house" by plans and courses of unrighteousness, meanness, falsehood, cruelty, oppression, and even murder! The last clause of the verse implies that in the first there is a special, though not an exclusive, reference to the taking of gifts or bribes; for the antithesis is between him that is "greedy of gain" and him that "hateth gifts."-The receiving of bribes by men in situations of responsible influence, is one of the evils that is often produced by greed of gain. But "he that hateth gifts shall live:" that is, shall enjoy life-shall live in comfort, in domestic harmony, in social happiness, in the secure possession of a good conscience, a good name, and the blessing of God.

Verse Proverbs 15:28. "The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things."

What is before said* of the wise and the foolish is said here of the righteous and the wicked: and what is before said of the utterance of wisdom and folly, is here said of the utterance of good and evil. We have repeatedly seen how Solomon identifies these in his statements. Wickedness is folly; goodness is wisdom. There is, in this verse, a very important feature in the working of right principle. "The heart,"-that is, the mind or inward part generally, not the affections merely, as we are wont to use the word heart, but the judgment also-" the heart of the righteous studieth to answer." He considers what he should say, as well as what he should do; knowing what an amount of evil or of good often depends on words. The fear of God, and the love of his neighbour combine to dictate this.

* Proverbs 15:2 and Proverbs 12:23.

What is, in the latter part of the verse, affirmed of "the wicked"-they "pour out evil things," implies recklessness alike as to the evil of what they say in itself, and the effects, often serious, which it may produce; as if they gloried in the freedom of their tongue to utter what they please; saying, "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?" They even get into the habit of thus "pouring out evil things,"-as in the case of the profane swearer,-and then derive their plea in extenuation, from the very consideration that proves the evil to have attained its greatest height-that they have got so much accustomed to it that they can't help it! And, while they are wounding the sensibilities of all who hear them, they wonder what they can have said that should be so offensive!

Verse Proverbs 15:29. "The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous." In an important sense the Lord is near-alike near, to all;* and none can ever "go from his presence or flee from his Spirit." But such phraseology as that in the former part of this verse is often used to express, not actual, or physical, nearness or distance, but states of mind. And the words, on this principle, may mean, either the state of mind of the wicked towards God, or the state of God's mind towards the wicked.

* Psalms 139:3-5; Proverbs 15:8; Acts 17:27.

Here the words relate to the latter, as is clearly indicated by the antithesis in the second clause of the verse. The meaning is, that the Lord has no complacency in the wicked. There is an infinitude of distance between His purity and their <evil principles and courses. These He holds in abhorrence; and they who follow them are not, and cannot be the objects of his love and care;-of those whom He guides by his counsel, shields by his power, cheers by his smile, and "receives to glory." He "knoweth them afar off;" keeps aloof from them; sets his face against them; admits them not into his presence; and at last banishes them from him for ever! But "He heareth the prayer of the righteous." (Comp. Psalms 34:15-16; Psalms 66:18-19; Psalms 145:17-20.) What a delightful assurance is this! "What a blessing to know that Jehovah is near; with an open ear, a loving heart, and a strong hand !*1 The Lord is his people's friend in need. He listens to all their requests; places all He has to their account, for the supply of their every want; and maintains an endearing intimacy with them.*2 His people never need "go forward but he is not there; or backward but they cannot perceive him." Never need they suppose him " hiding himself that they cannot see him." The supposition is "their infirmity." It is baseless. He withdraws not from them; but they from him. He is "ever near to them that call upon him,-to them that call upon him in truth." "In six troubles he is with them; in seven he does not forsake them." "His ear is never heavy that it cannot hear, nor his arm shortened that it cannot save." "He is nigh to them that be of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

* 1 John 5:14-15. rr *2 See Luke 11:9-13; John 14:21-23.

Verse Proverbs 15:30. "The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart; and a good report maketh the bones fat."

Light is, as formerly noticed, the natural emblem of joy. What joy, when light springs up in the midst of darkness, bringing into view all the glories and beauties of nature!-What new, strange, thrilling ecstacy of emotion, when light is let in upon the eyes of the blind! As light is thus joyous, so is a "good report" or good reputation to the heart of him who enjoys it. It "maketh the bones fat."* The bones may be called the foundation of the corporeal structure, on which its strength and

stability depend. The cavities and cellular parts of the bones are filled with the marrow; of which the fine oil, by one of the beautiful processes of the animal physiology, pervades their substance, and, incorporating with the earthy and siliceous material, gives them their cohesive tenacity; a provision without which they would be brittle and easily fractured. "Making the bones fat" means supplying them with plenty of marrow, and thus strengthening the entire system. Hence "marrow to the bones" is a Bible figure for anything eminently gratifying and beneficial. The idea is strongly brought out in the words-" And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the Lord shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies," Isaiah 66:14. The bones "flourishing like the green herb"-like an herb copiously sup plied with moisture-evidently means the firm, healthy, lively action of the whole system. The import, then, of the expression, "a good report maketh the bones fat," is, that a good reputation contributes eminently to enjoyment, to comfort, health, active vigour, spirit, life, and happiness.

* Comp. Isaiah 58:11. By some, however, "a good report" is understood of good tidings; and they conceive "the light of the eyes," to refer to the happy, glancing looks of the messenger of such tidings. The eyes of a friend glisten with gladness when he comes as the bearer of pleasant news. And, as "the light of his eyes rejoices the heart," so the "good report" itself which he brings, makes "fat the bones." It cheers and animates the spirit, and thus contributes to the liveliness and vigour of the body itself.

Verse Proverbs 15:31. "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise." The "reproof of life" evidently signifies the admonition of which the tendency and the intention are life-the life of him to whom it is addressed-his present and future happiness. And this verse may mean that the disposition to listen to the "reproof of life" is to be found among the wise. That is its appropriate place. It belongs to the wise,-is a feature of their character. The contrary-the rejection and disregard of that reproof is distinctive of the fool.* * For further illustration of the general sentiment, see Proverbs 1:5-6; Proverbs 9:7-9. The words may also intimate that he who has once received aright, in sincerity and truth, "the reproof of life," will thenceforward abide among the wise. He will fix his lot with them. He will permanently abandon the company of the foolish and the wicked. He will not return whence he came, but from his experience of the happiness found through the heavenly life introduced ink. his soul will cleave to the Lord and to his people. That "the reproof of life" is here to be understood in the highest sense, is clear from what follows-" He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding."

"Despising the soul"-is acting as if it were a matter of no concern that the soul should be saved; or as if there were no reality in its alleged danger. O that none of you may come to discover the danger, or be brought to the conviction of the preciousness of the soul’s life, only when it is too late to escape the one, or to obtain the other! God grant that you may "hear reproof" in time, attending to and obeying His faithful admonitions as to your sinfulness and guilt, and the only way of deliverance and peace-and thus "get understanding," securing the knowledge which alone is "life eternal." The same general lesson is followed out in the closing words of the chapter-"The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility."

Here is again the grand lesson of practical wisdom taught throughout the inspired volume-" Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." The fear of the Lord is the sum of Wisdom’s lessons. There is not a lesson superior to this in importance to man, among all the infinite stores of divine knowledge. There cannot be. Among all the objects of that knowledge He Himself is infinitely the first and highest. The former part of the verse sustains an important connexion with the latter:-"And before honour is humility" The humility is here connected with "the fear of the Lord," which, when genuine, is utterly incompatible with pride. The two sentiments cannot exist in the same bosom. They are mutually destructive of each other. There is nothing in any human bosom which God can regard as true humility, till the sinner comes down to his true condition-that is, till, in the spirit of entire self-renunciation, giving up, as dishonouring to God, all his previous confidences, he comes before the footstool of the divine throne as a suppliant for unconditional mercy. That sinner assuredly does the very reverse of honouring God, who stands out against the overtures of his mercy through a Mediator. Nothing can be more dishonouring.-It is dishonouring to the wisdom of God, by imputing to him the adoption of a needless device. It is dishonouring to the law of God, as denying the justice of its sentence. It is dishonouring to God’s righteousness, as setting aside the necessity of its claims being fully recognized and maintained. It is dishonouring to God’s mercy, as it restricts its freeness, and declines being a debtor to it but on certain conditions of its own. It is dishonouring to God, as being dishonouring to his Son, by presuming to divide the glory of salvation with Him, or even to take the credit to itself alone. Humility is the way to "honour." The path to the glory of the celestial city must be through the valley of humiliation. The very first sentence the Saviour uttered, when describing the character of the subjects of his reign, was-"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Thus have we again had before us, under different aspects, the contrast between the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked.-Alas! how many there are, who are prudent for time, but who take no thought themselves, and no counsel from others, for eternity! O let such be again reminded, that what is their joy now, will, in the end, be sorrow and bitterness. Death will silence your boastings, and judgment will expose and condemn them. Even now (you know in your inmost souls that I speak the truth) your pleasure in sin is subject to many misgivings of heart-you, especially, who have had the instructions and example of the godly. It has secret stings you do not own. The feast, and the dance, and the theatre, and all the higher or lower revelry of life, leaving an aching void which nothing on earth can fill,-you will sigh in vain after substantial happiness, just as Solomon did in what he emphatically calls "the days of his vanity"-until, like him, you return to God. Nothing whatsoever to which you can have recourse for happiness without God, can ever yield it. That is the law of His rational creation; and vain will be all your attempts so set it aside. He has fixed it. It is His absolute and irreversible decree-that no intelligent creature shall enjoy true happiness independently of Himself. And is it not right it should be so? Is it not right, that, when God offers himself to you, in the fulness of his love, and of his power to bless you, as "the portion of your inheritance and cup," and you refuse the offer-your punishment should be the fearfully and eternally felt experience that every other is vain?-that every other sweet should turn to bitterness-and all other fulness to emptiness?-that forsaking Him who is the only "fountain of living water," and hewing out for yourselves other cisterns, you should be condemned to find them all, in the end, "broken cisterns that can hold no water?"-that, even if they should hold it during life, and you should drink to satiety, and say, "Stolen waters are sweet," you should at last see them

shattered to pieces by the hand of Death, and your souls left empty-empty for ever-the fountain from which you might have found true, and pure, and permanent joy being then eternally sealed. O come-come now to that fountain, while it remains open. Come to God. Make Him your chief joy. And when you have given Him his proper place, all other things will yield their sweetness to you, according to their nature and their measure. Your happiness will then be-and there is no other-"GOD IN ALL THINGS, AND ALL THINGS IN GOD!"

41-Pro_16:1-5

Proverbs 16:1-5

LECTURE XLI.

Proverbs 16:1-5.

"The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established. The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished." The sentiment expressed in the first of these verses, according to the received translation, is this:-That it belongs to God, to furnish the heart with all wisdom and grace, by which it is prepared to dictate to the tongue the utterance of whatever is truly good and profitable.

Critics are agreed that the terms in the original will hardly bear this sense. The words are, literally, "To man the orderings of the heart; but from Jehovah the answer of the tongue." They have accordingly been rendered by one*1-"Man indeed forms his designs; but from Jehovah is the answer of the tongue:" and by another*2-" Man may prepare his thoughts; but the utterance of the tongue is from the Lord."

*1 Schulzius-"Homo quidem capit consilia, sed a Deo responsio linguae."

2 Hodgson. The meaning appears to be, that whatever thoughts and purposes are in a man’s mind,-whatever sentiments it may be his intention to utter; if they are such as are likely to have any influence, or to produce effects of any consequence,-they are all under supreme control. We have an exemplification of the fact in the case of Balaam. The preparation of his mind and heart was his own. He left his country on the invitation of Balak, with a certain purpose; designing to utter what was in harmony with his "love of the wages of unrighteousness." But "the Lord God turned the curse into a blessing." He made the infatuated false prophet to feel his dependence; so that, bent as his heart was to utter one thing, his tongue was constrained to utter another. Thus it often is-in ways for which the speakers and agents themselves cannot at the time account. One of these ways is, that, by imperative, unanticipated circumstances, men are brought to say the very contrary of what they intended. They have previously made up their minds. But either their memory fails them, in a manner they are at a loss to understand, and that which they had with pains prepared forsakes them in the time of need; or something different occurs suddenly to the mind just at the necessary juncture, which all their previous study had not suggested; or some incident-something it may be said or done by another, changes, in a moment, the current of their thoughts and the tenor of their words.

* The expression of this in the history is very pointed and strong. See Numbers 22:18; Numbers 22:38; Numbers 23:26; Numbers 24:12-13.

I have heard well-authenticated cases from ministers who were as far as possible from being canters or enthusiasts, of what they had prepared with much study unaccountably losing its hold of their minds, and another subject, they could not tell by what association, for they were sensible of none, so forcing itself upon their thoughts as to constrain them to speak upon it;-when subsequent results, in benefit to individuals who, in peculiar states of mind, were at the time among the number of their auditors, have shown the providential cause, and have rendered the occurrence a practical exemplification of the sentiment in the verse before us. In every case, there is complete divine control. A man may revolve in his mind or heart thoughts without number, but he cannot so much as lisp or whisper one of them without God:-" the answer of the tongue is from the Lord."

Verse Proverbs 16:2. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes: but the Lord weigheth the spirits." The general truth stated in the former part of this verse has its source in another-the depravity of our nature. That depravity has an effect upon the conscience, perverting its dictates. We have this exemplified in the whole history of persecution. Our Lord, in warning his disciples of what they might anticipate, says, "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."*1 But did this false conviction absolve the actors from guilt? Far from it. The reason assigned in the very next verse shows this: " These things shall they do unto you, because they have not known the Father nor me."*2 The ignorance was thus without excuse, from which the conduct originated; could the conduct itself, then, be innocent? Look at a particular case-that of Saul of Tarsus. His own words accord with the words of Christ, respecting the dictates of conscience-" I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," Acts 26:9. Did Paul mean to acquit himself of criminality when he said this? His whole manner of speaking of himself afterwards strikingly shows the contrary. Let one passage decide: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus," 1 Timothy 1:12-14. He here represents himself as having been "the chief of sinners" in the course he had before pursued; and the grace that had saved him as specially wonderful. He cannot mean, therefore, his having acted "ignorantly in unbelief" as an apology or palliation; seeing, otherwise than in unbelief he could not act, and seeing unbelief is ever represented as itself involving the most heinous guilt, on account of the principles of moral pravity to which it is invariably imputed. The probability is that the words "for I acted ignorantly in unbelief" are introduced parenthetically, rather as accounting for his conduct than apologizing for it.

*1 See John 16:1-2. rr *2 Compare this verse with John 15:21-25.

Again: how very often does self-partiality prevent us from seeing the turpitude of particular actions or courses, which even to fellow-men-to neutral observers and judges-is flagrantly apparent! And further, whence comes it that men see themselves so very differently from the description given of them in the word of God? How come they to appear so right in their own eyes, when that word declares them "all gone astray"-"desperately wicked"-"hopeless"-"lost?" Comes it not from their applying to themselves and to their ways false standards of estimate-false weights and measures: not the all-perfect, spiritual, heart-searching law of the Holy God,-the God of light and love-but the current opinions of the world, the theories of human philosophy, the general average of character around them, the laws and usages of human governments, or the second table of God’s law (and

that very erroneously understood) to the exclusion of the first? Or comes it not from their looking to words and actions, without due regard to the principles and motives by which they are influenced and dictated? This last deception may be considered as specially meant here, from the antithesis in the verse-"But the Lord weigheth the spirits." His "weighing" signifies his perfectly ascertaining, by intuitive and unerring discernment, and exposing, to universal satisfaction, the good and the evil with the precise relative proportions of each. His "weighing the spirits" implies that here the moral good or the moral evil really lies. The mere action is, in itself, incapable of either, independently of what it indicates in the agent. When we speak of a moral action, we mean the action of a moral agent. A dog or a man may do the same action,-may carry off, for instance, for their own use respectively, what is the property of another. We never think of calling it a moral action in the dog; but we condemn the man for the commission of a crime against his neighbour, and a sin against his God. An action may even in its effects be beneficial, which, in regard to the doer of it, is inexcusably hail: it may be good in its results, but bad in its principle. It is the latter alone that constitutes its moral or immoral character. And oh! it is well for us to be constantly impressed with the solemn truth before us-that "the Lord weigheth the spirits." It gives us a lesson in the duty of self-examination. We should weigh our own spirits. In the remembrance that our hearts are "deceitful above all things," we should, in that duty, go carefully and faithfully to work; not satisfied with a mere surface-look; not regarding the word and the action merely, but jealously tracing each, as in the sight of God, to its secret source within; testing that source by the application of Bible criterions; desiring to detect not merely motives that are unmixedly evil, but every secret adulteration of motives that are in the main good-every alloy-every deteriorating ingredient; "keeping our hearts with all diligence;" and looking forward to that day, when the equal balances of heaven shall try-both in deed, and in principle and motive-" every man’s work of what sort it is." That will be the great day of the "weighing of the spirits." What a day of strange revelations! when all hearts shall be laid open as they are in " the eyes of Him with whom we have to do!" How much that here appears genuine shall then be found "reprobate silver!" How much that by its superficial appearance deceived the eyes of men, shall be shown to have been but the gilding and lackering of corruption! How much that passed for virtue, but the counterfeit of vice! How much that seemed sterling, when "weighed in the balances" shall be " found wanting!" How many masks of imposing comeliness shall be torn from concealed deformity! Of how many "whited sepulchres" shall the "dead men’s bones and all uncleanness" be thrown out to view! Let us anticipate that day of coming disclosure, when the Lord the Judge shall "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts;" and let us faithfully "judge ourselves" that "we may not be judged." And for the same reason which should make us faithful and severe in judging ourselves, we should feel it incumbent upon us to be charitable and cautious in our judgments of others. We cannot "weigh the spirits." Of actions and of words, in their nature and in their tendency, we are entitled to form our opinion, according to the principles and precepts of God’s law. But there is often a great deal more freedom used, than there ought to be, with the motives and intentions of those by whom the actions are done and the words are spoken. We are apt to talk with as much confidence of the motives of others as if we had the divine prerogative of "searching the heart." Frequently, for instance, we conclude at once, from the actual result of what another has done, that such result was in his intention,-that the production of it was even the chief or only motive by which he was influenced. Whereas He who"weigheth the spirits" may know that the motive has been the very reverse; and that the actual result has arisen from an error in

judgment, and may be grieving the well-intentioned agent even more than it does ourselves. Let us then while we search our own hearts to the very bottom, beware of usurping the divine right of pronouncing on the secrets of other hearts. To this, as to every thing else, the great law of Christian equity and charity clearly and fully applies-" Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Verse Proverbs 16:3. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established." The counsel here given implies the following things:-

1. That all our purposes and all our doings should be according to God's will. How is it possible for us to commit them to God otherwise? How can we look to God for a blessing on that which we know to be contrary to His mind, and displeasing in His sight? We ought not to form or to pursue any purpose, regarding which we are sensible that we cannot, without a consciousness of inconsistency and impiety, acknowledge God. We ought not, unless we can even do so with confidence. The maxim by which, as Christians, we should be regulated, is to be found in the words-"Whatsoever is not of faith"-whatsoever does not proceed, that is, from a full conviction of right-"is sin."

2. That none of our works can prosper without God. His providential blessing and superintendence are indispensable to success in any one of them. When His own counsels require it, God can bring to nothing the best, and crown with success the worst devised of human plans. This is a lesson of which the divine word is full.* * See Psalms 127:1; Daniel 5:23; James 4:13-16.

3. That it is, therefore, the obvious and imperative duty of intelligent creatures to own their dependence, and to seek, on all occasions, the divine countenance and blessing:-a counsel we have had more than once before us: one which pervades the Bible; and to which, despite of all the speciousness which a sophistical infidelity may give to its theories and speculations, natural conscience gives its sanction-harmonizing with the dictates of unsophisticated reason.

4. That what is our duty is, at the same time, our interest. The act of committing all things into the hands of God to be regulated as He may see fit, preserves the spirit from corroding anxiety; from carefulness, and sleeplessness, and torturing apprehensions about the result. It "keeps the soul in peace."* * Psalms 117:2; Isaiah 26:3-4; Php 4:6-7.

5. As before, a general truth is expressed,-namely, that God will graciously smile on the efforts, and accomplish the purposes and wishes of him who, in all that he does, piously and humbly acknowledges Him, and seeks His blessing. God will " establish his thoughts"-will second and prosper, and fulfil the purposes he forms, and the desires he cherishes, crowning his endeavours with success.

Verse Proverbs 16:4. "The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil."-This verse has occasioned no small difficulty to interpreters; and without doubt it is difficult. The former part of it, indeed, regarded as a general truth, is involved in no perplexity. The perplexity lies in the latter. We can be at no loss to admit the proposition, that both in creation and in providence, all things must ultimately prove for the glory of the Maker and Ruler of the universe. And this, in reality, appears to be the great truth conveyed;-a truth which it would be as unreasonable to question, as it would be impious. There is, there can be nothing which God makes, and nothing which God either does, or permits to be done, which will not ultimately, in one

way or another, be rendered instrumental to the furtherance of His glory. It is a truth, that all God's works praise him; and in the end, all God's ways shall praise him. He will bring a revenue of honour and adoration to himself from the whole, and from every part. The words have been rendered, "God hath made every thing for his purpose-or for its purpose." If we render them "for his purpose," the sense will be much the same as in our own translation. If we render them "for its purpose," the sense will be, (a very manifest truth) that every thing in nature is designed and adapted for some special purpose-to its appropriate end. And then there will be intended a comparison: that as God hath made everything for its purpose, so also has He made even "the wicked for the day of evil." Still here lies the difficulty-the perplexing knot. "What is the sense, in which the Lord, who has "made everything for Himself," is said to have made the wicked for the day of evil? There are two things which it cannot mean. The first is, that God ever made a wicked creature; that any rational creature ever came from His forming hand, imbued with the principles of evil. That God has made creatures who have subsequently fallen and become wicked, is a matter of fact. But God never either made a wicked creature, or made a creature wicked; never created a mind in a state of depravity; and never into a mind that was created pure, infused the principles of depravity. These things-as they are far from God, be far from all our conceptions of Him! The second is, that God ever made an intelligent creature for the purpose of rendering that creature miserable;-or, to use the common phrase, that God ever made any man, to damn him! The first end of God in creation is his own glory. It must be so, unless we can conceive anything to which that glory should give way as being of inferior consequence:-and the second is the gratification of his benevolence in the production of happiness. Why this benevolent God has permitted evil to enter into his creation, is an inquiry too high for us. The fact is certain; and we cannot hesitate in believing, that in the long-run, God will make this part of his providential scheme to produce the largest amount of both glory to his name and benefit to the universal frame of being. But that God's end, in bringing any intelligent creature into existence, was that creature's misery, it is blasphemy,-and to every mind that desires to cherish veneration and love towards the divine Being-it is agony to imagine.

Setting such ideas aside, I would remark, that much of the meaning of the whole clause depends on the sense we affix to "the day of evil."

1. It is generally understood, and I have myself been accustomed so to explain it, of the day of final visitation and suffering to the wicked themselves. Supposing this to be the meaning, the sentiment expressed will be, that Jehovah, having made and destined all things for Himself, will cause even wicked men, who for the time may seem to be exceptions to that truth, and to be counteracting the purpose of promoting his glory, to subserve that end at last, in "the day of evil"-by their righteous punishment-their final overthrow and destruction: and that there is the same fitness in His thus "reserving the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished," as there is in any adaptation in nature or in providence. The words, in this view of them, have been finely rendered by Archbishop Tillotson-"God hath ordained everything to that which is fit to it; and the wicked He hath ordained for the day of evil: that is, the wisdom of God hath fitted one thing to another, punishment to sin, the evil day to the evil-doer." And thus, we may add, God will provide for the honour of his name and government-"What," says Paul, "if God, willing to shew wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?"

Romans 9:22-23. Those, observe, who are "fitted to destruction" are not said to be so fitted by God, as it is said of the "vessels of mercy" that "he before prepared them to glory." No. The ungodly fit themselves for destruction; and God forbears the immediate infliction of their punishment,-allowing them to take their course, and to work out their principles of evil, with mad infatuation, to the uttermost, that in that punishment when it is inflicted, He may the more surely and effectually make His righteousness apparent.

2. But I am now inclined to doubt whether "the day of evil" has here this meaning at all. There is another, of which it is alike susceptible, and which, in the Scriptures, it frequently bears-namely, the day of punitive visitation, in the infliction of judicial vengeance, in the course of God's providential administration. I question if the suffering of the wicked be intended, and am disposed to refer the phrase to the instrumental agency of the wicked. The expression, "The Lord hath made all things for himself," will thus mean, that He employs all as instruments in effecting his purposes; and that thus He makes the wicked as a part of his agency; employing them, without at all interfering with their freedom and their responsibility, as the executioners of wrath, "when He cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;"-thus rendering their very passions the means of accomplishing his designs; making "the wrath of man to praise him, and restraining the remainder of wrath."

Verse Proverbs 16:5. "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished." It is of vast importance that we bear in mind what is the "pride of heart that is abomination to the Lord."

1. There is a gentleness and condescending affability, that springs from mere natural disposition; and which may exist while pride, in the sight of God, is cherished and indulged in all its ungodly loftiness. While possessing such a disposition in the highest degree, a man may hate with his whole heart the humbling representations of the gospel, and the unconditional grace which it reveals. He may disdain the lowly, self-abasing language of the "broken and contrite heart," as language not at all befitting his lips. He may assume the portly self-justifying attitude of the Pharisee, and cast the side-long look of scorn at the penitent publican. But a man of this stamp, whatever his fellow-men may think of him, is of "the proud in heart whom the Lord abhorreth."

2. There are some, again, who are full of the language of the deepest self-condemnation:-no terms are strong enough to express their sense of their own vileness and unworthiness. Yet they are of "the proud in heart," after all. They are lowly in words but high in spirit. Pride dictates their very humiliation. They wish to be commended for their lowliness, and to be assured that they think worse of themselves than others do; that they are by no means the worthless wretches they make themselves; that they possess excellencies to which their humility makes them blind. Then, again, when thus flattered, they shake their heads and protest against it in terms of still stronger self-loathing; while all the time they are pleased with it, and only wish to draw out a little more of what falls so sweetly upon the ear of their vanity, and feasts their inward self-elation. They want a character for humility, while yet they are the very opposite of humble. They will show this at once, if you only agree with the ill they say of themselves; and come to close quarters with them as to actual bona fide faults. And not a few, moreover, who are all lowliness before God, are high and irritable, touchy and resentful in their intercourse with men.

I must then afresh urge on you the truth, that the first ingredient in true humility before God, is a heart-breaking conviction of sin, and exposure to wrath, with the deep feeling and the lowly confession of entire dependence on God’s mercy, and of owing all to the riches of His grace. Every other feature and modification of Christian humility must germinate from this. And from such a truly humble state of heart many are the descriptions of pride that keep sinners of mankind:-the pride of self-righteousness; the pride of wisdom; the pride of station; and what appears to be especially alluded to in the verse-the pride of rebellion-obstinate, daring rebellion, in which men combine and encourage one another:-" Though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished." The proud of all sorts may encourage one another in such rebellion-in holding out against all terms of submission not in accordance with what they affect to think due to themselves! O the mad presumption! Due to themselves! What is it that is due to them? Is it not just what is due to all, as having " sinned, and come short of the glory of God?" Yes; and where shall their pride be, in the day when God riseth up? There shall be a vast assembly on the left hand of the Judge. Will they then unite against him? Will they then join hand in hand to resist the execution of His sentence? O the felt impotence-the trembling helplessness-of that multitude! Every heart shall quail before those eyes that, "as a flame of fire," shall search their inmost souls;-before the purity and the power of Him whose mercy they have despised till it was too late to find it;-the purity and the power of Him whom they refused as their Saviour, but who, having exchanged the cross for the throne, shall then, as Judge, vindicate, in the destruction of his enemies, the righteousness of the divine government, and the insulted honour of the divine name. "O be no longer mockers, lest your bands be made strong." "Humble yourselves." Come to God as sinners, and as suppliants for mercy. He will "in no wise cast you out." Come in pride-you perish. Come in your own name-you perish. But come with a broken and contrite heart, in the name of Jesus, and as sure as He is the true God and the God of truth, he will stretch forth his arms to welcome you!

42-Pro_16:6-15

Proverbs 16:6-15

LECTURE XLII.

Proverbs 16:6-15.

"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil. When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right. A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps. A divine sentence is in the lips of the king; his mouth transgresseth not in judgment. A just weight and balance are the Lord’s; all the weights of the bag are his work. It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness. Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right. The wrath of the king is as messengers of death; but a wise man will pacify it. In the light of the king’s countenance is life; and his favour is as the cloud of the latter rain."

Two things are necessary to be noticed in regard to the language of the first of these verses, in order to our arriving at the true interpretation of it, and the principle of harmony between it and other parts of Scripture:-

1. The word here translated "purged," is the same with that so rendered in other places, and is the word which strictly and properly signifies expiation or atonement: and-

2. Mercy and truth, being here put generally, may mean mercy and truth either as exercised on the part of God or as practised by men.

Now, as we have already said, there is not a sentiment more directly in the face of the entire tenor of the word of God, than the sentiment, that the practice of "mercy and truth," on the part of men, can operate as an atonement or expiation for the guilt of their sins. It is a very favourite sentiment; but one which no man can hold, and, with any consistency, profess to believe the Bible. I do not deny, that the abandonment of unrighteousness and oppression, and the adoption of the principles and the practice of truth, justice, and mercy, may be a means of averting temporal calamities-suspending the execution of them for a time, or even removing them altogether;-as when Daniel said to king Nebuchadnezzar, "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thy iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity," Daniel 4:27. And were it not for the use of the proper word for expiation, and the general unqualified form in which the statement in this verse is made, such an interpretation might have been admissible. We might have restricted the application of the words to the manner in which the God of mercy and truth-the God who himself "delighteth in mercy," and who "requireth truth in the inward parts"-manifests his regard to the practice of these virtues by his creatures. There is a scriptural sense too, in which mercy and truth, and the kindred graces, impart confidence towards God:-but it is only as evidential of interest in the salvation by

grace which the divine word reveals; it is neither as meritorious, nor as expiatory. It is obviously in this way that we are to interpret the language of James, "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment," James 2:13. The best commentary on "mercy rejoicing against judgment"-that is, imparting peace, security, and joy to the soul before God the Judge-is the Saviour's own description of the solemn transactions of the judgment-day.* The works of mercy He describes, as done to "his brethren" for his sake, were done from love to him, and consequently from faith in him. They are thus graciously stamped with his approval, and, as evidence of those who did them being his, are interposed between them and condemnation. But in this there is nothing of expiation or atonement.

* Matthew 25:34-36; Matthew 25:40. The purging away, or expiation of sin, is invariably, in the Scriptures, put upon a different ground. There is but One Expiation-typified by all the ancient sacrifices, and offered up, in the fulness of time, on Calvary. To suppose the faithfulness and kindness of one man to another to expiate guilt, is to set aside the entire scheme of the divine Saviour's mediation.

I regard "mercy and truth" here as having reference to God,-to the exercise and manifestation of these perfections of his character, in the scheme of human redemption. This view is strongly supported by such passages as these. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."* * Psalms 85:10; Micah 7:18-20; John 1:17.

I cannot but consider the entire verse, when the two parts of it are taken together, as briefly expressing what God has done for the salvation of man-for expiating his guilt and restoring him to favour; and the character, in principle and practice, which arises out of an interest by faith in this atonement and salvation. By "mercy and truth," on the part of God, men's sins are expiated and forgiven;-and, in consequence, "by the fear of the Lord," springing from the faith that introduces to this forgiveness, "men depart from evil." Thus, in the language of the Psalmist-"There is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared." And when by the faith of the atonement sinners are brought to the fear of God, they "walk in newness of life."

Then we have, in the next adage, one of the many happy effects which result to those who so walk:-"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."* * Comp. Job 5:23. Not that a good man shall never have any enemies. The contrary, alas! we see and know; and the contrary the word of God, both by the views it gives us of human nature, and by many express declarations, teaches us to expect. Indeed, the very verse itself implies the contrary. Enemies are expressly supposed to exist. And it is of these enemies that it is here said, God "maketh them to be at peace with him." The meaning evidently is, that often when the fears of God's people are excited in regard to those enemies,-when they are trembling for the consequences of their hostility, thinking all over with them-the wrath is averted-the enemy's power broken, or his feelings changed, and rendered, for the time at least, friendly. Thus it was in the

case of Jacob with Esau; and, in different instances in that of Saul with David. And thus it was in the case of another Saul, in New Testament days, who, from "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," and "being exceedingly mad against them," became one of the warmest, and most devoted friends of Christ and his cause. God gave promise by Jeremiah to his ancient people-"Verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil and in the time of affliction," Jeremiah 15:11. The divine Saviour also makes a similar promise, by the Apostle John, to one of his churches, and thus, in like circumstances, to them all.* It has been briefly and tersely said-"The best way to have enemies reconciled to us, is for us to be reconciled to God." When we are thus reconciled, even when enemies are permitted to rise up against us, and " such as breathe out cruelty," yet may we say with confidence, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"-and to our brethren so situated, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?"

* Revelation 3:9.

There may be in the language more especial reference to those parts of the good man’s conduct which have raised up enemies against him, springing from his resolute adherence to what God commands and conscience approves, in spite of all remonstrance, threatening, persuasion, and even tears; and in the full knowledge of the painful result, that those whom he would fain number still amongst his friends must be rendered hostile, and assume the attitude of alienation and resentment. When a child of God acts thus decidedly, and makes himself enemies from "conscience toward God," by following out the principle-"We must obey God rather than men;"-that God whom he obeys, and for whom he suffers, will stand by him. He will disappoint his fears, (how often has He done it!) and make the very admiration of his firm yet mild and dignified consistency to work, through conscience, on the hearts of his foes, and convert them into his friends-sometimes his warmest and most valuable friends: and not only into his friends, but through his instrumentality, and through the very consistency which at first provoked them, into friends of God.-All this has not unfrequently happened in regard to the godly man’s ungodly relatives. An instance of it occurred in my reading the other day. The Rev. Edwin Sidney, in his Memoir of the Rev. Rowland Hill, gives the following incident. "At the close of his life, he was walking on the terrace at Hawkstone" (the residence of one of his brothers) "when he remarked to a lady who was with him, and who had witnessed the affectionate attentions which were paid him by Sir John Hill and his family,-’You have seen how I am now received here; but in my youth I have often paced this spot, bitterly weeping, while by most of the inhabitants of yonder house I was considered as a disgrace to my family. But,’ he added, whilst the tears ran down his cheeks-’it was for the cause of God.’" And this instance is only one of thousands.-Even in cases where affection has not been won, the Lord has many a time, by providential incidents and by secret influences, direct or indirect, upon the mind, kept His servants in peace, preventing the wrath from breaking out-laying an unseen and unaccountable restraint upon it, and giving peace even in the midst of cherished and strong enmity. Daniel has been in peace, in the lions’ den. God has "shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt him." When He has sent forth his servants on his embassies, "as sheep among wolves," the savage passions of their infuriated opponents have been restrained, and have even been, by divine grace, tamed into gentleness, so that the "wolf has dwelt with the lamb, and the leopard lain down with the kid."

Yes, my friends; and, without going far astray from the spirit of the words, I may add, that there is one enemy-the most dreaded of all by guilty nature-whom God "makes to be at peace" with "those whose ways please Him;"-Death, "the last enemy-the king of terrors." The believer fears him not. He hails him as a friend. To him the spectral form of the monarch of the grave brings no alarm. He comes "a messenger of peace, to call his soul to heaven." And "when a man's ways please the Lord," it matters not what may be his situation in life. "There is no respect of persons with God." With the man who is "humble and of a contrite heart, and trembleth at his word," He delights to "dwell," whether in the palace or in the cottage;-and from the palace He retires, when it is the abode of sin, to take up his abode in the cottage "wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Thus it follows-verse Proverbs 16:8. "Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right."

Taking the words in their general acceptation, without entering into the shades of difference between the term used for righteousness, and that for right-we may remark, that the "little with righteousness" is better than the "great revenues without right" in many respects.-1. They who have the "little with righteousness"-righteousness in the acquisition and righteousness in the use, have it with a good conscience; which they whose abundance is without right can never enjoy. -2. It produces less distraction and temptation to worldliness and forgetfulness of God,-the great curse of wealth; and exerts less of an absorbing influence on the affections and desires.-3. It is received as a blessing from a Father's hand, and is enjoyed with a blessing from a Father's heart; whereas "revenues without right" can neither be regarded as divinely bestowed nor as divinely blessed.-4. The "little with righteousness" meets the wants and the bounded desires of its possessor. Righteous before God, and cherishing towards God the spirit of confidence which He requires, he has "learned, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content"-which is the great secret of true enjoyment, and which all the revenues of earth without the grace of God must fail to impart.-5. He who has "little with righteousness," uses the little better; whereas he who gets without principle cannot be expected to put much principle into his spending. And for the encouragement of the poorest it is written, in regard to the employment of earthly means, "It is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not."-6. He who has little has no fears disturbing him of change for the worse; and having his little with right,-and as one under the power of principles which God approves, the principles of true religion,-he has the prospect before him, beyond all the privations and trials of his present poor and pinching condition,-of something infinitely better and more lasting than all the revenues, with right or without it, that this world can ever furnish to its most devoted worshippers-the blessed prospect of "the inheritance of the saints in light;" where, having on earth "received his evil things," he shall be eternally "filled with all the fulness of God!"

Verse Proverbs 16:9. "A man's heart," that is his mind, his inward powers of reflection, anticipation, skill, prudence, "deviseth his way"-a term implying the application of all possible consideration, invention, and precaution-but "the Lord directeth his steps." The words express and expose the folly and presumption, on man's part, of self-confidence-of his thus assuring himself of success, as if he had the future under his eye and at his bidding; regardless of that hidden but everpresent, ever-busy superintending Power, that has all under complete command; that can at once arrest his progress in the very midst and at the very height of his boasting, and "turn to foolishness" all his devices. The sacred Oracles are full of the sentiment and of the most striking

exemplifications of its truth.* And what is the sentiment of revelation cannot fail to command the concurrence of enlightened reason. It must be so. If there is a God at all it cannot be otherwise. It were the height of irrationality as well as impiety for a moment to question it-to imagine the contrary possible. How otherwise could God govern the world? Were not all human schemes under supreme and irresistible control,-what would become of the certainty of the divine? All must of necessity fulfil the plans of Infinite Wisdom in the administration of God’s universal government. God "will work, and who shall let it?"

* See Proverbs 6:21; Proverbs 20:24; Proverbs 21:30.

Verse Proverbs 16:10. "A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: his mouth transgresseth not in judgment."

Solomon being himself a king, it is no matter of surprise that he should occasionally touch on the duties of royalty. His object here is to set forth what kings ought to be, and what good kings always are. Such is the character of human government, as ordained of God-a divine institute for the well-being of men. The terms of this verse might be considered as having in them a truth specially applicable to the kings of Israel and Judah. They reigned under a theocracy. Jehovah himself had given laws to his chosen people. It was the duty of the kings to have these laws before them, and to govern in all things according to them. Anticipating the exercise of the kingly authority, God had expressly given command to this effect by Moses.* A sentence, therefore, which was according to this law, was, in the strictest sense, "a divine sentence." It was of God’s express dictation. But the words may be understood of kings more generally.

* Deuteronomy 17:18-20.

"A divine sentence" may be understood either as to its character, or as to its authoritative effect. If taken in the former sense, it means a sentence according to perfect equity-in harmony with the character of Him of whom it is said-"He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is He." If in the latter sense, the idea is, that as every judgment or "sentence" of God is decisive and effectual, so that the execution of it cannot be evaded or resisted, such, in measure, is the case with the sentences of kings among men: and in the general idea of a divine sentence may fairly be included both character and efficiency-both equity and power. When understood of equity, the latter part of the verse, according to the principle of Hebrew parallelisms, will be a kind of counterpart or echo to the former-"A divine sentence is in the lips of the king; his mouth transgresseth not in judgment." When understood of power, the verse might be rendered-"A divine sentence is in the lips of the king: let not his mouth trangress in judgment:"-in proportion to the authoritative and efficacious nature of his sentence, ought he to see to it that the sentence be right:-he should weigh well his decision ere he pronounces it, seeing it involves consequences so certain, immediate, and important. And the principle of this lesson applies to all in situations of authority and influence, whether more private or more public. As does also the lesson of equity from the character of God, as a just God-" the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness." The principle is, in the spirit of it, repeated in next verse-"A just weight and balance are the Lord’s; all the weights of the bag are his work." The laws of Moses were adverted to in our comment on this subject on a former occasion. (Proverbs 11:1.) They are most pointed and strict, and heavy the denunciations against the violators of them. The Jews are said to have kept their standard weights and measures in the

sanctuary. The fact might arise from the particularity of the law; and might operate as a remembrancer of the righteousness of Him by whom the law was given and the weights and measures fixed. And it furnishes, at the same time, an interesting commentary on the words in this verse. They are " the Lord's"-they are " his work." All adulteration of them was a kind of sacrilege. It was not cheating men merely, but defrauding Jehovah, changing what He had fixed. The general idea is, that the weights and measures should be held sacred, like all else that belongs to God, so that encroachment upon them should be considered as profanation, which God himself would avenge. And, from the connexion in which the words are here introduced, they lead us to observe, that while kings are called upon to "do justly" themselves in their whole administration, and in every department of it, it is, at the same time, a most important part of their official duty to promote among their subjects, to the utmost extent of their power, the principles and the practice of equity between man and man. The prevalence, indeed, of mutual confidence is indispensable to the comfort and prosperity of society, nay to the very existence of a community that, to any extent, depends on trade and commerce. Destroy such confidence, and all the intercourse of business is at once annihilated-cut up by the very roots.

Verse Proverbs 6:12. "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness." This verse is susceptible of various interpretations, as-1. "For kings to commit wickedness is abomination; for the throne is established by righteousness." This view presents a sentiment to which none can possibly refuse their assent; For any man to "commit wickedness" is an abomination-an abomination to God and to all holy creatures, and it is peculiarly so for those who hold stations of authority and influence. It is theirs to give the tone to public morals and manners. This invests them with a special responsibility.

2. The verse may be read-"Let it be an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness:" that is, kings ought to hold wickedness in abhorrence in their own conduct; and that, whether personal or official. A distinction is at times made between the man and his office; or between the man personally and the man officially;-which, if pushed far, may be very prejudicial. It goes to this-that a man may be a very good magistrate, though he is a very bad man; that private character has little or no connexion with the discharge of public functions. This is surely a pernicious mistake. The two should, as far as possible, be in union. The best security for upright and correct official conduct is uprightness of private character. There never can be full confidence in a government, of which the conductors, supreme and subordinate, are, in their private deportment, destitute of principle. Principle in the personal character will alone resist temptation to malversation in public office. We have no certain hold of a man otherwise.

3. The third view is probably the right one-that "wickedness" in general "is an abomination to kings;" that is, ought to be, and in regard to every good king will be-"for the throne is established by righteousness." That such is the true meaning is likely from the verse that follows, which presents an evident contrast to this. A virtuous, flourishing, comfortable, and happy population will scare away from the throne all apprehensions of seditious and revolutionary movements. Such a people will wish for no change; and against any enemy that would introduce change will defend with their heart's blood the government under which they enjoy such prosperity. On the contrary, the extensive prevalence of opposite principles,-very often the result of misgovernment, will prevent prosperity, will produce poverty and discomfort, will cherish discontent, will foment insubordination, and excite wishes for change, and render the country a mass of combustible

materials which requires but the striking of a spark to ensure a universal explosion. Then the throne is in incessant insecurity. It stands amongst gunpowder. It is surrounded with terrors. Its occupant can be in peace only from ignorance. Let it be laid down as a settled maxim, that the best security of "the throne" is in the virtue of its subjects; that the diffusion of knowledge and of religious and moral principle, is the best means of ensuring the loyal peaceable, happy submission of the people. Equal laws, equal rights, equal privileges, equal favour to all in their respective departments of occupation, a fair field for every one, and no partiality in either immunities or restrictions, in trade, in science, or in religion,-will do much to produce this desirable condition of things. And "the righteousness which exalteth the nation" will place its throne on a firm basis, and surround it with the truest glory.* * See Proverbs 14:34.

Verse Proverbs 16:13. "Righteous lips are the delight of kings; and they love him that speaketh right." Ah! would that this could be truly predicated as matter of universal fact! Well had it been, and well would it be, both for princes and for people! But history tells another tale; and we must again regard the words as the statement of what ought to be, rather than of what is,-of the character, not of all kings, but of the truly good king.-The flatteries, the wiles, the falsehoods, the treacherous smiles and selfish heartlessness of courtiership, have been proverbial from the beginning. It has been in every age a complaint, and one alas! too well founded, that princes do not hear truth,-that, from fear or from favour, it does not reach their ears. There have been, and there are, honourable exceptions; but a courtier has long been a term almost synonymous with a man versed in all the arts of simulation and chicane.-Of how many princes, in ancient or more modern times, has this been (though, perchance, a present gratification to them) the ultimate wretchedness and ruin! Falsehood and flattery are often for the time more palatable than faithfulness and truth. When the lying lips of the parasite pour into the open ear of royalty the false and delusive maxim that the people are made for the prince, not the prince for the people; when they place the ruler above the law, and pronounce the ruler’s pleasure the criterion of the ruler’s duty, and his will what should bind all, and be itself unbound:-when a profligate minister recommends measures according to what he knows to be the caprice of his royal master, or his unhappily obstinate prejudices, rather than according to what he knows just and liberal views of the public good to require;-the deceived prince becomes the dupe of treachery; and his throne may be tottering to its base when he is fancying it most secure. Happy is it for the prince who feels and acts as this verse describes; who desires honest and faithful counsel; who prefers unpalatable truth to palatable falsehood; who rejects with dignity and scorn the advisers whom he detects putting a bandage over his eyes, and who places those proportionally near to him and in the light of his favour, who assist him to see clearly things as they actually are, and suggest, with the fidelity of conscientious conviction, the measures that will make things as they ought to be!-The best commentary on the verse before us, as descriptive of the character of a good king, may be found in the resolutions of the father of Solomon-Psalms 101:1-8.

Verses Proverbs 16:14-15. "The wrath of the king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it. In the light of the king’s countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain."-These verses contain a striking contrast between the effects of royal displeasure, and of royal favour. The sentiment of the former verse was strikingly true then of the capricious fury of Eastern despots; and in all arbitrary governments it is so still. Human nature remains the same; and hence the tendencies of absolute power remain the same. It has been truly said, that absolute

power is safe in no hands but those of God. Many a time have those Eastern despots, whose will was law, and their frown death to their trembling vassals, when any one had done them a displeasure, given "the messengers of death" their secret and summary commission,-consigning the victim of their resentment, without trial and without warning, to the dungeon, and giving him his choice of the bowl or the bowstring.-On the contrary, "in the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain." "Life" here, as in other places, means prosperity and joy-happy life. And "a cloud of the latter rain" may be regarded as the emblem at once of pleasure and of benefit. The shower which it pours down to water the earth is at once refreshing and fructifying. Thus to Haman the wrath of Ahasuerus was as "messengers of death," while to Mordecai his favour was "as a cloud of the latter rain." Thus to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the wrath of the incensed Nebuchadnezzar was the "messenger of death;" but when their God had preserved them in the sevenfold heated furnace, and turned the wrath of the king into astonishment and repentance, his favour returned to them like "the cloud of latter rain." Thus to the enemies of Daniel was the wrath of Darius; and thus to Daniel himself was his favour. The prudence of every "wise man" will seek to avert "the wrath" and to secure "the favour" of one who has so much in his power,-not, if he be a man of principle as well as prudence, in any way inconsistent with honour and integrity,-but by all means which do not compromise these; as by every becoming, though by no undignified and sycophantish, concession.*1 Of such wisdom-the wisdom of "the children of this world," we have an example in the conduct of the men of Tyre and Sidon to the ambitious and vindictive Herod.*2 Theirs was carnal policy,-the unprincipled prudence of selfishness, escaping evil to itself by fulsome, impious, and as it proved, destructive adulation to the aspiring pride of another. Let us be thankful that we live in a land of liberty, where the law is above the royal will,-where, without the law, "the wrath of the king" is impotent; where, (and, though in some respects it may be questionable, yet is it a beautiful provision of the Constitution) though the supreme power has the privilege of remitting a sentence of death by showing mercy, there is no right of reversing at will a sentence of acquittal, and consigning to death when the law has awarded life. It is the characteristic prerogative of the ruler of a free country-of a law-controlled prince in opposition to a prince-controlled law.

*1 Comp. Ecclesiastes 10:4. rr *2 See Acts 12:20-24.

Suffer a few closing reflections.-

1. What was said, in the course of exposition, on the importance of deliberation in giving judgment, may be said in regard to the publication of opinions. No man should form his sentiments hastily; and far less should he hastily enunciate them; especially when he has reason to know that his opinion will go far with any considerable portion of the community. He should, in that case, be solicitous that every sentence to which he gives utterance on any subject should be a "divine sentence"-one in harmony with the mind of God. Men are at times tempted, by the very circumstance of their having got the public ear, to give forth their opinions more crudely, pluming themselves on their intuitive quickness, and trusting to their oracular authority. But conduct the very reverse should be the result of the confidence placed in their judgment; the greater should be the anxiety not to do harm by presuming on that confidence,-but to be all the surer of their ground.

2. He is the truest patriot, the best friend of his country, who contributes most to the extension of the knowledge, the virtue, and the religion of the people. That man more effectually advances its

true interests, its solid greatness, its prosperity, its happiness, and the safety and stability of its government, than he who augments its resources of wealth and power and territory, and means of hostile aggression. The best educated, and the most moral people; and above all, the people among whom there is the most extensive prevalence of the principles of true religion, will invariably be, as they are the best, the happiest people, and the throne of such a nation the most secure and well-established. The surest way to provide for the political and commercial prosperity of BRITAIN is to seek the advancement in her of knowledge, religion, and sound morality,-in the train of which all else that is good will securely follow. And this implies, that we use such influence as we have, in a legitimate form, to avert such measures as might tend to the deterioration of the country, directly or indirectly, in her most important interests,-by multiplying temptations to crime, and, through the abridgment of the resources for obtaining education to the rising generation, ensuring ignorance, with all its wretched results, as the future character of the community.

Finally, whatever, in the form of good, is true of the best princes on earth, is all true, without the slightest alloy or drawback, of the King of Zion. His abhorrence of evil is infinite. The authority and the certain efficacy of His word are absolute. Every sentence of His is truly "a divine sentence" worthy of being executed, and as sure as it is worthy. Fearful and fatal are the effects of His displeasure, and the excellence of His favour is above all price. O! if you would deprecate the anger, and desire the favour of a fellow-creature who had it even in his power to kill the body, or to ruin your interests for time; how can you think of living for another day, another hour, another moment, under the frown of God, and in a state of exposure to His wrath? Truly may it be said of this wrath, "a wise man will pacify it." But there is no way which human wisdom could ever have devised to "pacify it." It can be pacified towards you-not by any means of your own devising, but only by your acquiescing in that which God has devised. The Lord Jesus Christ is your peace. In Him Jehovah is well pleased. In Him he waits to be gracious. He has no pleasure in sending against you the messengers of death, but rather delights in waiting over your souls as a cloud of the latter rain, ready to discharge its shower of blessing!

43-Pro_16:16-26

Proverbs 16:16-26

LECTURE XLIII.

Proverbs 16:16-26.

"How much better is it to get wisdom than gold? and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver? The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul. Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better is it to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good; and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he. The wise in heart shall be called prudent; and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning. Understanding is a well-spring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly. The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death. He that laboureth, laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him." The first of these verses might be taken in connexion with what immediately precedes. In the fourteenth verse, one of the benefits of wisdom is mentioned; namely, it’s suggesting to its possessor the desirableness, and the most eligible means, of evading impending danger from the displeasure of those in authority: "The wrath of the king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it." In this respect, then, "How much better is it to get wisdom than gold? and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver?" What wisdom thus effects, riches cannot. Wealth, and its attendant influence, may even lead to the opposite result-exciting the prince’s jealousy; and where they are possessed without wisdom, they are the more likely to produce this evil. And if ordinary wisdom is, on such accounts, preferable to riches-O how strongly does the sentiment apply to true, heavenly, divine wisdom, as delivering from the wrath not of any mere earthly monarch, but of the "King of kings," the Ruler of the universe!*

* On the general sentiment, in regard to wisdom, see Proverbs 3:15-18; Proverbs 4:7; Proverbs 8:10-11; Proverbs 8:18-21. The same lesson, under another form, is conveyed by the next verse, "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul."-"The highway" is the way which Jehovah, the God of heaven, has "cast up." It is the way of the "upright"-the way of God’s people; and it is "to depart from evil." As the man who has turned his back upon a place, taking the road that leads most directly from it, and anxiously pressing on in that road, to get as fast and as far from it as possible,-so is "the upright" man in regard to sin. He has turned his back upon it. He has, with decided step, taken God’s "highway" and will not be tempted into any of sin’s devious paths: for well he knows that he, and he only, "that keepeth his way"-the way of faith and obedience; the faith of God’s truth, and the obedience of God’s precepts, "preserveth his soul."

Verse 18. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."* Many are the exemplifications of this left on record in God's word. It was when Nebuchadnezzar's heart was lifted up with pride-when in a spirit of self-elation he said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" that he was visited with the most humiliating of heaven's chastisements; until he was constrained to acknowledge Jehovah's supremacy, and to publish the lesson-"Them that walk in pride He is able to abase." It was when his son Belshazzar "humbled not himself, though he knew this, but lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven," and "praised the gods of silver and gold," and profaned the sacred vessels of Jehovah, bringing upon himself the charge-"The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified"-that his doom was written on his palace-wall by the hand of mystery and dread; and that night the terrible doom fulfilled.-And in the experience of his people God has often checked and punished the obnoxious principle. David suffered for it when he numbered the people; and Hezekiah suffered for it when he made his ostentatious display to the ambassadors of Babylon.

* See Proverbs 11:2; Proverbs 15:25; Proverbs 15:33, &c.

Verse Proverbs 16:19. "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud." In many respects "it is better." The spirit of the humble is contented, unaspiring, cheerful, submissive; and happier by far is this spirit than that of "the proud:" who may indeed have the temporary advantage-may "divide the spoil"-may obtain and exult over the plunder of their fallen rivals-may revel in the attainment of their property and their honour: but, after all, their riches and their glory are no more than- "--------meteors in the midnight sky, That glitter for a while and die."

They "flash, and fade." The higher their elevation, the deeper their fall. The brighter their splendour, the gloomier the darkness by which it is succeeded! The connexion is sufficiently natural between this verse and what follows. Pride renders him who is the subject of it hasty and rash. Impatient precipitation is one of its distinctive features. Humble-mindedness is necessary to steady, cautious, discreet action. Hence, "he that handleth a matter wisely shall find good." The obvious sense is-that thorough understanding of business and prudent management of it, tend to ensure a prosperous issue. And if the business is another's, the intelligent, cautious, successful conducting of it, will procure benefit by the favour it conciliates, and the character it establishes. One business well conducted brings a man another. This is the way to get forward in the world. And in proportion as the intrusted transaction is difficult and delicate, will the "handling of it wisely" prove advantageous.-Still there is no amount of human understanding and discretion that can render success in any transaction certain. The result rests with God. Hence a very natural connexion of the latter clause of the verse with the former:-"And," or but, "whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." Here is the true secret of happiness-the union, in all things, of prudence and diligence, with trust in God. Trust must be associated with effort. And when it pleases God, after all has been done within the limits of human power, to withhold the blessing, our happiness lies in the faith that all is well;-that God sees it to be so,-and that, had we the eye of God-the eye that "seeth the end from the beginning," we should be fully satisfied of this; and discover that any change, such as would have conformed the result more to our anticipations and wishes, would have been "for the worse." It is also a comfort and satisfaction, when we are disappointed, to feel that we have "done what we could." Disappointment is thus resolved into the will of God; whose will, while

sovereign, is ever determined by a wisdom incapable of error, a faithfulness incapable of failure, and a love incapable of any step really and ultimately injurious to its objects,-and thus the heart is at rest in the Lord.

Let it be further observed, that "handling a matter wisely'" does not mean handling it cunningly, with artifice and what the apostle calls "fleshly wisdom"-the policy of this world; but with a wisdom and prudence in harmony with the most rigid and straightforward integrity. Double-dealing may be misnamed wisdom; the arts of a tortuous cunning may be dignified with the designation of prudence; but when such wisdom, such prudence, has been employed, even the greatest amount of success can impart little that deserves the name of happiness. There can be none, where conscience interferes, and inserts its secret envenoming sting. And no man who is using the arts of a crooked policy can exercise trust in God. The two things are incompatible. Who can unite disobedience and confidence? What! act in opposition to the precepts of Him who "desireth truth in the inward parts," and yet profess to trust in him for success! Look for God's blessing on the violation of God's will! That were infatuation indeed! How could David trust in God for the success of his plan against Uriah the Hittite-a plan to accomplish adultery by murder? There was art in it; but there was not wisdom. The art was the art of hell; and success left a barb rankling in the soul.

Verse Proverbs 16:21. "The wise in heart shall be called prudent; and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning." Some translators invert the first part of the verse-"The prudent shall be called wise in heart." There is no need for any such change. "The wise in heart" are those who, under the influence of sound principles, know how to "order their affairs with discretion." Men of the most splendid powers and attainments are not always the most remarkable for practical good sense. Better, therefore, in many respects, is the man whose wisdom regulates his temper and affections, his words and actions, aright. That is far more important, for the production of personal and social happiness, than the most brilliant genius without it.-He "shall be called prudent," means his having a character for it-his being looked up to, respected, consulted, confided in, chosen as an adviser. Such a man is more truly valuable and useful, than the man of mere learning, who has not discretion and common sense to guide the use of it. We see the effect of the manifestation of "wisdom of heart" in procuring reputation and inspiring confidence, in the case of Solomon in his first recorded act of judgment-1 Kings 3:28.

It is, at the same time, of great moment, that along with the possession of wisdom and prudence, there be "the sweetness of the lips"-or honeyed lips-gentleness and persuasiveness of counsel-impressive eloquence of speech: which gives vast advantage in the application of wisdom for the benefit of others. It " increaseth learning"-effectually spreading it-rendering others wise as well as the possessor himself.

If the "wise in heart" be understood of the truly, spiritually, divinely wise, then the phrase "shall be called prudent" must be interpreted, according to a common Hebrew idiom, as meaning "is prudent"-deserves to be so called. The sentiment will thus be the oft-repeated one, that true religion is the only genuine prudence. And is it not so? we ask anew. Take as a standard the ordinary maxims of prudence among men. Is it the part of prudence to be considerate? to look forward? to anticipate, as far as possible, the contingencies of the future? to provide against evil? to make sure of lasting good? Then is true religion the very perfection of prudence. It secures the happiness of both worlds; the most substantial enjoyment in this, and eternal life in the next. These

ordinary maxims of prudence would more than justify no small sacrifices in the present life-nay even the endurance of continued privation and suffering during the entire course of it,-were the result to be, insuring the blessedness of a never-ending existence. It is capable of more than demonstration-it is intuitively manifest-that if life were prolonged to an antediluvian continuance, it would be the part of wisdom cheerfully to submit to have Methuselah's nine hundred and sixty-nine years filled up every moment with the most intense and varied of torments, were these to secure the happiness of eternity-of which nine hundred and sixty-nine times that period does not so much as form a part! It would, beyond all controversy, be a bargain of prudence. But, blessed be God! there is no call to any such purchase. "Godliness has promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come." The ways of true religion are even here "ways of pleasantness and peace."

Verse Proverbs 16:22. "Understanding is a well-spring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly." *1 "Understanding" must here be taken in its highest acceptation, as synonymous with spiritual illumination-the divinely imparted discernment of the truth and excellence of divine discoveries. For, although even the ordinary exercise of intellect, in the acquisition and use of general knowledge, is, without doubt, a source of real enjoyment, and may, in an inferior sense, be called a "well-spring of life"-one of the fountains from which the happiness of life is drawn; yet the expression, as it occurs in Scripture, means something more-even a spring from which life itself is obtained-a life-giving spring; and the life that is yielded is the happy life that lies in God's favour. The spiritual understanding of divine truth is "a well-spring of life" to the person himself who possesses it,-and it is a fountain from which streams of life-giving influence flow forth to others. Let me refer you to two passages for illustration. Our Lord says-"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." *2 The words express two things,-first, that the thing known is the ground of eternal life; and secondly, that the knowledge of it is the principle of eternal life. He who, by the illumination of the Spirit, possesses this knowledge, has, in his mind and heart, the essential element of the life-the germ from which it springs-its "incorruptible seed." Jesus further says,"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."*3 It matters little whether the water that Christ gives be interpreted of the water of divine instruction, or of the Holy Spirit's influence; for the two are inseparable. It is the Spirit imparting divine knowledge,-or it is divine knowledge imparted by the Spirit,-that becomes, in him who enjoys it, this "well of water"-"the water of life."

*1 Compare Proverbs 13:16; and Proverbs 14:27. rr *2 Gospel of John 17:3. rr *3 Gospel of John 4:13-14.

And, as I have remarked, it sends forth streams for the benefit of others;-becomes not only a living but a life-giving fountain. Thus Jesus says of the Spirit-"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."* The instructions of the spiritually enlightened man are life-giving instructions.

* See John 7:37-39.

"But the instruction of fools is folly." These words are capable of two senses. 1. They may mean that the instruction imparted to fools is like themselves:-what can come out of a fool but folly? 2. They may mean that the instruction imparted to fools is labour lost,-the attempt to teach them,

folly. From the antithesis in the verse, the former seems the more likely sense. What comes from the mouth must correspond with what is within:-and this is true, both as to temporal and as to spiritual things. The next verse proceeds on the same general principle, and may serve for the further illustration of this-" The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips."

1. That which the wise man utters is in itself good-instructive, edifying, "profitable to direct." The streams bear analogy to the fountain.

2. The wise man uses the understanding, the wisdom and knowledge, imparted to him, for the benefit of others. The wisdom that is in his heart passes to his lips. All that he knows, he seeks to turn to use, as "a good steward of the manifold grace of God."

3. His self-knowledge-his experience of his own heart-his incessant self-inspection-his intimate acquaintance with the secret tendencies and workings of his own mind, in the various scenes and circumstances of life-his knowledge both of "the old man" and of "the new man" in their respective principles and influences, as they exist and contend within himself-all qualify him for wisely and judiciously counselling others, according to their characters and situations:-for "as in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man." There may be, there are, many varieties of peculiar character; but the great general features both of corruption and of grace are the same in all; and an intimate experimental acquaintance with them in their diversified and conflicting operations in the soul, is a most important qualification of a spiritual teacher and counsellor-rendering him at once discerning and humble; the discernment dictating the appropriate counsel, and the humility imparting to it its appropriate tone. Which leads me to notice-

4. The truly wise man will, in his wisdom, accommodate the manner of his instructions and counsels to the varying characters and tempers of his fellow-men. A vast deal depends on this. The end is often lost, not for want of wisdom in the lesson itself, but for lack of discretion in the mode of imparting it. A thorough knowledge of anatomy is necessary to a judicious and successful practice in the operations of surgery. Ere he venture to make his incision, the surgeon ought to understand all about the region where it is to be made,-what arteries, veins, glands, nerves, lie in the way of his instrument;-and should be fully aware of the peculiarities of the case under his treatment. In like manner an intimate acquaintance with the anatomy of the heart is necessary to discriminative and successful dealing with moral cases-to the suitable communication of instruction and advice. Without the surgical knowledge mentioned, a practitioner may inflict a worse evil than the one he means to cure. And so, through ignorance of moral anatomy, may the injudicious adviser,-who treats all cases alike, and makes no account of the peculiarities of character and situation with which he has to do.

Verse Proverbs 16:24. "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."-Honey was prized by those of old time, not only as a luxury to the palate, but on account of its medicinal and salutary properties. To this there is an allusion here. The words express the twofold idea of pleasantness and of benefit. Many things have the one quality, which have not the other. Many a poison is like honey, sweet to the taste; but, instead of being "health to the bones," is laden with death. So may it be in regard to their present effect and their ultimate influence, with words.

Harshness and severity never afford pleasure, and seldom yield profit. If they were, in any case, requisite to the latter, we should be under the necessity of giving it the preference, for profit must ever take precedence of mere pleasure. But it will usually be found that both are united. Pleasant words, however, must be distinguished from flattering words. The latter may at the time be palatable, but they can never be otherwise than injurious; for they are not words of truth.

"Pleasant words" may be understood of words of soothing sympathy and comfort in the season of trouble. These are indeed "sweet to the soul" of the disconsolate mourner; and they are strength to all the principles of rectitude within him. For in regard to consolation, as in regard to everything else, the pleasant words must be true words. If not, the consolation cannot be true consolation, and will prove bitterness in the latter end.

"Pleasant words" again may be understood of the gentle though firm language of needful and salutary reproof. Such reproof must be administered in faithfulness and love; as little in the terms of angry severity as affectionate fidelity will allow. "A soft tongue breaketh the bone." Faithfulness may be maintained in perfect harmony with gentleness. He is in a mighty mistake, who fancies he cannot be faithful otherwise than by being high, and violent, and dictatorial. There are varieties of temper, no doubt, to be dealt with; but, in general, one word of manifestly sincere affection will go further towards our object-"the gaining of our brother,"-than a hundred of intemperate invective. If we have a bitter or otherwise disagreeable medicine to administer, we are desirous, in proportion to its own nauseousness, to convey it in a pleasant vehicle. Thus should we do with reproof. It is itself bitter-in some cases most unpalatable. Let it be administered in honey-the honey of "pleasant words." It will thus be the better taken; and indeed in this case-in the case of moral distemper and moral influence-the sweetness of the accents will contribute to the efficacy of the medicine of reproof that is conveyed in them. The more distasteful we know any advice to be, while we know it at the same time to be salutary, the more reason is there for the words in which it is communicated to be "pleasant words."-In the case of the body, we must not sacrifice the health to the mere gratification of the palate; but, on the other hand, it would be untender and harsh, to make the potion on purpose bitter and nauseous, when the health does not at all require our doing so, but would be equally the better for it, if taken in a pleasant as if taken in an unpleasant vehicle,-in honey as in gall. The same observation may be applied to all controversy.

If our object be to convince and to reclaim,-to disabuse the mind of error and to recommend truth,-we do what lies in our power to frustrate that object when we make use of irritating words,-words of contempt and of anger,-words of personality and violence. The maxim ought ever to be-"Soft words and hard arguments." Soft words are not weak and tame words. In proportion to the importance and certainty of our position must our words be decided and strong. But they may be both, and yet words of love; both as to our subject, while they are gentle and pleasant to our adversary’s person. The two should ever be kept distinct. And the more important our subject, and the more solicitous we are to make a favourable impression in regard to our view of it, the more solicitous should we be to shun all that might prove repulsive and provoking. For the illustration of the twenty-fifth verse the reader is referred to Proverbs 14:12, where the same sentiment occurs.

Verse Proverbs 16:26. "He that laboureth, laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him."-A rendering considerably different, and conveying quite a different sentiment, has by some critics been given of this verse; and the sense in which they understand it is supported by the authority of

the Septuagint:-"The troublesome person troubleth himself; for his mouth turneth upon him." The sentiment thus extracted from the words is one of which the truth is many a time realized; namely, that the evil which the troublesome man utters, and by which he vexes, disquiets, and injures others, shall ultimately return in damage to himself. It does so amongst men, by his becoming the object of universal suspicion, distrust, and resentment-hated and shunned; and in his misfortunes unpitied. And from God he receives his due recompense. He makes his evil dispositions his tormentors and punishers; causes his words to betray and injure himself; and in the end requites him according to his illdeserts.

While this is a truth, I am inclined to regard it as somewhat a forced and unnatural interpretation of the original words, and our own received translation as simpler and preferable: "He that laboureth, laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him"-or presseth on him-or urgeth it on him.*1 The sentiment is, that hunger is the incentive to labour. Man must have sustenance, and to obtain it he must work. He who will not work must starve. In "the sweat of his face" must man eat his bread. In civilized life, no doubt, there are many artificial wants. Various luxuries are desired, in addition to the means of subsistence and even the comforts of life. But the original, the primary and proper impulse to labour is, the necessity and the "craving" for food. This is first. Other things are superinduced upon it.*2

*1 "The appetite of him who toils, is toilsome to him, (i.e. makes him strenuously exert himself) for his mouth urgeth him on (i.e. for appetite is urgent)."-Stuart.

*2 Ecclesiastes 6:7.

Let not the sentiment before us, however, be misinterpreted and abused, as if it savoured of selfishness, or was meant to give it any countenance. It does not mean that the labour of man ought to be, or even that it may lawfully be, solely for himself-for his own mouth alone. There are other and ulterior objects of labour. There is nothing selfish in the pervading spirit, or in any one precept, of the word of God. A noble and exalted motive to labour is laid down by the Apostle Paul-"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth," Ephesians 4:28. There is thus infused into the toils even of the humblest sphere the principle and spirit of benevolence. A man must, in the first instance, labour for himself and for his family:-his own mouth and theirs "crave it of him." But when he has a little-how little soever-to spare, he is to indulge the sympathies of his heart for others, who may be still worse off than himself. And let it not by any be forgotten,-especially in these times of hardship,-how distressing it is, when a man is disposed to labour, and, with all his anxiety and pains, cannot find work to do! Such industrious poor ought to be pitied and relieved; and everything done that can be done, to open for them permanent sources of employment and comfort, both by individuals and by the government of the country.

Alas! that the craving of the mouth for "the meat that perisheth" should be so universal, and should keep the whole world ever astir, while there is so little desire after "the meat which endureth unto everlasting life." Alas, that there should be so little labouring for it-for "the bread that came down from heaven to give life unto the world!"-that the prayer of felt necessity and earnest desire should come from so few lips-"Lord, evermore give us that bread!" Why is it so? Simply because the wants of the body are felt, and not those of the soul; the necessity of providing for the present life, and not that of providing for the life to come. O that men were wise! that they would attend to the

gracious and faithful admonition and counsel of the "Friend of sinners"-"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you!" Mark well his solemn words-"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." Labouring implies some impression of the value of that for which we make the exertion. O the preciousness of life eternal!-and consequently of the means of obtaining it-the "living bread-the bread of life!" There is no labour that would be too much for this. But it is offered to sinners as God's free gift, "without money and without price." When a sinner, however, has believed the gospel,-has felt his destitution and his need,-and the value of the life which the gospel reveals, what toil, what self-denial, what sacrifices, will he not submit to, with cheerfulness, for its final and full attainment! * * Compare 2 Corinthians 5:9; Php 3:8-10. In conclusion-1. If it be a truth that "happy is he who trusteth in the Lord," then "lie not against the truth," by professing to trust, and yet shewing none of the peace and joy which such trust should inspire. If you betray the same anxiety and carefulness, the same trepidation, the same fretful disquietude in disappointment, which are shown by the men of the world,-well may they ask, Where is your religion?-and throw the further question in your teeth, "What do ye more than others?" O manifest its happy tendency; doing your duty with active cheerfulness,-blessing God if you succeed, and bowing, and still blessing Him if you fail.

2. Study to ascertain your respective talents,-and without "thinking of yourselves more highly than you ought to think, but thinking soberly," use them for the glory of your Master, and for the benefit of your fellow-men. Knowledge of business and of the world; knowledge of divine truth and of the things of God;-wisdom and experience in the affairs of life, or in spiritual concerns;-the power of speech and persuasive address;-all descriptions of authority and influence,-whatever it be by the use of which you may be useful, employ it with this view;-whether it be in instructing the ignorant, in counselling the heedless, in establishing the unsettled, in comforting the cast down, in directing the perplexed, in pleading the cause of the injured, in warning and strengthening the tempted, in reclaiming the wandering, in cheering the pilgrims on their way to Zion.

3. We have been speaking of the importance of accommodating instruction and counsel to character and situation: there is one character and one situation that is common to All-all differing, yet all alike. Sinner is the general character of mankind, without one exception; guilty and lost their universal condition. And for this common character and common condition, there is a common counsel-and there is but one:-"BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED."

44-Pro_16:27-33

Proverbs 16:27-33

LECTURE XLIV.

Proverbs 16:27-33.

"An ungodly man diggeth up evil; and in his lips there is as a burning fire. A froward man soweth strife; and a whisperer separateth chief friends. A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good. He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things; moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass. The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city. The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." In the first of these verses, "an ungodly man" is, in the original, "A son of Belial;"-a frequent designation of the wicked-of those who "have no fear of God before their eyes." In the expression "diggeth up evil" two ideas may be included:-

1. Taking pains to devise it. We dig and search for treasure in a mine, or where we fancy it lies concealed: thus the wicked man, the "son of Belial," does in regard to "evil." It is his treasure-that on which he sets his heart; and for it, as for treasure, he "digs" and searches,-ay, often deep and long. His very happiness seems to depend on his reaching and finding it. He is specially laborious and persevering, when any one chances to have become the object of his pique or malice. Marvellous is the assiduity with which he then strains every nerve to produce mischief,-plodding and plotting for it,-mining and undermining,-exploring in every direction, often where no one could think of but himself,-and, with savage delight, exulting in the discovery of aught that can be made available for his diabolical purpose.

2. Taking pains to revive it, after it has been buried and forgotten. He goes down into the very graves of old quarrels; brings them up afresh; puts new life into them; wakes up grudges that had long slept; and sets people by the ears again, who had abandoned their enmities, and had for years been living in reconciliation and peace. As to "evil," whether old or new, "the son of Belial" is like one in quest of some mine of coal or of precious metal. He examines his ground; and wherever he discovers any hopeful symptoms on the surface, he proceeds to drill, and bore, and excavate. The slightest probability of success will be enough for his encouragement to toil and harass himself night and day until he can make something of it. The persevering pains of such men would be incredible were they not sadly attested by fads:-"They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep." * * Comp. Psalms 64:1-6. The latter part of the verse corresponds well with the former-"And in his lips there is as a burning fire." This is a contrast to the "pleasant words" of the 24th verse. The "burning fire" is the fire of pride, of passion, or of lust:-perhaps, from the immediate connexion, words such as serve for kindling the flames of contention and discord, whether in families, or in the circles of intimacy and friendship, to which his malignant influence finds access. The heart burns

with envy and malice; and the words of the lips get their fire from within; both, in the strong terms of the Apostle James, being "set on fire of hell."-The three following verses continue the description of these "sons of Belial."*

* They bear a close resemblance, in the spirit of the character they describe, to previous passages-Proverbs 1:10-14; Proverbs 2:10-15; Proverbs 6:12-14.

Verse Proverbs 16:28. "A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends." They try, wherever they can find any even the smallest room for them, to insert the seeds of animosity; and, with a devilish interest, they watch their secret germination and their gradual growth. They suit their practice to the particular case:-more open and direct in the means they use in one case; more covert and cunning in another.

"Whispering" is one of their favourite resources. This whispering is carried on with both parties,-while each is kept in careful ignorance of what is said of him to the other. Insinuations, intended to engender suspicion and jealousy, are thrown out to the one and to the other respecting his friend. Mutual coolness ensues, and neither can understand why; each wonders what can possibly be the cause. And thus the firmest, the longest, the warmest, and most confiding attachments-the sources of life’s sweetest joys-are broken up, perhaps for ever.

These sons of Belial are also tempters of others:-Verse Proverbs 16:29. "A violent man enticeth his neighbour, and leadeth him into the way that is not good." A fearful employment-a fearful delight! Yet the employment would not be followed, were there not pleasure in it. The pleasure is fiendish-laying plans, and putting every vile art into practice, to seduce the virtuous-and especially virtuous and unsuspecting youth-from the way of rectitude! Not the young only entice one another; but men of gray hairs,-the veterans of infidelity and vice, may be found weaving their nets for the feet of virtue, and spreading them with all subtlety and care. There is not on earth a more perfect impersonation of Satanic malignity than such a hoary-headed seducer. As "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth," so is there a malicious joy in hell when such tempters succeed in turning any from the right to the wrong, from the narrow to the broad, way. This is the joy of fiends; the other of angels: the one the joy of Satan; the other of Jesus and of God. The character is completed in verse Proverbs 16:30-" He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things: moving his lips he bringeth evil to pass." A man "shuts his eyes," when he wishes to think closely and undistractedly. "The ungodly man" does it for the purpose of planning and maturing "mischievous devices." When he "shuts his eyes" even in bed, while others sleep, it is to meditate on schemes of evil. And then, having digested his schemes inwardly, he employs his "lips" in their artful accomplishment. Thus mind and mouth are in concert for evil-the latter the agent and servant of the former."* * Comp. Psalms 36:1-4. The connexion of suggestion is abundantly manifest between the description in these verses and the verse which follows: "The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." The little word if is a supplement. The verse may be read without it. "The hoary head is a crown of glory; it shall be found in the way of righteousness." Two things are implied:-the conduciveness of righteousness to the attainment of old age, and its conduciveness to the respectability and honour of old age. The former sentiment we have noticed, under other forms, before: it expresses rather a natural tendency than anything like an invariable fact.* The latter is the same with that expressed when the if is retained.

* See Proverbs 3:1-2; Proverbs 9:10-11.

Respect and honour, as due to age, are enjoined by the Mosaic law: "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am Jehovah," Leviticus 19:32. As there is a respect due to office independently of character, so is there to old age-to gray hairs. But as, in the former case, our very veneration for the office makes us the more indignantly sensible of its desecration, by the intrusion and occupancy of characters whose incongruity with it is marked and notorious, so is it with our feelings as to age. The more we venerate "the hoary head," the more are we shocked by its association with meanness and vileness of character,-with impiety and vice. A wicked old man-a man silvered with age-who has come to the "threescore years and ten," or even the "fourscore years," but on whom long and varied experience,-warnings and entreaties, blessings and corrections, kindness and severity, promises to allure and threatenings to alarm, the smiles of a gracious and the frowns of an angry God, the terrors of the law and the mercies of the gospel, have all been equally thrown away;-whose advancing years have only ripened him in profanity and sin,-who has become only more and more "wise to do evil," "but to do good" continues to have "no knowledge," and who, while "even to hoar hairs" providential goodness has spared him, has still "no fear of God before his eyes:"-shall I say of such a man he is a contemptible character? I might say it. with truth. "Shame and everlasting contempt" are before him as his portion. Yet scorn is too light a feeling for the case. He is a character on which we do not so much look with contempt, as with loathing and with pity. We shrink back from the hoary profligate with a shudder. Venerable in appearance, he is in reality odious. The aspect and the character are at variance. We are struck with admiration, when we only see what he looks:-we are disappointed and overwhelmed with horror, when we know what he is. There is no glory; nothing to admire. "The hoary head" becomes a crown of shame. In proportion to the grace and dignity, it may be, of the outward appearance, by which our eye is captivated and our favour bespoke, is the emotion of disgust, detestation, and grief, with which we hear the disclosures of the character. It is the most affecting sight on earth. We cannot smile; we can hardly scorn. We abhor, and we compassionate-abhor the character-compassionate the man. On the contrary-"the crown of glory is found in the way of righteousness." With what peculiar heartfelt delight do we regard the good old man, who during a long pilgrimage has "walked with God;" whom length of days has matured in wisdom and in all the lovely virtues of the Christian character; who by the exercise of all the kindred affections, and by the habitual practice of all that is "true, and just, and pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report," under the dominant influence of the spring of all-piety towards God,-has recommended himself to the reverence and love of a grateful and admiring community, at the same time that he has endeared himself to the entire circle of his family and kindred!-how we cling to him!-how we esteem and honour him! He has the complacent and affectionate veneration of all the good;-and in the consciences of an ungodly world he has a testimony they cannot set aside. They are constrained to approve and to admire; even while their hearts retain their unhappy disinclination to imitate,-their infatuated attachment to the world and to sin.

Look at old Jacob, the devout patriarch of "a hundred and seven and thirty years," before the monarch of Egypt. Look at Abraham bowing himself to the children of Heth, while the hearts of all around him bowed in affectionate veneration to himself! Look at the aged Simeon, with the infant Redeemer in his arms; with earth under his feet and heaven in his eye; and with the glory of God, and the salvation of the world, Jew and Gentile, in his devout and benevolent heart! And look at others,-many, both men and women, in Old and New Testament times, to whom age has been

honour,-" the hoary head, the crown of glory, being found in the way of righteousness."

Ye aged pilgrims, mark this. Ye have been kept by the grace of God to advanced years in the faith and holiness of his people, beware of whatever would sully your "crown of glory." See to it, that to the end you keep in "the way of righteousness." It is when the life has been passed in that way, and a consistent character has throughout been maintained, that the glory of this crown is the greatest. But even to those who have spent a long lifetime without God, in the ways of sin and the world, we have the full warrant of God's word for saying, It is not yet too late. "While the lamp holds on to burn," the oldest as well as "the vilest sinner"-ay, though he be the oldest and the vilest in one-" may return." It is not too late for you even now, to cover your hoar hairs with "the honour that cometh from God." God will honour all, of whatever age-and the saints of God will honour them, and the angels of God will honour them, and rejoice over them too,-who turn unto Him, by Jesus Christ, as penitent and believing suppliants for mercy, confessing and forsaking their sins, and avowing and practising the determination "no longer to live the rest of their time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." And let the young mark this. You wish to live to old age; and you wish, in old age, to have respect and honour. Behold the way. O follow those aged pilgrims who are now wearing "the crown of glory." They have found it in "the way of righteousness;" and that way you must pursue, if you would ever wear it. And the earlier you enter on it, and the more steadfastly and consistently you keep it, the more lovely and the more venerable will be your crown. Let all, in youth, in manhood, or in age, remember the words of Jesus-" If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour" John 12:26. And then-even if men should "cast out your name as evil," blessed are ye!-blessed now-blessed for ever! The "crown of glory" shall be yours, "that fadeth not away."

"The mighty"-the conquering heroes and warriors of successive ages, have ever stood high in honour and fame amongst mankind. To such has been attached the appellative surname of the great. They have been celebrated in history and in song. Their names have become the watchwords of excitement to deeds of valorous achievement, and have been enrolled in the archives of a nation's glory. But according to the wise man, speaking by the Spirit of God, the best of all conquests is the conquest of one's self; and self-command the most truly excellent and desirable of all supremacy:-" He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." (Proverbs 16:32. *Compare Proverbs 14:28; Proverbs 15:18)-In the first place, he accomplishes a more difficult task. To indulge passion is easy; because it is natural,-all being, according to the tendencies of fallen nature, prone to it. The poet expresses the sentiment and feeling of that nature, when he says, "But oh! revenge is sweet!" To follow, therefore, the bent and tendency of our nature, requires no struggle, and, being common to all, involves no distinction. But to keep the passions in check,-to bridle and to deny them; instead of letting loose our rage against an enemy, to subdue him by kindness,-" when he hungers to feed him, when he thirsts to give him drink;"-this is one of the severest efforts of virtuous or of gracious principle. The most contemptible fool on earth may send a challenge, and draw a trigger; and, indeed, his readiness to do so will be in proportion to his imbecility of mind,-the littleness of self-importance. It requires no great amount of brains to quarrel and fight. But to lay passion under restraint,-to keep down the risings of pride,-not to be "overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good,"-demands a vigour of mind, and decision of character, far more difficult of acquisition than

the thoughtless courage that can stand the fire of an adversary.-Then further, he does a greatly better and more useful thing. Universal self-government-universal command of temper,-would surely make an incomparably happier world, than universal pride, universal resentment, universal courage, and universal strength!

How widely different the maxims prevalent in the world and those sanctioned by the Word of God! According to the latter he is the truly great man,-not who destroys and lays waste cities, and desolates kingdoms, and wades through fields of bloody carnage to the utmost point of his ambitious aspiring; but who succeeds in subjugating his passions; who, by meekness and gentleness, diffuses peace and happiness around him; who "loves his enemies, does good to them that hate him, and prays for them who despitefully use him and persecute him," thus imitating the universal Father, who "makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." In reference to one of the warriors, or wholesale murderers and robbers of ancient days, who obtained the title of "The Great," it has been truly and happily said, "To subdue one’s self is more than to conquer the world; for he who conquered the world could not subdue himself."

Let us aim then at this mastery,-the mastery of the passions, the government of Self; and, in order to its attainment, keep in mind at once the need of divine grace, and the sufficiency of it for every one;-the need of it, that we may not fail through self-sufficiency, and the sufficiency of it, that we may not find an apology in the strength of our passions and the quickness and excitability of our natural temperament, for our failing to gain the ascendency. There are no passions so strong-no temperaments so excitable,-as to be beyond the power of divine grace to overcome; and that grace is promised, in unqualified terms,-and, therefore, in every case,-to the full extent in which it can be required, to all who ask it.-At the same time, let those of more phlegmatic temperament, and less violent passions than others, guard against two things,-mistaking in themselves the mere gentleness of constitutional temper for the operation of God’s Spirit; and being uncharitably severe on those whose temperament may be the opposite of their own, and, instead of having been restrained and subdued by early training, may have been only further cherished in its touchiness and fiery violence, by education and circumstances; and who may have actually overcome in themselves more than they have, although much remains to be subdued.

Verse Proverbs 16:33. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." The lot is anything, whether drawn or cast, for the purpose of determining any matter in question. The instances of its use mentioned in Scripture are considerably various:- 1. In finding out a guilty person when there was no direct and satisfactory evidence: (1 Samuel 14:38-42; Jonah 1:7).

2. In dividing and apportioning land: (Numbers 26:52-56.) 3. In the choice of an official functionary: (Acts 1:26.) 4. In assigning departments of duty: (1 Chronicles 24:4-5; 1 Chronicles 25:8.)

5. In deciding controversies: (Proverbs 18:18; Psalms 22:18. with John 19:23-24.) There are no particular laws, either enjoining or prohibiting the use of the lot;-specifying any occasions on which it must or must not be employed. The direction to use it, however, on certain special occasions, gave it a divine sanction. At the same time, from the fact of God’s commanding a particular mode of proceeding in a particular case, it would be rather a presumptuous and hazardous thing for any one to take upon him to determine in what other cases recourse may be had to the same practice. Even such texts as the one before us, are capable of being interpreted without inferring a certain

divine approval of the frequent or ordinary appeal to this mode of decision:-inasmuch as, whether the "casting of the lot into the lap" was of divine authority or not, it would be equally true that "the disposing thereof was of the Lord." It is very plain, that when it was had recourse to by Jews or Christians, it involved an appeal to the omniscient God. And one general principle regarding the employment of it is sufficiently manifest,-namely, that it should never be introduced except in cases where reason and evidence are incompetent to decide. And we may, I think, safely go so far as to affirm, that in cases of importance and of extremity,-that is, where other means of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion or a harmonious agreement have failed,-there does not appear to be anything in the Scriptures by which such an appeal can be considered as interdicted. There does not appear to be anything in it at all repugnant to the general character, or to any of the principles or provisions of evangelical or New Testament worship. Still, if there is nothing interdictory of the use of it, there is nothing that makes it obligatory in any specified circumstances; and it is clear that, if used at all, it should be seriously and sparingly. It is very wrong, and the very reverse of truth, to speak of any matter whatever as being in this way referred to chance. There is no such thing. Chance is nothing-an absolute non-entity. It is a mere term for expressing our ignorance. Every turn of the dice in the box is regulated by certain physical laws; so that if we knew all the turns, we would infallibly tell what number would cast up. And so it is in every thing.-Besides, in no case is there a more thorough disavowal of chance than in the use of the lot. It is the strongest and most direct recognition that can be made of a particular providence,-of the constant and minute superintendence of an omniscient overruling Mind. While it assumes our own ignorance, it equally assumes divine knowledge.-" The whole disposing" or determining, "of it is of the Lord:"-or, as some understand it, "the entire judicial decision by it is of the Lord." Whatever be the kind of lot employed, all is under His control, who has every law of nature, and every movement, whether of the hand or mind of man, under perfect and unceasing control. This is, or ought to be, the acknowledgment of the parties in every instance of recourse to this mode of settlement. The section of the Christian community among whom the use of the lot is most frequently resorted to is-the Moravians or United Brethren; among whom, indeed, the use of it is held as one of their distinguishing principles. It is employed in the selection of their bishops, according to the example of the choice of an apostle in the room of Judas, in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles;-as well as on various other occasions. By many pious persons the condemnation of all games that pass under the designation of games of chance has been rested on this text and others of the same description. I cannot but think, injudiciously. It is pushing the application of the principle of such texts to an extreme; and placing the objection to such games on a ground which, with many, can never prove convincing or satisfactory. The objection should not, I humbly conceive, be rested solely or chiefly on the consideration of these games being chance games. I have already said that there is no such thing as chance; and, when no such thing as an appeal to providence is at all thought of by the mind of the player, there is no more of impiety in this case than in "others without number, where there is nothing bearing even the name of chance, yet in which providence is not thought of. And when it is alleged that the lot has been rendered sacred by the use of it on sacred occasions, the objection does not seem to have force in it; inasmuch as it would lead to our drinking no water, and to our relinquishing the use of bread and of wine, because they too are all made use of in sacred institutions. I cannot help thinking that the objection against such games is more satisfactorily derived from their evil tendencies when indulged in, than from any mere abstract principle such as the one just mentioned. They involve a temptation to waste precious

time; they tend to unsettle and unduly excite the mind; they are fitted to engender a liking to gambling; they serve, in many cases, especially when stakes are introduced, to foment the worst passions. Yet even here discretion is required; for some of these evil tendencies attach equally to other pursuits which few think of sweeping within a verdict of universal and unqualified condemnation. We may safely say that, in the amusements of youth, the less of such games the better; and that in all cases they require to be under very judicious regulation and control. In some instances, they have become, from particular associations, no matter how, marks of a worldly character. In such cases, Christians will feel it their imperative duty to shun them. They will be shunned too, in cases where the introduction of them would give offence-I do not say to weak minds, because they are by no means all weak minds that object to them-but to scrupulous minds, that cannot see things in the same light with ourselves. And in one case more they ought to be shunned-when from our at all, however moderately, practising them, others are likely to plead our example in excuse for themselves, in going a length far beyond what we should regard as legitimate. This is not seldom the use made by worldly men of the example of Christians; and it should render Christians specially careful of the example they set.

Allow me to illustrate and confirm this last remark by an instance. It is taken from the life of the celebrated commentator Thomas Scott. Before the happy change in his views of divine truth, he himself informs us, he was particularly fond of cards. And although afterwards he had lost all his relish for them and other things of a like nature, he adds:-

"I however occasionally joined in a game, from an idea that too great preciseness might prejudice my neighbours; and I was then of opinion that there was no harm in the practice, though it seemed a frivolous way of spending time. I felt it also a very awkward transition to remove the card table and introduce the Bible and family worship; though I never omitted this service at home, and commonly performed it on my visits. My fetters were, however, broken effectually and at once, in the following manner. Being on a visit to one of my parishioners, I walked out after dinner, as was my common practice, to visit some of my poor people, when one of them (the first person, so far as I know, to whom my ministry had been decidedly useful) said to me- 'I have something which I wish to say to you; but I am afraid you may be offended.'

'I answered that I could not promise, but I hoped I should not.'

She then said-'You know A. B.; he has lately appeared attentive to religion; and has spoken to me concerning the sacrament:-but last night, he, with C. D. and some others, met to keep Christmas; and they played at cards, drank too much, and in the end quarrelled, and raised a sort of riot. And when I remonstrated with him on his conduct, as inconsistent with his professed attention to religion, his answer was-'There is no harm in cards; Mr. Scott plays at cards.' ' This smote me to the heart. I saw that if I played at cards, however soberly and quietly, the people would be encouraged by my example to go further. That very evening,' he adds, 'I related the whole matter to the company, and declared my fixed resolution, never to play at cards again. I expected that I should be harassed with solicitations; but I was never asked to play afterwards. Let me therefore from my own experience, as well as from the reason of the case, urge persons, from their first entrance upon a religious course, when asked to do any thing which they disapprove, fairly to state their disapprobation as a point of conscience. For not only is this most becoming those in whom there is no guile, but it is also by far the most prudent proceeding."*

* In the life of the same eminent commentator, another instance occurs of a similar kind:-"When I first attended seriously to religion, I used sometimes, when I had a journey to perform on the next day, to ride a stage in the evening, after the services of the Sabbath; and I trust my time on horseback was not spent unprofitably. But I soon found that this furnished an excuse to some of my parishioners, for employing a considerable part of the Lord’s day in journeys of business or convenience. I may scarcely add, that I immediately abandoned the practice, on the same ground on which I resolved never more to play at cards, even before I thought so unfavourably of them as I now do."

Lay to heart, brethren, this counsel, and, in like circumstances, follow the example of this "man of God." "Avoid all appearance of evil," and give no advantage to the enemies of the truth. Act boldly and faithfully for Christ, whose you are, and whom you profess to serve, and you will have an ample reward in peace of mind, and the approving smile of your exalted Lord.

45-Pro_17:1-7

Proverbs 17:1-7

LECTURE XLV.

Proverbs 17:1-7.

"Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife. A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren. The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts. A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue. Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker; and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished. Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers. Excellent speech becometh not a fool; much less do lying lips a prince." This chapter, you perceive, commences with a proverb much the same as others that have been already under our notice:*1-"Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife." The word "sacrifices" has reference to the practice of feasting on the flesh of the slain victims, when they were not holocausts-to be entirely consumed on the altar.*2 The preposition "with" is supplementary. The words have been rendered "sacrifices of strife;" that is, such as, in the appropriation and consumption of them, occasion contention and brawls. On the margin the proper sense of the word, in such a connexion, is evidently given-"a house full of good cheer with strife." I do not dwell now on the sentiment-the superiority of the feast of love-the feast of souls, to the banquet of royal dainties, where there is no heart. But let all feel its truth. Let the poor especially feel it, when called to partake of their frugal and necessarily stinted meals. If they sit down to these in the smiling cordiality of domestic love, and with the supplicated blessing of Him who "feeds the ravens" and "clothes the lilies of the field,"-they are happier far than those whose houses are full of good cheer; but full, along with it, of the bitterness of contention. Love sweetens the stinted portion, hatred embitters the full one.

*1 See Proverbs 15:16-17. rr *2 Compare 1 Samuel 9:12-13; 1 Samuel 9:22-24.

Verse Proverbs 17:2. "A wise servant shall have rule over a son that causeth shame, and shall have part of the inheritance among the brethren." The general maxim here is, that wisdom-true godly discretion-the exercise of genuine principle in steady fidelity, prudence, diligence, and general propriety of conduct,-tends to advancement-to elevate to higher station, and to secure approbation and reward. A servant whose character has been long tried and proved, will be highly respected and valued, and will obtain the most important trusts. Even the care of a refractory and wayward child may be committed to such a domestic, as one in whose fidelity and prudence the most entire confidence can be reposed. Or the phrase, "shall have rule over the son who causeth shame" may only signify his becoming the superior of such a son and heir, in the amount of his influence and weight in all domestic arrangements. Such a servant is a treasure in the family to which he or she belongs. And in many instances, with great propriety, have such servants found a

place among the legatees of their masters;-obtaining, as their reward, and their testimonial of grateful approbation, a portion of the family patrimony. This was the case of old, in a special manner, with servants who had been born and brought up in the family, or on the estate, and had worn out the vigour of their youth and manhood in the faithful service of the one or of the other. Such a servant to the patriarch Abraham was Eliezer of Damascus.

Let me say, then, to servants, that there is hardly any other class in society who have more in their power, in either promoting or preventing domestic comfort and happiness. By faithfulness, industry, good temper, and respectful demeanour,-by putting your hearts into the interests of the household with which providence has associated you, and identifying yourselves with its well-being, you effect the former; you make yourselves happy, and you contribute no unimportant share to the happiness of all around you. It is thus too that you render both your station and yourselves respectable and honourable. It is the man that adorns the station; not the station the man. The very highest station can never secure respect to the occupant who acts unworthily of it,-who disgraces it. On the contrary, the very contrast between the station and the character will serve to deepen the dark shades of the latter, and aggravate both private and public disrepute. The dutiful servant is incomparably the more honourable and entitled to respect when set in comparison with the mean, the unjust, or the profligate master. No station will detract from you, if you adorn the station. And then-while you gain and fix affectionate and grateful regard, and secure from every generous master and mistress an earthly recompense; if you act under the influence of gospel principles, and, in serving your earthly masters, "serve the Lord Christ," you will enjoy the smile of divine approval, and, in the end, obtain "the reward of the inheritance."* *See Colossians 3:22-24.

Verse Proverbs 17:3. "The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts."-There are two things effected on the silver and the gold when subjected to the process of the fining-pot, or crucible, and the furnace. These are-trial and purification; the first with a view to the second. Trial detects the proportion of extraneous matter in the ore,-or of alloy in the metal; and the process which detects, at the same time, and as the designed result, separates the extraneous matter, or the alloy, and by separation, purifies, and so renders the remainder the more precious.

"But the Lord trieth the hearts." It is obvious that a comparison is intended: "As the fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; so the Lord trieth the hearts." Trying is more than simply discerning. The Lord does not need to try, in order to make any discovery for himself. He "knoweth what is in man." But He "tries," in order to bring to light what may lie concealed from men, and especially from the individual himself. And this He does in order to the person’s conviction and benefit, and that He may be vindicated in his final judgments.

He "tries," in different respects, both "the wicked and the righteous." By the dispensations of his providence, He often elicits the latent evils that are in the hearts of the ungodly and the worldly. He brings out their hidden abominations. He manifests the deceitfulness, the hypocrisy, the "desperate wickedness," of their "inward parts,"-their rebellious and unsubdued dispositions. He exposes the simulation of dissemblers; and of those whose religion only seems to thrive when their profession of it brings no suffering and demands no sacrifice. How many has God thus tried and exhibited in their true characters!-how many has He thus "weighed in the balances, and found

wanting!"-In the same manner too does God try, and bring out to view the inward graces and virtues of his children. And, while disclosing, He refines and purifies them, He detects and removes the alloy-the dross and tin of self and the world; separating "the vile" from "the precious," and so rendering the precious the more excellent;-purging away the earthly from the heavenly, and bringing the heavenly out of the furnace more spiritual and divine.* * See Malachi 3:3-4; Zechariah 13:9; Isaiah 27:9; 1 Peter 1:7.

Let the Lord's people, then, in every season of affliction, seek above all things its refining virtue. Seek that, when "tried" you may "come forth as gold." O how sad to suffer, and not to profit! Pray that the gracious end of your heavenly Father may be answered in you; that you may be made more like himself,-more "holy as he is holy,"-more meet for heaven, while sojourning on earth:-that so you may not bear the heat of the furnace without acquiring the purity which the heat is meant to impart.

Verse Proverbs 17:4. "A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue." These words are capable of two meanings. They may mean, first, that the man is wicked who lends his ear to calumny and slander; who takes up, with easy and malicious credit, all injurious reports: and that he is deceitful and not to be trusted, who listens to and encourages the tongue of detraction and envy and inventive malignity,-gathering up evil, and making what he can of it for the stirring up of mischief.-Or rather, secondly, that the wicked and untruthful are prone to give heed to flattery of themselves, and calumny against others. The more ill they can hear of others, the better. They are supported and comforted by the knowledge that their neighbours are as bad as themselves or worse. They delight in "false lips" and in a "naughty tongue." They keep them in countenance. They furnish them with the means of evil, on which they can proceed in their own tales of falsehood and scandal-grafting one lie upon another, and forging all manner of calumnies. It is their highest gratification to get a good story, which they can turn to account in their own way.-"A wicked doer," too, "giveth heed to false lips;" because they are lips of which he can avail himself in time of exigency for his own safety. "A liar" is of essential use to the evil-doer. He can suborn him. He can get him to bear witness in his favour-to perjure himself to get him off, when in danger of being convicted.

Such characters too, it may be noticed, are fond of the lies of false teachers. They keep their ear greedily open to these. They are soothed and flattered and encouraged by them in their evil courses. They cannot but like the doctrine that allays their fears; that palliates sin; that makes light of future punishment; that tells them of a God all mercy; that assures them of ultimate universal salvation. Thus it was of old; and thus it is still.* * See for example Isaiah 30:9-11; Jeremiah 5:31.

O let thoughtless sinners beware of this wretched delusion! Lies may serve a present purpose; they may keep the mind easy for the time:-but their detection must come; and then the emphatic application of the prophet's question-"What will ye do in the end thereof?" It is strange how men should wish to be deceived; should be satisfied if they can but keep themselves in present quietness, though at the risk, or with the certainty, of everlasting disappointment, regret, and anguish. Be assured, my friends, they are not your enemies who "tell you the truth." The truth may agitate for the time-may give present pain; but it is salutary; it tends to everlasting benefit. They are not your enemies who warn you that "the wages of sin is death;" when they add with the same breath, that "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." They are not your

enemies who sound in your ears the terrors of a broken law, when they sound along with them the gracious promises of a divinely accredited gospel. They are not your enemies who tell you of the "wrath of God revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men," when they tell you, at the same time, of the love of God revealed to "the chief of sinners" in the cross;-of God’s delighting in mercy;-of "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."

Verse Proverbs 17:5. "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker; and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished." The poor are of two descriptions-the industrious and virtuous; the idle and profligate; the one, poor, not by their own misconduct, but in consequence of circumstances over which they could exercise no control; the other, poor through indolence and vice.-Mockery is not the sentiment for either. We do, indeed, regard the one and the other with feelings widely dissimilar. In the one case we approve, in the other we condemn; on the one we smile with complacency; on the other we frown with indignation; to the one we cheerfully stretch the hand of our bounty; from the other we hold it back, through a hesitating sense of duty, lest our beneficence should be abused, and bad made worse. We may see it right to allow them to feel the effects of their folly and sin, in order to their future good. The words before us have manifestly reference to the former-to those whom divine providence has placed in poverty and prevented from rising, or has been pleased, by what we are accustomed to call misfortunes, to reduce to poverty from a better condition. To "mock" at such is to "reproach their Maker." That Maker has assigned them their lot, and to mock them is to mock Him,-to mock the wisdom and the kindness of his administration. He who is the Maker of the poor is the Maker of the rich,-the Maker and Ruler of the mocker as well as of the object of his scorn. It is a sad thing when one "potsherd of the earth," because it happens to have got from the hand of the potter a little gilding and superficial decoration, mocks at another "potsherd of the earth" which chances to be somewhat more homely in its outward appearance, or perhaps formed of a little coarser material, than the other; both the work of the same hands, and both alike frail, brittle, and perishable.

It is one of the features of the divine greatness to regard the poor; and one of the features of human littleness to despise them. O what are all the distinctions of earthly condition in His eyes, who is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity!" That "high and lofty One" regards the man of low degree who "trembleth at his word," while the proud scorner of the poor he "knoweth afar off."-Vast is the multitude of poor amongst us at this moment. O let there be anything but "mockery"-anything but making light of their lamentable privations and sufferings! May God keep all, whether in private or public station, from thus reproaching their Maker, and provoking his wrath!* * See on Proverbs 14:20-21; Proverbs 14:31.

Verse Proverbs 17:6. "Children’s children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers." We have had one crown of old age before.*1 Here we have another. A numerous progeny was, among the Hebrews, an object of high estimation and earnest desire. In the Scriptures, we find the number of a man’s children frequently specified:-and at times it is represented as a token of divine favour and blessing.*2 As an example of one who enjoyed this crown, look at Joseph.*3 When we read the narrative of him, as the envied and persecuted stripling of seventeen, we feel towards him a warm and sympathising affection. But when we have followed him through all the intensely interesting steps of his history, and come to the touching close, we feel our affection for Joseph the youth, rise and ripen into veneration for Joseph the

aged-the hoary patriarch-in the midst of his descendants of four generations. All these look up to him, with deep reverential love, and honour him for his years, his character, and his paternal authority. They thus invest him with a respectability and dignity which, as a solitary individual, he could not have possessed.

*1 Proverbs 16:31. rr *2 See Psalms 128:6. rr *3 See Genesis 50:23. rr But this is not all that is intended. The meaning and truth of the saying depend greatly on the character of the children. It expresses what they ought to be.

This, then, implies the duty of parents, on the one hand, so to attend-diligently, affectionately, prayerfully, perseveringly, and with all the accompanying power of consistent example-to the education of their children, or, it may be, of their children's children,-as that they may be an honour to them,-and a comfort and support to their advancing and declining years-to the evening of their life's long day.-And it implies, on the other, the duty of children to be an honour to their fathers and grandfathers;-to lay to heart the influence which their behaviour cannot fail to have on the respectability, the character, the happiness of their parents.

Yes, my young friends; you may be their honour, or you may be their disgrace. "Which would you wish to be? If you are not "without natural affection," I need not answer the question. For your fathers' and mothers' sakes, then,-and to some of you I may say, for your grandfathers' and grandmothers' sakes, as well as for your own, let me urge you to goodness-to the adoption and cultivation of right principles, and especially of the principles of true godliness. O remember, that by one course of behaviour you will weave a garland of honour for the aged brows of those you love;-by another, you will encircle those brows with a crown of thorns,-ay, and, it may be, "bring down their gray hair with sorrow to the grave."

What an honour was young Timothy, who "from a child knew the holy Scriptures," to "his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice!" And what a stain upon his reputation-a sword in his bones-a weight of oppressive sadness on the spirit of his old age, were the profligate sons of Eli!-and Eli, let parents remember, was himself to blame; for "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

"And the glory of children are their fathers:"-that is, I need hardly say, when their fathers are what they ought to be; when by character they have earned for themselves general affection, esteem, reverence, and honour. When this is the case, these feelings naturally attach themselves to their descendants. And when children follow their example and conduct themselves aright, this serves to double their honour. "The sons are honoured in the honoured sires."

Alas! it is not always the case, that fathers are, as they ought to be, "the glory of their children." Too frequently are they the reverse. Their children and grandchildren have to struggle into life against all the disadvantage arising from the disreputable characters of their sires. Let parents bethink themselves of this. They do not stand alone in the effects of their evil ways. Whatever disgrace they incur becomes a drag upon their children's advancement. The child that comes of so disreputable a stock, is unavoidably regarded with a suspicious and uneasy jealousy. There is a fear to trust him; a fear that he may inherit his father's principles, and follow his father's example. The effects of the father's infamy thus descend to him; and if ever he rises above it, and by his virtuous, honourable, and pious behaviour, commands our confidence and esteem, our

admiration, respect, and love-no thanks to that father; he owes no part of it to him. It is self-acquired; or rather, let us say, he is indebted for it to the superintending providence and distinguishing mercy of Heaven; and he will be disposed, humbly and thankfully to say-"By the grace of God, I am what I am!"

Verse Proverbs 17:7. "Excellent speech becometh not a fool; much less do lying lips a prince." The plain sentiment of the first clause is, that the language of wisdom and piety is unsuitable to the lips of a foolish, unprincipled man:-rr

1. There is, what first and immediately strikes us, incongruity. To use the comparison of Solomon on another subject, it is "like a jewel of gold in a swine's snout." We wonder where the man can have got what he utters. "We are quite sure it is not his own. He gets no credit for it. The surprise we feel in hearing it, only awakens our attention the more to his folly and wickedness. The latter are the more strongly and loathingly impressed by the power of contrast. There is superadded to former impressions of his character, the further one of hypocrisy; and the suspicion of a mask assumed for some selfish end.

2. There is a total want of force, or weight, in such sayings from such lips. You all know and feel the native power of name and character. The sayings of one whose reputation is justly high for wisdom and goodness, are in danger at times of being received even too hastily. Whatever bears the "image and superscription" of such a man, we are ready to accept without testing or looking at it, as mint coin. On the contrary, and from the converse influence of the same principle, we suspect the sayings of the foolish. We shake our heads and say, We must think again, before we put our seal of acceptance on anything that comes from such a quarter. We must examine it; we must test it, especially before we venture to act upon it. The sayings sound well; they seem good; but they are so very unlike the man, we fear there must be more surface than solidity.

3. Hence arises want of influence. When a fool utters a wise, or a wicked man a good, advice, he to whom it is given thinks himself, by the very circumstance of its coming from such a person, at liberty to disregard it. The advice having no worth of character to support and recommend it, goes for nothing,-falls lifeless and pithless to the ground.

It well becomes the public teachers of religion to lay these thoughts to heart. More "excellent speech" cannot be uttered than the doctrines and precepts, the counsels and warnings, of the word of God. But if the character of him who utters them is notoriously at variance with his instructions, the incongruity shocks, disgusts, and revolts the hearer. It draws tears from the pious, and mockery from the profane. The latter feel the admonitions pointless. Good they may be; but they are blunted by the character of the speaker. They scoff, and exchange the sly wink with each other; or they are provoked at the thought of their being schooled by such a man! and, with the one feeling or the other, they leave the sanctuary, whispering or exclaiming with a careless shrug-"Physician, heal thyself."

"Much less do lying lips a prince." In such a case the incongruity, the indecency, the outrage on all consistency and propriety, is most flagrant. The prince ought to be the guardian of truth and honesty, of righteousness, and virtue, in the community. He who is officially their guardian, ought personally to be their example. The example is valuable; and so is the infusion of such principle into the administration of the government. There is nothing of more consequence for inspiring the

community with confidence and so maintaining satisfaction and peace, than that rulers should keep their word to the people, redeeming every pledge, fulfilling every authorised and legitimate expectation. "Lying lips" may serve a present purpose, and suspend for the time a threatening evil,--but they will inevitably work mischief, and aggravate the dreaded calamity in the end. Simulation is bad in private life; worse in public; and worst of all in stations of high authority, example, and influence.* * For further illustration, see Proverbs 16:10-13.

I close with two reflections:

1. Let none mistake the nature of the connexion between parents and children,-so as to imagine that the grace and the godliness of the one will avail and be accepted for the other. Every individual, old and young, must stand before God for himself. Godly parents and godly forefathers will not, in the great day, profit ungodly children, or be any protection to them from the avenging justice of God:-on the contrary, their godly ancestry will come in among the aggravations of their guilt and condemnation. They can have no share in their glory, since they have not "followed their faith," and traced the path to heaven in the footsteps of their holy example. Religion is a personal thing. There is no having it by proxy. Eli’s sons were not accepted for Eli’s sake. Let parents beware, and let children beware. If they would meet in heaven, and be each other’s "joy and crown" in the final day,-let parents seek by all divine means, to have their children for their spiritual as well as their natural offspring; and let children receive the instructions, and emulate the Christian excellences of their godly parents. Then shall parents and children be the glory of each other, and Christ the glory of both.

2. Spiritual children are the glory of aged ministers and fathers in the Christian church-the house of God:-and when these are useful in their turn in bringing others to God, those of whose conversion they are the instruments, are children’s children. So Paul and so John regarded their converts. It is not wrong surely for Christ’s ministers to covet the honour of such a spiritual family,-who may be to them their "joy and crown" in the day of the Lord. Alas! that after even a long lifetime of labour, the number of such should often be so small! It gives reason for "great searchings of heart," whether, and how far, the cause may be found in deficiency of faithfulness, and earnestness, and prayer. I would humbly thank my God for the number of the members of this church to whom He has been graciously pleased to render the ministry of his gospel within these walls the means of saving benefit. And I would say to the congregation at large-I long for your salvation, and pray God, "that I may have some fruit among you also!" We must stand together at "the judgment-seat of Christ." O that I may then be found to have delivered my own soul by faithfulness to yours;-and that you may be found so to have profited by your privileges and opportunities, as that you may give your account with joy; so that minister and people may rejoice together!

"BRETHREN-PRAY FOR US!"

46-Pro_17:8-15

Proverbs 17:8-15

LECTURE XLVI.

Proverbs 17:8-15.

"A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it; whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth. He that covereth a transgression seeketh love: but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends. A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool. An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him. Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly. Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house. The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with. He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord."

Two views may be taken of the first of these verses. It may refer to the person who receives the gift, or to the person who has it to bestow.

1. In the former view of the words, they may be explained in this way:-A gift is a mark of regard, of approbation, of confidence, of honour. It gives the recipient of it credit and consequence. It thus contributes to obtain for him further favour. Wherever it comes to be known, it operates for his benefit. A modest man will not be disposed to puff it off;-but in proportion as he rather conceals it, or says nothing of it, the more effectually does it tell in his behalf when it is known. And this will be still more the case, if the gift has been bestowed by a person of eminence,-high in station, or high in character and in public esteem. The man also of a different disposition,-the artful, insinuating, self-sufficient man-may, in a variety of ways, turn a gift to good account,-so that it shall tell for his advantage. He knows where the character and the influence of the giver are highest; and there he makes the most of it. "Whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth."

2. Viewed in the other light, (which is the more likely sense of the words) as referring to the person who confers the gift, or has it to bestow,-we may notice first, that the reference may be to the man who is known to have something to bestow which all covet. In this case, every one desires his favour, strives to oblige him, tries every means of insinuation into his good graces. A man who has any skill in maneuvering may, in this way, render what he has to confer a capital instrument for pushing forward his own prosperity; keeping all in expectation,-cherishing hope,-making his desired and coveted gift look first one way, then another, then a third; perhaps partially bestowing, and still reserving enough to hold expectants hanging on, so as to have them available for his own ends. Secondly:-On the part of those who have gifts to bestow, uses may be made of them that are honourable and prudent,-quite consistent, not with mere self-interest, but with right principle. They may be employed to avert threatened evil, and for the more sure attainment of desired good. Such was Jacob’s gift to his brother Esau; when, in setting it apart, he said, "I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward will I see his face." Such was the gift of the

same patriarch, at a later period, to "the man the lord of the country," when he sent his sons the second time to Joseph in Egypt.-Thirdly:-The verse is generally, and probably with justice, understood of gifts that have the character and the object of bribes, the idea being that "a gift" is as tempting, as irresistible as a precious jewel;-that the man who has it and is disposed to give it, can seldom be at a loss to find another equally willing to receive it;-that such is its power that it "prevails over all men, dispatches all business, carries all causes, and effects whatever a man desires." (Bp. Patrick.) Alas! for human nature, if this account of it be true. And, although there are not a few honourable exceptions from the inculpation,-yet wonderful it is to what an extent a gift, sufficiently tempting, and artfully managed, may be made to accomplish all that is thus ascribed to it; how many evasions and plausibilities men discover to satisfy their consciences, or rather to hoodwink and blind them, in accepting what no consideration can reconcile with common honesty. To what a fearful extent have these observations been verified in the system of parliamentary electioneering, and in all the varieties of public jobbing!-no matter whether by whig or tory. It is no business of mine to balance accounts between them. In either the one or the other, the practice is equally odious, and ought to be branded with public execration.*

* "A bribe, if accepted, will influence in many ways, even without a consciousness of its power, on the part of the receiver. Turn he which way he will, the influence of it will follow him." So Stuart, but the language seems hardly susceptible of such an interpretation, however true the sentiment.

Verse Proverbs 17:9 "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love: but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends." We have, in this verse, a new aspect of a sentiment formerly under notice.* The verse before us may be applied to offences committed against ourselves, or to those committed against others.

* Proverbs 10:12; Proverbs 16:28. As to the former:-we should be slow to take offence. We should throw the veil of concealment, in the spirit of the love which the verse before us inculcates, over everything that can be passed by without violating the precept of "not suffering sin upon our brother."-Then, further, when, in consequence of our dealing, the wrong has been confessed, and forgiveness for it extended, it must be buried; there must be no "repeating" of it to others,-no recalling of it to mind and to notice on future occasions. This is extremely hurting to the feelings of the offender, when he has confessed and been forgiven; and is the sure way to renew the breach, and to make it wider and more hopeless than ever. If we are to confirm attachment and give permanence to reconciliation, we must be silent as the grave as to the past. With regard to trespasses against others:-there are many little things which we may come to know of, as having been said or done by one friend respecting another,-said or done, perhaps, without any evil intention whatever,-yet of such a nature, that, if told to the person, are fitted to produce in his mind an unpleasant impression. The very repetition of them invests them with an importance that does not belong to them. It makes him to whom they are reported, think much more of them than he would have done, had he heard or seen them himself. These, then, charity and discretion alike demand that we hide in our bosoms.

Then with regard to cases of serious importance, observe-

First:-If we alone are privy to the fact, our first business is with the offender; just as much as if the trespass had been one against ourselves. We should represent his conduct to him in love-the inconsistency of it with the claims of friendship-and try to bring him to a sense of his error. If we

succeed in effecting this, let not the friend against whom the evil has been said or done, but who is in entire ignorance of it, be ever informed of the matter at all. Let it be as though it had not been; except as to the offender's disabusing the minds of others on whom he may have made a similar impression.

Secondly:-If it be a case in which the aggrieved party must be informed; the information must be imparted with a faithfully, and carefully minute adherence to truth; without exaggeration; without irritating representations; in the evident spirit of sincere regret and love. When we succeed in making up the breach,-which, in every case, ought to be our great end,-then the same rule as before must be followed; we must never "repeat" the matter,-either to the one or to the other of the parties, or to any neutral persons. That might only tear open the recent wounds, make them bleed afresh, and perhaps fester into incurable sores.

Thirdly:-Let another lesson be remembered, which we are exceedingly apt to forget; namely, that all unnecessary repetition even of real faults comes under the category of scandal, and is sinful and mischievous. You may fancy you are within the limit of blameworthiness, when you are telling no more than what is true:-but, if you are telling even truth needlessly, for no good and laudable end, you are chargeable with the offence. Some people have a strange delight in repeating grievances. They are ever coming out with-"What do you think such a person did?" and, "What do you think such another person said?" They gather up every idle rumour-catching it from the passing wind;-giving to every evil report an additional pair of wings. Sometimes they pretend to be very confidential. What they have heard they tell to you alone,-" and remember," say they, (putting their finger significantly on their lips,) "it is a profound secret." Generally, however, such persons will be found selecting for their confidants those whom they well know to be incapable of keeping a secret to themselves. And thus it finds its way at last to the quarter where the mischief was intended: the schemer of it, all the while, wearing the mask of friendship-all kindness, all regret, all sympathy.

O these "tattlers and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not!"-they are the very pests and vermin of social life,-as despicable as they are annoying and noxious.

Verse Proverbs 17:10. "A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool." The "wise man" understands aright his own interest. The knowledge of truth and of duty is the object of his sincere and earnest desire. He is thankful to be freed from his own errors, instead of being doggedly tenacious of them, when he can obtain truth instead; and readily relinquishes whatever practices he has been accustomed to follow, when made to discern their inconsistency with the claims either of God or man. The "fool" clings pertinaciously to whatever is his own-his own thoughts, his own projects, his own ways,-simply because they are his own. He possesses neither a genuine love of truth, nor a candid and humble solicitude to know and to do what is right.

Now "a reproof," or even the simple intimation of his fault unaccompanied by any direct rebuke,-a mere look of disapprobation-"entereth more" into the former "than an hundred stripes" into the latter. It affects him, that is, more deeply, with conviction, compunction, shame and sorrow; and produces more of practical effect in the way of "confessing and forsaking."* Even taking wisdom in its lower sense, as relating to a man's discreet understanding of his temporal advantage, he who possesses it will keep his ear and mind open to intimations of error and danger, even though conveyed in the form of sharp reflection on his own prudence, rather than ruin himself by a

headstrong and selfwilled opinionativeness.

* Comp. Proverbs 9:7-9. The spirit of the verse may be applied to the influence of the word of God and the providence of God. A simple notification of evil, coming from the word of God, will "enter more into the wise man," who "trembleth at that word," than a hundred of the sharpest strokes of His providential rod will into the ungodly and the froward. The latter, indeed, without divine grace accompanying the strokes, will be provoked by them, rather than subdued. And even amongst the children of God themselves, there are great diversities of temper; some requiring harder dealing than others to bring them down, and to reclaim them from their follies: as is the case often with children in the same family. A word, or a look, will go with melting and heart-breaking power to the very soul of one; while the severest correction, and oft-repeated, will fail to bring down the stubborn and fractious spirit of another. O for more of the spirit of Job, and less of the spirit of Jonah!-for more of that truly child-like disposition, which gives way before every divine admonition, which melts into penitence under the eye of an offended God, and looks up with a child’s submission at the slightest touch of his corrective rod!

Verse Proverbs 17:11. "An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him." This rendering accords with that of the Septuagint. By others it is inverted:-"A rebellious man seeketh only evil or mischief:"-and others still understand the verse as meaning-"A seditious man shall surely fall into mischief." In the general effect, different renderings bring out much the same sentiment. The character appears to be one which, in the experience of Solomon, as well as of other princes, had often occasioned great trouble;-that namely, of an unprincipled, discontented, intractable, indomitable spirit-ever seeking to disturb the public peace, to stir up and foment broils and insurrectionary tumults; whose element is strife; who loves it for its own sake; and who seeks by it, not the ultimate attainment of the public good, but the adoption of some empirical nostrum of his own political quackery;-who is reckless of consequences, regardless of the sufferings of all who stand in his way. "A cruel messenger shall be sent unto him." This seems to mean, the inexorable executioner of the sentence of the law. Such is generally the end of the turbulent man of mischief and wrong. He brings upon himself the punishment required for the protection of the lives and property, the liberty and well-being of others, of the community at large.

O my friends, let the reproofs of God’s word, and the corrections of God’s providence, be attended to and obeyed now; for "who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered?" "A cruel messenger" shall be at last sent unto him. Death shall be such a one to you-"ye that forget God," and love evil;-for death will summon you to the bar of the Eternal. O take warning. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."God now sends a merciful messenger, to testify to you the riches and freeness of his grace, and his willingness to save. He speaks to you by his own Son, and prays you to be reconciled to himself. If this gracious Messenger be rejected, he shall be succeeded by a messenger of vengeance that shall shut you up in the prisonhouse of everlasting darkness and despair. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Verse Proverbs 17:12. "Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly." A strong expression!-but, when the subject of it is rightly understood, not a whit too strong. The reference is, not to the mere teasing and vexatious talk of the loquacious, emptyheaded, and self-conceited pedant or coxcomb. In that there is more of the troublesome and annoying than of the dangerous. But the comparison before us expresses, and is designed to express, real danger.

And the danger intended does not seem to be the murderous rage of the infuriated fool or wicked man,-when stung by resentment, and, under the impetuous power of his headstrong passions, ready for all mischief:-although I would not say that this idea is to be excluded; for "a bear robbed of her whelps" is no unapt comparison for an unprincipled man in a passion. But in harmony with the frequent warnings of this Book, the reference is most probably to the spiritual danger arising from the society of foolish and wicked men. The bear, in all the fury of its disappointment and privation, can do no more than kill and lacerate and tear in pieces the body. The "fool." if he succeed in his unprincipled attempts, especially on unsuspicious and simple-hearted youth, will murder the soul-seducing it from virtue and from God, and consigning it to the death that never dies. A "bear robbed of her whelps" seems anything but an appropriate emblem of him, in regard to temper and kindly pretensions. But this only augments the danger. The very smoothness and flattery of his manners is the peril.

O my young hearers, beware of "the fool in his folly"-of the unprincipled libertinism of the licentious, with all their fascinating temptations! Would you flee from the rage of an infuriated wild beast-from the paw and jaws of the lion and the bear?-flee with still greater terror from the company of the wicked.

Verse Proverbs 17:13. "Whoso rewardeth evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house." On this subject the Bible takes high ground. Good for evil is the Bible law from first to last.* It has been said very truly-"To render evil for good, is devil-like; to render evil for evil, is man-like; to render good for evil, is godlike." The ungrateful forgetfulness of favours, is bad; but the requital of good with evil is the very utmost stretch of depravity. Yet alas! even this is far from being a rarity. Selfishness is the besetting sin of our fallen nature. It reigns paramount. It sets aside the claims of both God and man. Selfish men receive the good bestowed upon them, merely for its own sake. They have no consideration for the giver, further than as conveying the benefit to them. They feel no attachment on account of the principle by which the bestowment of it has been prompted,-though to a generous spirit that is a gift’s chief value. They snatch the good, and, in the enjoyment of it, never think more of the hand from which it came. What is that to them? Their own interest is promoted:-and, should the interest of the kind friend from whose bounty it has come ever stand in the way of theirs, they laugh at the thought of obligation, and sacrifice it without a scruple. Every man for himself, is their base and sordid maxim.-O shun selfishness. Cultivate the generous and forgiving spirit of the Bible. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

* Exodus 23:4-5; Deuteronomy 22:1-4; Job 31:29-30; Proverbs 24:28-29; Proverbs 25:21-22; Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 3:9.

All persecution of good men, in return for the affectionate zeal with which they set themselves to promote the best interests of others,-their spiritual and eternal good,-comes fully under the condemnation of this verse. That is indeed "rewarding evil for good." How writes the poet of Whitefield?-and what is true of him is but a portraiture of every genuine servant of God:- "He loved the world that hated him: the tear That dropp’d upon his bible, was sincere.

Assail’d by scandal and the tongue of strife, His only answer was-a blameless life; And he that forged and he that threw the dart Had each a brother’s interest in his heart." And when this fraternal interest,-animating to self-denying earnestness of effort to impart the very best of

blessings, is requited with reviling, and persecuting, and casting out the name as evil-what a melancholy manifestation of the tendencies of our fallen nature to render evil for good!-and how awfully was this displayed in the person of the blessed Redeemer himself! All that he did and suffered was for men; yet men, instead of requiting him with grateful love, "pierced and nailed him to the tree." The temper of mind, and the conduct proceeding from it, that are here condemned, are very displeasing to God. They are contrary to His nature, contrary to His example, contrary to His commands. Many a time in retributive righteousness has God testified to this; and how often-as in the case of Saul for his persecution of David, which was from first to last a "rendering of evil for good"-has the closing denunciation been realized-"Evil shall not depart from his house."

Verse Proverbs 17:14. "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with."

"When in the embankment of a canal, a river, or a reservoir of water, a very slight fissure is made,-the water at the first only oozes through, and comes by drops; but by degrees the opening widens; the mound is gradually sapped and weakened; and. at length it gives way, and the bursting inundation sweeps everything before it. So, from what trivial beginnings have discords the most extensive, distressing, and ruinous, often originated!-Thus we find it among children:-and in this respect, as in some others, "Men are but children of a larger growth." A single word, the motion of a finger, the glance of an eye, happens to be noticed; and being interpreted as conveying a certain meaning, is resented;-the measure of the retaliation is of course excessive, and it provokes a return; the quarrel rises; the breach is widened; irreconcileable alienation ensues; and the alienation of the individuals spreads to families, to circles of friends, to neighbourhoods, to communities! In Scripture, an evil is sometimes condemned and reprobated in itself; and at other times, on account of its consequences. The latter is the case here. "Strife" is in itself an evil, and as such to be shunned. But it is the more to be shunned, that its tendencies and effects are as here described. "Leave it off before it be meddled with," is a strong way of conveying the admonition to have nothing at all to do with it. Rather let the offence pass than risk the consequences. "When the fissure in the embankment appears, let the first drop of oozing water be the signal to stop the leak, and prevent the threatening flood. And nowhere is the maxim or the counsel more appropriately or more strongly applicable, than in the churches of Christ. The contention of two individuals may soon embroil a whole church. Let each feel the duty, then, of selfcontrol. If one word has passed their lips, let them beware of a second; for a second will lead to a third, and a third still more certainly to a fourth. He who is able to return bitter with sweet, will be most approved by the divine Master. Look at the consequences; and "leave it off before it be meddled with." And where the fissure of passion has unhappily, to any degree, widened, let all unite in throwing in the materials of love, and stopping up the gap.

There is one kind of strife, which of all possible descriptions, it is wisdom to "leave off before it be meddled with,"-with which indeed there can be no greater infatuation than to meddle at all:-it is the strife of sinners with their God. Sinner! God has a controversy with you. It will be well for you to submit in time,-to submit in humble selfcondemnation. Persist not in a strife so unequal and so hopeless. If you spurn at your sentence, and return the holy frown of an offended God with the proud look of sullen rebellion,-you are widening the breach; you are "provoking the Lord to anger." That anger is in the meanwhile suspended; but in the end it will infallibly burst forth, like an overwhelming flood, and sweep all his enemies away. "Behold," He says, "I lay in Zion for a

foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place," Isaiah 28:16-17.

Verse Proverbs 17:15. "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord."-To "justify the wicked"-is to take part with him, in opposition to evidence,-and, though the evidence condemns, to make the sentence one of acquittal. To "condemn the just" is, of course, the counterpart of the same crime; pronouncing sentence, contrary to, or unsustained by evidence, against the innocent. There may be various motives, by which individuals are tempted to this crime:-the fear of evil from the power and influence of the wicked man, or the hope of benefit from his favour; self-interest, in one or other of its various forms:-and in the other case, spite and envy; malicious dislike of principles or of conduct by which their own are condemned; revenge of fancied injury; considerations of expediency; and others of a similar kind. How fearfully was the motive of expediency exemplified in the case of perfect innocence and righteousness, in the person of the Son of God!* * John 11:47-50. No consideration can ever, in any case, warrant the act.*1 The judgment of God is denounced against all who are guilty of it.*2 *1 See Exodus 23:7; Deuteronomy 25:1. rr *2 Isaiah 5:23; Ezekiel 22:27-29; Amos 5:12. And yet, manifest and universally admitted as is the evil here declared to be "an abomination to the Lord" there are those who would have the Lord himself to set the example of it. Men are sinners. They have broken God’s law. That law has condemned them. This of course is the same thing with their being condemned by the Lawgiver-by God himself. If they are condemned justly,-that is, if they have sinned and are wicked, he never can justify them in the sense in which the word is used in this verse. That would be to contradict himself,-to condemn and acquit,-declare guilty and declare innocent-at the same time. It would be to take part with sin. It would be to give false judgment, and to do that himself, which He pronounces "abomination" in his creatures. This God cannot do, any more than He can pass sentence of perdition on an innocent angel,-or than He would have inflicted death on man while he continued to "hold fast his integrity"-continued without sin. God could not condemn man in innocence; neither can He acquit man in his guilt. In the one case, He would "condemn the righteous;" in the other, He would "justify the wicked." And yet God does justify-and justify the ungodly. It is the very purpose of the gospel to provide for this being done in a way consistent with truth, and with all the claims of righteousness and law. How is it done? The answer is-that sinners are condemned on their own account, but justified on account of the merits and mediation of another-even of Him whom Jehovah has appointed as the atoning and interceding Redeemer. In so justifying the ungodly, the divine righteousness stands as unimpeachably clear as the divine mercy; "mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace embracing each other."

Let two closing reflections suffice.

1. As in the administration of justice,-in the world or in the church,-so in the official declaration of doctrine and of duty,-faithfulness is the first and most essential qualification. No "gift," no bribe, no love of gain,-or, in the apostle’s phrase, "greed of filthy lucre," must ever be allowed to corrupt "the man of God," and tempt him either to pervert or to keep back the truth,-to "shun to declare" any part of "the counsel of God," or to utter a single sentiment but what he believes to be a lesson of God’s word,-a divinely authorised message. For a minister of Christ either to say what is false or to

withhold what is true, from a wish to please those on whom he may feel himself dependent, is as unworthy of him as for a judge on the civil bench to pervert justice; and may be to others unspeakably more mischievous. The decisions of the latter can affect only what is temporary; the effects of the former's unfaithful temporizing may extend to eternity. The guilt of the former, therefore, may be greater than that of the latter, in the proportion of the value of the soul to the body, of eternity to time. There must be no bribery and corruption here. O to be able to say with Paul-"I AM CLEAR FROM THE BLOOD OF ALL MEN!"

2. How vast the benefit, were the precepts of Christ, especially on the subject of offences, regarded and followed out with a more conscientious and practical strictness! And on this particular subject, O never fancy yourselves at liberty, in any one case, to dispense with any one of His directions. I speak the experience of thirty-eight years of pastoral superintendence, when I say, that in no single instance has departure from the prescribed course failed of producing the most pernicious results. The rules of Christ are the rules of Him who "knoweth what is in man." And an incalculable amount of the discord and trouble, which are ever and anon occurring in the churches, would be prevented, were His people only to follow with scrupulous exactness the prescriptions of those rules.

47-Pro_17:16-20

Proverbs 17:16-20

LECTURE XLVII.

Proverbs 17:16-20.

"Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it? A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend. He loveth transgression that loveth strife; and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction. He that hath a froward heart findeth no good; and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief."

Wisdom is frequently pronounced to be inestimably precious-a good for which no price can be found. What, then, can be meant by "a price to get wisdom?" By some another turn-but, as seems to me, a turn far from natural,-has been given to the sentence:-"Of what avail are the rich fool's riches to him, since he has not a heart to get wisdom by means of them?" The sentiment thus expressed is true; but it is no more than a branch of the more general sentiment conveyed by the words; one form-one variety only, of the evil. We understand the term "a price" as signifying, whatever puts it in any one's power to acquire the particular object. The phraseology is borrowed from the market. Any article, we are wont to say, may be had there, if a man has but the price to pay for it. What the "price" is to the article wanted, the means of acquiring are to "wisdom." When we wish to put any article of ordinary merchandise within a person's power, we furnish that person with the price at which it is valued. There are cases, however, in which this may not be enough. The price may be in a man's hand, and yet the article may not be within his reach-not, at the time, to be had. Happily, it is never so with the wisdom here spoken of. If the means are possessed of acquiring it, it may always be acquired. It is in the hand of God himself; and He is never either at a distance that we cannot repair to him; or unwilling to bestow it upon us, when we come to him for it-bestow it I say; for we must remember, with regard to divine wisdom, that "in a literal sense, it cannot be purchased. It must be had "without money and without price." It is not to be "gotten for gold."*

* See Isaiah 55:1. There is a contradiction in the idea of buying "without money." The word has been rendered more generally, procure. The original term is used to denote what is usually effected by means of a price in money. And such is the case here.-(Author).

Why is it, then, that in so many cases in which "the price is in the hand to get wisdom"-the means of securing it possessed-its lessons remain unlearned, the mind ignorant, the heart unimproved? Whence the sadly prevailing deficiency, and oven destitution, in the knowledge of the very simplest elements of divine truth? Whence is it that we find the ideas of so many minds so strangely crude, superficial, and confused? How comes this to be so frequently the case, even where all means and opportunities have been fully and long enjoyed?-where there has been early tuition; where the word has been in the house and in the hand, and the ministrations of it in the ear

for many years of Sabbaths?-Here is the answer-the only one that can with truth be given,-there has been "no heart to it."-The principle is of wide application, and might be largely illustrated.

Why, for example, is not the knowledge of God learned by the heathen themselves from the volume of nature?-or rather, how has it been that they have not retained the knowledge originally possessed, though surrounded, in creation, with all that is fitted to keep them in mind of it? The apostle answers the enquiry-" They did not like to retain God in their knowledge." In other words, they had "no heart to it." "Why were the Jews, with all their superior means of knowledge-possessing, as they did, God's "lively oracles"-many of them-ay, the large majority, so miserably ignorant of the character of their own Jehovah? Why? because they had "no heart to it"-the inclinations of their minds lay to the idolatrous follies of the surrounding nations. Why "forsook they the fountain of living water, and hewed out unto themselves broken cisterns which could hold no water?" The answer is the same, they "had no heart to it."

There is no maxim more thoroughly established by experience, than that a man cannot excel in anything to which his heart does not lie. When do men succeed best in the pursuit of any object? Is it not when they have a heart to it? What is it that keeps all men astir in the pursuit and acquisition of wealth?-Is it not that they have a heart to it? How do men acquire celebrity in any of the departments of science or of art? Is it not when they have a heart to it?-some measure of enthusiastic eagerness and persevering delight in the pursuit?-My young hearers know well, that they acquire most readily, and attain to the greatest proficiency in, those branches of knowledge to which they have most heart--which are most congenial to their inclinations,-to the taste and bent of their minds. You then set about it in earnest; you prosecute it with energy and perseverance; you let no difficulties deter you, nor cease application till you have mastered them:-it is your pleasure, and success in it becomes your distinction. If you "have no heart to it," the work is all up hill; you begin it with reluctance; you yawn and nod over it; you are pleased with every little apology for neglecting or shortening your lesson; your knowledge is partial and superficial; and you quickly let slip the little you have learned. The lessons of the Bible,-those of them especially which it is of most importance to know, and which are the most essential elements of true wisdom,-are far from being beyond the apprehension of any of your understandings. Why then-to bring the matter home-have you not an extensive acquaintance with these lessons, and with all the contents of the sacred volume?-its histories, its doctrines, its precepts, its promises, its prophecies, its devotional compositions? Is it not-speak the truth-because you "have no heart" to the study of the book that contains them? Can you, in conscience, assign any other reason for the difference between your attainments in this department of knowledge, and your attainments in others that are of a more secular and worldly, or merely literary and scientific, character,-than that you have less of interest in the one study than in the others-less pleasure in it-less heart to it?-Why is it that you do not cherish the fear and the love of God by the contemplation of those views of his character which He has, in his works and more especially in his word, revealed?-is not the reason the same-that you have no heart to it? This, the Bible tells you, is wisdom. But, although your judgment cannot refuse its assent-its constrained and reluctant assent-to the proposition, your heart goes not along with it. It is not the "wisdom of this world;" nor what the world will ever regard as a recommendation. It is not the wisdom, therefore, which you choose and which it gives you pleasure to think of acquiring. I put it to your consciences,-whether there be anything else whatever, that keeps you from the knowledge and the fear of God, wherein true religion consists-than your having no heart to

them?-Talk not to me of inability:-your inability is entirely moral; and consists in nothing else whatever than your "having no heart" to that which is good. And is this not criminal? If not,-then is there no sin nor crime on earth, in hell, in the universe; nor is the existence or the conception of such a thing as moral evil possible. The want of heart to that which is good, is the very essence of all that is sinful. You offer anything but a valid excuse for your want of religion, when you say you "have no heart to it." You plead in excuse the very essence of your guilt. If you desired to fear God, and could not help the contrary, your inability might be something in your behalf. But the thing cannot be. To desire to fear God, and not to be able, is a contradiction in terms. The having of the desire is the having of the principle. There can be no desiring to fear without fearing; no desiring to love without loving. Would you admit it as an apology for a rebellious child, that he desired to love his father but could not?-Yes; there is one case in which the apology might stand-if there was nothing in the father that was lovely, but everything fitted to repel and to quench affection,-And will you venture to offer this plea in your case? If indeed you can make it out that there is no loveliness in God, your plea may stand!-If you can make it out that there is no beauty in Christ, why you should desire him,-then may your disaffection to him be excusable. But if in Christ and in God there is everything lovely, and that ought to be loved,-then your "having no heart to it" must be your guilt and condemnation. O what a hopeless task you would undertake, were you to plead the want of loveliness,-the absence of all that is amiable-in God and in Christ! Your own lips would condemn you. Give up your plea. Acknowledge your sinful alienation. Turn to Him who says-"Behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you:"-"Ask and ye shall receive:"-"A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."

Verse Proverbs 17:17. "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." These words contain the just commendation of faithful constancy in friendship and brotherly affection.-A false and faithless friend professes great attachment-is the extreme of devotedness, when the object of it is in prosperity and honour, and when connexion with him is a credit and a benefit. But when the world ceases to smile upon him, when their plaudits are hushed, and their court is withdrawn-though without any cause in the forsaken and the fallen, whose character and deserts remain the same,-he cools, and skulks, and disowns him. When attachment is of service to himself he will gladly share all the good,-bask in the light of his countenance, make his favour a stepping-stone to his own advancement;-but when the evil day comes, and association with him ceases to be a credit and a benefit, he sheers off, and knows his dear, his valued, his esteemed, his excellent and honoured friend no more!-abandons him in the very hour-when the worth of true friendship is most deeply felt, and the sustaining and sweetening influences of its genial sympathy most keenly needed!-shakes himself loose at the very moment when he should stick fastest!-A genuine friend-the only friend worth having, and when found, of inestimable value,-is the same in all changes of condition; the same in every respect but one,-that his heart gets warmer to his friend as the world gets colder; he becomes the more a friend to him as other friends fail;-stands the more firmly by him, and avows his attachment the more openly and the more fervently, in proportion as, by the false and faithless, he is unworthily deserted. His attachment is to the man-not to his wealth or his honours; and if the man remain the same, no change of circumstances will lessen the ardour of his friendship.-Of such disinterested and steadfast friendship, we have a fine exemplification in the case of Jonathan and David. In opposition to a father’s unreasonable and groundless jealousy, and at the sacrifice of his own interests and prospects as heir to the throne, did the faithful Jonathan cleave to David, through all his trials and

dangers and shifting fortunes,-guarding him from harm; encouraging and cheering him in his difficulties; and clearing the way for his advancement, till he himself met his death on Mount Gilboa.-Other instances are on record in the pages of history;-and in a greater and less degree, in more private life, have the same principles of selfdenying and generous attachment-true even to death-been manifested.

"And a brother is born for adversity." Some would render the words-"And he" (i.e. the true friend) "is born to be a brother in adversity."-But more probably, as the previous part of the verse describes what a friend should be; the latter clause describes what a brother-or any near relation-should be.*

* "'A brother for adversity' is one who will act the part of a brother in a season of adversity. Of such an one it is said, he must or shall be born, (possibly) he is born. I do not understand this last clause, unless the assertion is, that none but such as are born brethren, i.e., kindred by blood, will cleave to us when in distress. Yet this is true only in a qualified sense. But another shade of meaning may be assigned to the passage; which is, that such a man as a friend in adversity, is yet to be born, i.e., none such are now to be found; thus making it substantially equivalent in sense to the expression: 'How few and rare are such faithful friends!'"-(Stuart).

Adversity is the time when affection is put to the proof. It is hardly at all tried among relatives, when all is going-well, and there is no call in providence for sacrifices on the part of any members of the domestic circle, in behalf of the others. But when, through unforeseen circumstances, privation and distress become the lot of any of them, then is the test of the sincerity and strength of natural affection. Brethren are born to help each other in need. This is the will and purpose of God in placing them in their near relationship. It is sad when this fails; and beautiful when it is displayed. It is not when Naomi "goes out full," but when "the Lord brings her home again empty," that the fond attachment of Ruth draws to the eye the tear of approving and delighted sympathy. It is in the reverses and fallen fortunes of his kinswoman-widowed, desolate, and dependent-that the fidelity and generosity of Boaz are brought out into conspicuous manifestation.-We shudder at the unnatural conduct of Joseph's brethren; while in Joseph himself-whether viewed in the providential arrangements of his history, or in his amiably pious and forgiving disposition,-we see "a brother born for adversity."

Verse Proverbs 17:18. "A man void of understanding striketh hands, and becometh surety in the presence of his friend." The sentiment of this verse appears as if suggested by the preceding.-It might naturally be asked-If "a friend loveth at all times," is not the time of his reduction of circumstances just one of those times of need when the sincerity of friendship is tested, and when the love is called for?-The answer is-Unquestionably. Solomon does not mean to say that in no case ought friendship thus to express itself. But he certainly does mean to say, that it should not be done in all cases; that it should not be done with reckless and inconsiderate hastiness. He does mean to say that there are other claims besides those of friendship, which even those of friendship must not exclude from consideration. There are some enthusiastic sentimentalists on the subject of friendship, who talk wildly and at random of its paramount claims. O! there is nothing that must be allowed to stand in the way of friendship:-everything must yield to it! They seem ready-in words at least, to sacrifice at its shrine all other claims of men whatsoever, and even the very claims of God himself. Now, right and amiable as the earnest desire to help a friend may be, we must

beware of what may be termed the romance of friendship. Let as great sacrifices be made as self can bear, when self alone is implicated. But the extent of ability must be considered. Circumstances must be rationally weighed.

There are claims of family; there are claims of creditors and of partners in business; there are claims of the cause of God. Imperious as the claims of friendship may be, the claims of wife and children, and the claims of obvious justice, must not be disregarded and put out of account for them.-And then, in every case, it should be well considered, whether by our advances and suretiship the friend is, after all, ultimately and in the long run, to be benefited. He may think so. It may be quite clear to him. No doubt about it. But sanguine minds, under the pressure of immediate difficulty, are of all others the most in danger of imposing on themselves. And in such cases, when neutral eyes, seeing more clearly and further forward, discern the illusion and its cause;-painful as it may be to disappoint the eager wishes and confident anticipations of the friend who may be looking to you as his last resource, and assuring himself of your standing by him,-yet to go forward with the certainty, instead of ultimately doing him service, of only making bad worse, and involving yourself with him in common loss and ruin, would assuredly be a very mistaken exercise and evidence of friendliness.-And again, it may be remarked, friendship should be very cautious of pressing such claims,-of urging to such proofs of its sincerity. There is good ground for suspecting the soundness of the friendship, and for fearing there is in it too much of the selfish, when a man is very eager to draw his friend into such engagements.* *On this subject see Proverbs 6:1-5.

Verse Proverbs 17:19. "He loveth transgression that loveth strife; and he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction." The former of these propositions requires no proof. For, first, strife itself is transgression. "Wars and fightings come of our lusts which war in our members." The angry and resentful passions cannot be indulged without sin.-And, secondly, strife leads to transgression. It is the unfailing occasion of much evil-in temper, in word, and in action. If a man is desirous to bring himself and others into sin and suffering-into trespass and punishment,-he cannot accomplish the end more effectually than by fomenting contention. Strife at once springs from, and gives strength and exercise to, the principle from which all men’s evil deeds and words against each other proceed-the opposite principle of love: love being the fulfilling of the law, and enmity its universal breach. Wisdom then and duty alike say, "Give place unto wrath."* * Romans 13:8-10.

"And he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction." Some take this for a comparison:-As surely as he that exalteth his gate (enlarging it out of due proportion) seeketh destruction to his house, by thus weakening its structure,-so surely does he that loveth strife generate transgression. The phrase "exalteth his gate," however, instead of being thus understood literally, may, with more propriety, be interpreted of a man’s ambitiously affecting a style of living beyond his income-disproportionate to the amount of his means of maintaining it. The general character is described by one particular manifestation of it-the high style of the exterior of his mansion. The "exalting of the gate" applies to the entire style of his household establishment-not to his dwelling merely, but to his equipage, his table, his servants, his dress, and every thing else.-He who does this "seeks destruction:" he courts his own downfall, as effectually as if it were his direct object to ruin himself. Matthew Henry, in his own quaint and pithy way, says-" He makes his gate so large, that his house and estate go out at it. "A man’s manner of life may, with perfect propriety, be proportioned to his circumstances; though a man of christian principle will rather keep within the allowable boundary than go beyond it-rather keep below than go above his means. But-,

1. A man sets out in high style upon little or no capital-desiring to get credit by giving the impression of abundance. The man who does this, acts not foolishly only, but falsely. It is an imposition-a practical lie. There is too much of this; too much of a departure from the soberminded prudence of our forefathers. If a young man, in ordinary station, sets up a domestic establishment, it must now be all at once in such style, that it presents a hindrance to many from entering into married life, and thus operates to the prevention of domestic habits, and to the fostering of dissipation and vice:-and at the same time, it embarrasses business at its outset, and exposes to many anxious fears, and many serious risks, which might, and ought to be shunned by the good old-fashioned way of beginning on a small scale and in a plain way, and working a gradual rise. This is the way of prudence and security:-the other is the way of speculation and hazard.

2. If a man of principle rises in his style of living as his means advance, he should, on a corresponding principle, cheerfully and proportionally, retrench on their decline. The contrary is another of the evils frequently to be seen in our day. A man is what the world calls unfortunate. He compounds with his creditors; and he lives on just as before; still "exalting his gate," still maintaining all the show and style of his former course, to the utter perplexity and amazement of simple and honest minds,-that can’t at all comprehend how it is that a man contrives to keep up on nothing-or on what they think, in their honest simplicity, ought to be nothing,-the same style of living that he maintained when his business prospered and his riches increased. The contrary is required by many considerations.-Submission to God requires it. The course described bears the aspect, and, it must be feared, is the reality, of rebellion against His providence.-Justice to men requires it. He who, in a reverse of circumstances, continues to keep up his full style of expenditure, neither acts like a Christian, nor like a man of common honesty. His first business is with his creditors; and his first aim, at every cost of self-denial, to pay them, what every honest man must wish to pay them, twenty shillings in the pound.-Peace of conscience requires it. How can a man, who has a remnant of sound principle left, enjoy himself, when he is "faring sumptuously every day" on money that belongs to others?-And let me add-a just regard to his own interest requires it. He who never comes down, or who does it, not spontaneously but by sheer and stem compulsion, takes the surest way to impair respect and to forfeit confidence and credit and reputation in business. He who, on his fall, gives all up, in the spirit of integrity and honour, commands universal esteem, secures trust, and produces in every rightly principled mind a desire to help him again forward, and promote his prosperity. On the closing verse we need not dwell, as we have had the same sentiments frequently under review:* only let all mark afresh the assurance and ponder it well-" He that hath a froward heart findeth no good: and he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into mischief."

* Proverbs 3:22; Proverbs 6:12-15; Proverbs 10:14; Proverbs 10:31, &c.

48-Pro_17:21-28

Proverbs 17:21-28

LECTURE XLVIII.

Proverbs 17:21-28.

"He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones. A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment. Wisdom is before him that hath understanding: but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth. A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him. Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity. He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."

"He that begetteth a fool."-A child of weak capacity? No. Such a child, though a trial in one sense, may be a source of joy in another-true, sweet, lasting joy: for it is almost impossible to say how feeble the powers of intellect may be, and yet a parent’s heart be gladdened by witnessing that child a subject of divine grace;-the mind, as far as its powers go, apprehending, though but imperfectly and glimmeringly, the elements of gospel truth, under the secret teaching of Him who "hides these things from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes,"-and the heart experiencing, though in much simplicity, the influence by which the affections are drawn to God, and the conscience rendered sensitive to his authority.

"A fool" means a graceless child,-froward, unprincipled, a "despiser of that which is good," without the "fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom." Such a child brings to a godly parent’s heart "grief," "sorrow," "bitterness." These are the terms here employed, (Proverbs 17:21; Proverbs 17:25) and along with these we have the strong negative form of expression:-"The father of a fool hath no joy." The meaning is more than that he has no joy in that son. The character and conduct of that son serve to infuse "bitterness" into everything else. There may be many things in his domestic lot fitted to inspire cheerfulness and delight:-but at the happy moments, when his heart, yielding to all the fond impulses of conjugal and parental tenderness, is swelling with the emotions of gladness, the thought of his perverse, rebellious, profligate boy comes over him, sends through that heart the pang of agony, "turns his harp to mourning, and his organ to the voice of them that weep."-Nothing but blinding partiality can prevent this in the case of a pious parent. And such partiality, alas! is too common, and very mischievous and very cruel to the youth who is its object. There is no cruelty worse than this mistaken blindness; this shutting of the eyes to a child’s sinful propensities; this incredulity of evil; this easy, indulgent disposition, that cannot bring itself to apply a check, and still goes on hoping the best,-smiling at trespasses, in its own, as venial faults, which, in other children, it would condemn with gravity as serious offences; and looking, or professing to look, to grace, while neglecting the ordained means by which grace operates. David

"never had displeased Adonijah in anything, by saying to him, "Why hast thou done so?"-and the upshot of it was, in the old age of his indulgent father, ambitious rebellion, and the risk of civil war:-and there is every reason to fear that, to a certain degree at least, he owed to the same parental partiality and indulgence, the still more atrocious and unnatural conspiracy of Absalom, whose premature death drew from his eyes the bitterest tears they ever shed, except those for his own sins.-For a man who has the affections of nature, and who believes God's word, to see a son, "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh,"-the object of his yearning love,-the subject of his early care, of his tears, his prayers, his watches, his anxieties, his fears, his hopes,--walking in the way of sinners, refusing instruction and admonition, taking his side with God's enemies, living in ungodliness and vice, going on, in all appearance, to perdition, unawed by correction, whether from the parental or from the divine hand, and untouched and unsubdued by entreaty:-O! if there be a drop in the cup of life of pure undiluted "bitterness,"-this is that drop. And special emphasis is here laid on the sorrow and heart-break of a pious mother-" bitterness to her that bare him;" bare him, with the throes of a mother's anguish; but those were throes which introduced the joy of a mother's love, and were light when compared with the agony of a mother's wounded spirit for her child straying from God.-On the contrary, if there is a draught of pure delight in this valley of tears, it is the joy of a godly parent in a godly child! Do you wish, then, parents,-how strange and needless a question!-do you wish to have joy in your children, and not "sorrow," and "grief," and "bitterness?"-Mind your duty. Neglect not means; and when you use them, use them with an affection that is regulated by judgment, and a judgment whose firmness is softened by affection. Mind instruction, example, correction, and prayer. Their corrupt nature our children derive from us. If we neglect instruction, or mislead them by our example, or fail to correct, and to draw down by prayer the blessing of a covenant God upon them,-we become ourselves the causes of our own sorrow, as well as of their danger and ruin.-And children:-O! knew you but the "bitterness" you infuse into the parental cup,-could you but put your lips to it and taste it,-it would-had you a drop remaining in your heart's-blood of a child's sensibility,.-it would send a pang through your spirit; it would arrest you in your wild and godless career. If ever you have a serious reflection, and your parents should then be no more, how bitter to yourselves will be the cup of your remembrance! For your parents' sakes, and for your own-"remember your Creator in the days of your youth:"-"forsake the foolish, and live."

Verse Proverbs 17:22. "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine; but a broken spirit drieth the bones."*1-The first clause stands in the original-"A merry heart doeth good-a medicine;" and we may either supply like or is; and read "doeth good like a medicine," or, "doeth good-is a medicine." In the margin we have "to a medicine;" by which is meant, what undoubtedly is included in the general sentiment, that a cheerful, contented spirit, contributes to promote the beneficial influence of a medicine in the recovery of health.*2 A spirit that is cast down and "broken"-not so much, in this connexion, by afflictive visitations, (though in that case too, there is truth in the representation) as by impatience, thanklessness, disappointment, discontent, envy-"drieth the bones." Under the influence of this gnawing, carking, dissatisfied spirit,-the spirit of peevish dulness, that never smiles on the lips or sparkles in the eyes, but is oppressed with a weightier heaviness by the very cheerfulness of others, as if it hated everything so unlike itself,-the body pines and wastes. Instead of the bones, in the terms of the prophet, "flourishing like an herb," they wither for lack of moisture; the healthy secretions fail; the strength decays; all is fretful debility and indolence.-I would not confine the expression, however, to this description alone of a dull and cheerless spirit; it is true,

as has been hinted, of the effect of the burden of affliction,-and it is specially true also of the load of conscious guilt and the heavy, soul-depressing apprehension of coming wrath. This is indeed a cankerworm, that secretly consumes the very vitals, and, if not effectually relieved, may lay the body, like a skeleton ere it dies, in the grave.

*1 Compare Proverbs 15:13; Proverbs 15:15. rr

*2 Stuart renders, "will do the body good." The word âää, which only occurs here, is translated body in the Chaldee and Syriac. "This makes," says Stuart, "a more congruous sense, for body then corresponds to â■■, bone in the other clause, which last is only a tropical appellation to the word corpus." In sickness, cheerfulness "is a medicine." In some disorders especially, an easy and happy mind is the very best of healing antidotes, and assists in the efficiency of every other. And what is the nature of the cheerfulness or "merry heart," which Solomon here commends? We are sure it is not the "laughter of the fool;" for of it he says "it is mad"-and short-lived too, "like the crackling of thorns under a pot," only leaving, when the blaze is over, a gloomier sadness. What he here and elsewhere commends is the cheerfulness of a heart that has found peace with God, and the joy of God’s salvation. There may, it is true, be a natural buoyancy and lightness of spirit, to which, in a limited acceptation, the words before us may truly enough be applied. But above all, and in the fulness of their meaning, are they true of the heart in which there has settled the "peace that passeth all understanding"-the happy sense of God’s love, the cheering hope of God’s glory. Here is sunshine,-here is gladness. A commentator, (Henry) whom I occasionally quote for the pithy comprehensiveness of his remarks, observes-" It is a great mercy that God gives us leave to be cheerful, and cause to be cheerful; and especially if, by his grace, he gives us hearts to be cheerful." Yes- "Ten thousand thousand precious gifts Our daily thanks employ; Nor is the least-a cheerful heart, That tastes those gifts with joy."

O let us be thankful above all for those springs of spiritual and never-failing joy which God, in the fulness of his mercy, has opened for us, when, so far as our deserts were concerned, every fountain of sweetness might have been "sealed," or converted into a fountain of bitterness. Let us drink of the "wells of salvation," and "go on our way rejoicing!"

Verse Proverbs 17:23. "A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment." We have had this subject so recently before us, that we shall not again dwell upon it. (See verse Proverbs 17:8.) The only phrase here that suggests a remark in addition to those formerly made is-" taking the gift out of the bosom." The phrase implies concealment. He who gives from the bosom, and he who receives from the bosom, are both desirous to have the action hidden. The "gift"-the bribe, must both be given and received covertly.

Let the briber and the bribed, alike bethink them of the words-"Thou, God, seest me!" The secret bribe may to men remain a secret-a secret through life-a secret till the judgment-day. But then-God will "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts." He abhors the deed. He will visit it with vengeance. And let all my hearers bear in mind-there is a judgment which can by no possible means be perverted. There is no bribing the Judge of all. He is infinitely beyond the reach of "gifts." All receive-from Him. He can receive from none. The universe, with all that it contains, is his own. Where is the creature who possesses any thing, that is not God’s in an infinitely higher sense than it is his? And in that dreadful day that shall sum up and close the history of our fallen world, when all shall be summoned before the bar of the Eternal;

when not one shall be able either to evade or to resist the summons; when the sentences of all that have ever lived shall come forth from an authority whence there is no appeal, and shall take sure effect the instant they are pronounced, and settle for ever the doom of each unbelieving and unpardoned culprit there-then,-O then "what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"-how shall he buy off his doomed and trembling spirit?-Were the universe his, he would offer it all. But where is the influence that can shake eternal justice? What "bosom" contains the bribe that can command even a commutation of the sentence?-There is One, who has paid the ransom of a fallen world. God has accepted the ransom. It is not "a gift that perverteth the ways of judgment." It is a "propitiation, to declare God's righteousness in the remission of sins." This ransom may avail for you in all its blessed fruits of pardoning mercy, sanctifying grace, and life everlasting, in a way that "brings out God's righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noonday."

Verse Proverbs 17:24. "Wisdom is before him that hath understanding: but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth."

One translator renders the words-" In the countenance of a wise man wisdom appeareth; but the fool's eyes roll to and fro:"-the rolling of the eyes being understood as the indication of an unsettled and vacant mind. But there is more, surely, in the sentence than mere physiognomy,-or than the mere expression of the mind in the countenance. Another understands the contrast as meaning that wisdom is near to the one and far from the other:-"wisdom is before"-that is, ever near to-"the man of understanding;" "but the fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth"-seeking it; it is far from him. The meaning seems rather to be simply this:-The maxims and principles and directions of true wisdom are before the man of understanding; that is, they are kept ever in his view. They are familiar to him, and constantly applied for his guidance in the right way,-ready for immediate use, in all circumstances. In whatever condition, and whatever emergency, "wisdom is before him:"-the word of God is before him,-the fear of God is before him; the one the rule of wisdom, the other the principle of wisdom; both, before his memory, his conscience, and his heart. Wisdom leads, and he follows.

"But the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth."-He has no fixed and steady principle or rule; nothing on which he fixes his eye for his guidance. His thoughts are incessantly wandering after matters he has nothing to do with,-anything and everything but that which he should at the time be minding;-roving after every vanity, and keeping steadily to no pursuit. It is specially true of "things pertaining to salvation." Wisdom, in this matter above all others, is "before him that hath understanding." He looks to one point. He sees one thing to be needful. He sees the wisdom of God providing for it. There he fixes. And this is wisdom. It is ever before him. One end-one means. Whereas "the fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth," He has examined nothing. He roves at random, with no determinate ideas about the most interesting, by infinite degrees, of all concerns. Ask him how he hopes to be saved; you immediately discover his thoughtless unsettledness. He is in "the ends of the earth." His answer is to seek. It is here; it is there; it is nowhere. He hesitates; he supposes; he guesses; he is at a stand; he cannot tell. This is very mournful; but it is very common. My friends, wisdom is before you-in this Book of God. But it is in vain that it is here, if you set it not by faith before the eye of your mind and the contemplation of your heart, that you may follow it. Wisdom may be fixed in the book; while your eyes are roving away from it in every possible direction. O be persuaded to learn it here, to set it before you, and to follow it for your good.

There is another character that may here be meant-by the fool whose eyes are in "the ends of the earth;"-namely the schemer-the visionary projector. The truly intelligent man applies the plain and obvious dictates of common sense and prudence to the attainment of his ends; and in the quiet and persevering application of evidently appropriate means, he pursues and gains them. But the scheming, visionary fool is for ever after out-of-the-way plans, new and far-fetched expedients; ever experimenting, where experiment is useless; ever theorizing, and ever failing:-yet by no failure convinced or corrected; but still, instead of fixing his eye on the near, gazing out on the far off;-and instead of patiently looking for the regular produce of his own proper occupation, projecting something new, and generally as wild and harebrained as new; looking for his income from a distance, from something yet, and yet to be tried,-expecting good to come to him from "the ends of the earth."

Thus, in every view, the fool resembles the man who, on a road that is full of traps and pits and snares, and beset with dangers on right and left, instead of having (to use a colloquial expression) all his eyes about him, has them roving, in idle vacancy, on far distant objects.

Verse Proverbs 17:26. "Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity."-The word rendered prince signifies noble, and is differently understood. It may be applied to the nobility of station, or to that of mind. Some give preference to the latter; and by interpreting it of the nobleminded, and the "just" in the former clause, of the righteous or the people of God, make the two clauses thus to correspond, and to have much the same import. It seems, however, both more natural and more comprehensive, to consider two ideas as expressed; the one relating to the duty of the ruler, and the other to that of the ruled. It is the incumbent duty of the ruler, on the one part, to administer justice with strict impartiality. It is the duty, on the other part, of subjects to countenance, encourage, and support the ruler in the equitable administration of his trust. To "strike" is evidently to be understood, not literally alone of actual striking, but of "smiting with the tongue" as well as with the fist or the rod,-of all kinds of vituperation and abuse, and attempts to bring the throne into disrepute and odium, and unsettle its stability, by shaking the confidence and attachment of the community. There are many occasions in which a man may be tempted to this. He may, in particular cases, have his mind biassed by pride, by self-interest, by partiality towards a friend, by political predilections; so that even when all has been done with impartial investigation, and the judgment pronounced according to the legitimate rules of evidence and demands of equity, there may be unfair, unreasonable, and angry dissatisfaction; and the prince may be smitten for justice. Every man ought to be on his guard against this. The higher the responsibility,-the more burdensome and difficult the trust,-and the more serious the results of bringing authorities and the laws into disesteem, and unsettling public confidence in them,-ought to be the amount of our reluctant caution in pronouncing censure.

Another remark may be ventured. One of the great difficulties with which governments of great nations have to contend, arises from the variety of crossing and contending interests with which they have to deal. How anxious soever they may honestly be, to allow no undue bias to draw them from the line of impartial justice, yet there is hardly a measure they can adopt that does not affect differently different classes of the community; so that, from their various predisposing circumstances, that shall appear to one class,-to those in one particular department of trade or commerce,-the very essence of injustice, which by another is lauded as a most unexceptionable exemplification of impartial equity. This ought surely to have the effect,-I do not by any means say

of forbidding the most vigilant observance and the freest and most searching scrutiny and discussion of every measure, and the exposure of its evil or questionable character and tendency,-but assuredly of procuring some allowance for the difficulty of the task of pleasing all parties, and some moderation in the tone of censure even where to us the grounds for it are clear and palpable. No man who knows himself will affirm, in almost any case, that, placed, in other circumstances, he might not see with other eyes.-I speak in general. There are cases, in which the interests of a suffering country are to a vast extent, involved, in which it becomes every man's paramount duty to speak out and to speak plainly, and to make the ears of the rulers to tingle with the outcry of humanity and justice.

I would further apply the spirit of this verse to the case of arbitrators. We have ourselves, it may be, consented to submit a litigated point to arbitration. We do so with a full persuasion of our being in the right-of our claim being the just one. But the arbiters unite in giving it against us. It would be most unreasonable on our part to retain a grudge, especially at the one appointed by ourselves, on this account. Our reference implied confidence in his impartiality and honour, and implied a pledge of cheerful acquiescence. To grumble, to censure, and to withdraw our friendship, would be indeed to "strike him for equity." He would have proved himself unworthy of his trust, if his disposition to please and serve us had been too strong for principle, conscience, and oath.

There is one government, in which "the just" are never "punished,"-all whose laws and all whose sanctions are the perfection of equity. But alas! it is under that very government that the spirit expressed by the phrase "striking princes for equity" is most fearfully manifested. All the murmurings of sinners against either the law of God or its revealed and threatened penalty, are the very essence, in its deepest malignity, of this spirit. There can never be reason for it here. Let sinners submit to God; own the righteousness of His law, and the equity of its sanction, and bow to the outstretched sceptre of His grace.

Verse Proverbs 17:27. "He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit." * * Comp. Proverbs 10:19. and Proverbs 15:28. and see too James 1:19; James 1:26.

Modesty and diffidence, sound judgment and discretion, make the wise man "sparing of his words;" but the connexion naturally leads me to the view generally given of the passage-namely, that the wise man lays his tongue under restraint when his spirit is warm, and when he feels he would be in danger of speaking unadvisedly, improperly, injuriously to others or to himself. The phrase "an excellent spirit" is on the margin, more literally, and in the present instance, I should think more appropriately-"a cool spirit." He has the power of self-control, of the government of his passions;-he is meek and lowly in heart; conciliatory and forgiving in his disposition. It is this that enables him to maintain coolness in his manner, even when inwardly, were he giving way to corrupt nature in its felt tendencies, his blood would boil over, and his lips utter perverse things. The fool might get a character for wisdom, had he only wit enough to be quiet;-"Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding." Folly, to be known, must be uttered. If it is kept in, it may pass undiscovered; and the very reserve might contribute to give a stranger the impression of wisdom; since "he that hath knowledge spareth his words." But the loss of the fool is, that he "cannot withhold himself from speaking; and thus he cannot conceal his folly."

49-Pro_18:1-8

Proverbs 18:1-8

LECTURE XLIX.

Proverbs 18:1-8.

"Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom. A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself. When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach. The words of a man’s mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook. It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment. A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. A fool’s month is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." Of the first of these verses two views are given by critics and commentators. They are opposites. The one makes Solomon refer to a pursuit of knowledge and wisdom that is right and commendable, the other regards him as speaking of what is wrong and censurable.-And of this second view of the general meaning there are several varieties. By one critic*1 the intended character is thus described-" A self-conceited hair-brained fool seeks to satisfy his fancy, and intermingleth himself with all things." Another*2 draws it thus:-"He who has separated himself agitates questions as his desire prompts, and breaks his teeth on every hard point." A third*3 thus-"The recluse seeks his own pleasure, or inclination; he laughs at, or derides, everything solid or wise:"-and a fourth,*4 differently from all these-" He seeks occasions, who desires to separate himself from his friends." In the margin, we have it thus: "He that separateth himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom;"-and, from the reference subjoined, (Jude 1:19) it is evident in what sense this was meant to be understood.

*1 Schultens.

*2 Schulz.

*3 Parkhurst.

*4 Hodgson.

Another gives it, like our translators, a general form, without directly expressing either good or evil in the case:-"A retired man pursueth the researches he delighteth in, and hath pleasure in each branch of science."

I am disposed to think that our own translation gives the sense-"Through desire"-that is, the desire of knowledge--"a man having separated himself"-that is, having retired and secluded himself from interruption by the intrusion of companions and the engagements of social life-"seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom."

Among other reasons for preferring this view of the verse, I may mention, that to me there seems to be an intended contrast between the character in the first verse and that in the second. The contrast is between the man that loves and pursues knowledge, and the man who undervalues and despises it. In the investigation of each of the sciences, and in the pursuit of general knowledge, many have been the instances of men devoting themselves to research,-" rising early and sitting late"-expending time, and toil, and mind, and treasure, for the acquisition. Different and mingled motives have incited and maintained the pursuit. The love of knowledge for its own sake; the love of reputation and fame, present and posthumous, as one of its results; and a benevolent desire to contribute, by means of it, to the comfort, entertainment, improvement, and happiness of mankind, as another. Men of literature, and men of science and art, have discovered an abstraction and a perseverance in their respective pursuits,-though in some instances disproportionate to the real value of their objects,-eminently creditable to their mental powers, and to their powers of application and research.

It were well if the word of God,-the fountain of the best and highest of all wisdom-had a greater number of such ardent and devoted students. Alas! how many there are, and ever have been,-men of eminence in erudition and science,-by whom its sacred pages have been neglected, and who have remained utter strangers to the knowledge it communicates;-who have thought that knowledge quite beneath them, and would have been ashamed of being seen with the Bible in their hands or of being for a moment supposed ever to look into it!-"In that hour, Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Here is knowledge which babes may understand; and yet here is knowledge for the grasp of angelic minds. And this union of the simple with the lofty and sublime,-of information for a child amongst men, with subjects of devout admiration for seraphs before the throne,-is one of the evidences of divinity with a heavenly origin with which the Book is enstamped. The philosopher may despise it; yet it contains depths that are beyond the soundings of the longest line of his wisdom; and if he despises it, because its blessed discoveries can be apprehended, sufficiently for their salvation, by the unlettered poor-and the lisping child, he despises it on account of one of its divinest and most wonderful excellences. Let it be observed, at the same time, respecting the study of the Bible, that there are dangers to be guarded against. There is the danger of studying it simply as a branch of science, or of mere philosophic speculation. There are many points relative to the evidences of Christianity, and to the system of theology which the Bible unfolds, such as may engage and interest the inquisitive mind, while the soul remains estranged from its influence-the knowledge "playing round the head," but never reaching the heart. There is the further danger-against which all its public teachers require to be on their guard,-of merely studying the Bible professionally; preparing from the Scriptures, something to be preached, week after week, to others, without a due impression of its importance to themselves, or the necessary personal application of it. The Bible may, in this way, be studied for a life-time, and never be felt and exemplified in its spiritual and saving power. Yes, my friends. There are other unworthy ends for which a man may wish for, and choose, the profession of a minister, besides the desire of a living, or of a reputable standing. This is one-fondness for literary retirement. Here is a situation for its indulgence. A man may thus, in literary leisure, "seek and intermeddle with all wisdom." I will not say, honourably; I will not say safely. For nothing can be more dishonourable, than for a man to choose, for his own gratification, what ought to be a scene of active inquiry and effort for the benefit of others; to convert into a literary lounge, and a source of

mere selfish mental luxury, the most fearfully responsible of all the services in which it is possible to be engaged.-Yet there is far more in the word of God than that which lies on the surface; and it is well when sanctified minds devote themselves to such researches as are fitted to bring out for public benefit its hidden treasures. And here lies one part of the value of a well-instructed ministry.

Verse Proverbs 18:2. "A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself."-This verse, as we have said, presents a contrast to the first,-an opposite character. According to the sense we have put upon the first verse, it is the desire of knowledge and wisdom, that induces tho man who "separateth himself" to choose his seclusion, that he may follow out the desire with success. But the fool has no such desire. He "has no delight in understanding." If he seeks knowledge at all, it is neither for its own sake, nor for the purpose of fitting him for usefulness, but solely for the ends of self-display. He "hath no delight" in knowledge, "but in the displaying of his own thoughts."* His delight is in the gratification of vanity and self-conceit. Such kinds and measures of knowledge as may just save his credit, or enable him, in the company he frequents, to show off,-to talk so as to be admired and flattered,-he seeks eagerly:-and a very superficial smattering may serve his purpose. He thus makes manifest to every sensible and observant mind, both tho weakness and emptiness of his understanding, and the vanity of his heart. In the use he makes of his knowledge, such as it is, his heart "discovers itself."

* Hodgson.

It may mean too, that the fool-the unprincipled man-seeks knowledge such as accords with the perverse propensities of his heart; such as he can use for the gratification of those propensities. In the very choice he makes of the knowledge to be sought, as well as in the use he makes of it when it has been acquired, he shows the state of his heart. For the purpose of vanity and self-display, the fool may take a fancy to attend a little, among other matters, even to divinity. Such subjects may be introduced. When they are, it would never do for him to have nothing to say. He does not like them, it is true; they are very dry; not at all to his taste. But still, the appearance of utter ignorance would be mortifying; and by the contrary,-by showing that he can talk on that as well as on other subjects, he has his vanity gratified. The very thought of the applause of his circle,-of his sentiments being received with-" Spoke like an oracle!" is everything to him. It is to be feared, that with some this goes further; and that the discovery of what is in the heart is of something worse than vanity. There are those who seek a little acquaintance with the doctrines of Christianity, for the purpose of enabling them to say some thing against them; and who get a smattering of the arguments of infidelity, that they may go primed with them to the club or the tavern, or the debating society, and there get a reputation for being persons of free thought and independent spirit, by sporting sentiments that are in contrariety to what are ordinarily held, and showing their superiority to vulgar prejudices. They pass for choice spirits, that have freed themselves from the leading-strings of a nursery education, and learned to think for themselves. Thus "the heart discovers itself." There is nothing there of the real earnest love of truth; but the desire of a character for originality and boldness, and for being the oracles of their circle. This is a very sad, but, it is to be feared, no very uncommon case. And it is no less sad when the sacred truths of the divine word, instead of being studied for their own sakes, and for the infinitely important ends to which they are designed to be subservient, are made the mere food of vanity, and means of a fool’s self-display.

Verse Proverbs 18:3. "When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach."-The sense of this verse will somewhat vary, according to the sense attached to the first clause. It may mean:-

1. "When the wicked cometh" into places of public trust, power, and influence-" then cometh contempt." They bring "contempt," not to themselves only, but to the places they fill, and the societies to which they become united-to themselves, for the unworthy manner in which they fulfil the duties of the trust they have assumed, or have had committed to them; and to their places and societies, with which their names are associated. They entail "ignominy and reproach" upon all they have to do with. And in no case is this more true, than with regard to offices in the church. O what an amount of scorn and reproach has been brought upon the sacred office of the ministry by the intrusion, under numberless pretexts, and from numberless causes, of wicked, worldly, ungodly men into its holy functions. How full is Church history of this deplorable evil!-and how many infidels and scorners has Church history by this means produced. Thus it was under the old dispensation. The wickedness of the sons of Eli made men" abhor the offering of the Lord." And thus it is still. Of the "false teachers" who should arise in the latter days, it is said-" by reason of them the way of truth shall be evil-spoken of." From few other sources, if from any, has there proceeded a greater profusion of unmerited "reproach" of the name and doctrine and kingdom of the Lord; or has "the chair of the scorner" drawn a greater number and variety of its sarcastic sneers and bitter revilings.

2. The phrase may mean-"When the wicked cometh" into intimacy, companionship, familiarity, "then cometh contempt."-He who admits the wicked to his intimacy-makes him his associate,-must share the infamy of his ill-chosen companion. Many a time too has this been exemplified. Many a fair reputation has been blasted,-many an honoured name brought into disgrace by association with the wicked and worthless. On this account, then, as well as on the higher ground of the risk of infection from the contact of evil, beware, all of you,'-beware, especially my youthful hearers,-of such associations. Keep aloof from the wicked and the foolish. Be assured, there is far more reason to fear that he will debase and degrade you, than to hope that you will elevate him. You will get the disgrace of his society, rather than he the credit and the honour of yours.

Verse Proverbs 18:4. "The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook."

Here two different interpretations have been given, as the terms are evidently susceptible of them.-1. The two clauses of the verse are by some considered as containing a contrast between two opposite things:-the first clause referring to the depths of evil and guileful counsel in the heart; while the words do not truly indicate what lies there concealed:*-while the second refers to the transparent open flowing stream of true wisdom, from the heart of the upright and the good; whose conversation flows in a limpid current, not deep and turbid, but clear, fresh, cheering, fructifying.-2. It is more likely that the other interpretation is the correct one;-according to which there is no designed contrast; but the character of the former clause is to be taken from the latter:-"The words of a man's month"-that is, according to the second clause, of a wise man's mouth-" are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook." In the two clauses of the verse, on the principle of parallelism, there appears to be an inversion of the same sentiment;--for, properly speaking, the words uttered are not the "deep waters," but the stream that issues from them; and,

on the other hand, "the wellspring of wisdom" is not "the flowing brook," but the deep and copious fountain or reservoir from which it issues. Another passage may serve to confirm this view. "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; hut a man of understanding will draw it out." Here, the counsel is the deep water-not the words. But the words are the stream which the deep waters send forth. The words bring out and contain the counsel. They are like "deep waters," inasmuch as they do not readily run dry-are not quickly exhausted. The stream of words is of a character such as indicates the depth or abundance of waters from which it flows. The wisdom proceeding from the deep and full fountain in the heart, flows in a pure and silent stream,-not like the shallow current, with rattling and brawling noise,-the apt emblem of the noisy but empty talk of the fool.

* Comp. Psalms 64:6. The sentiment expressed in the verse, we have already had before us more than once under different modifications. The same may be said of the sentiment of the fifth verse. We have had it twice before us, though not precisely under the same form of expression, recently,* and it will come before us again hereafter:-" It is not good to accept the person of the wicked, to overthrow the righteous in judgment." Bear in mind, that what is true of causes in civil courts, or in submission to arbitration, is not less true of causes that come before the churches of Christ. There must be "no respect of persons." It is of such cases the apostle James speaks when he says, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" James 2:1-4. The last of these verses determines the meaning. If they were tempted to give a preference to tho rich, in a plea between the rich and the poor, they were become "judges influenced by evil thoughts."-On the part of the church, and of all who may be appointed to investigate cases for their guidance in discipline, no duty is more important than that of "doing nothing by partiality."

* See Proverbs 17:18; Proverbs 17:23.

Verses Proverbs 18:6-7. "A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes. A fool’s mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul."-While the contrast here described is wicked as opposed to the character and will of God-the God of peace and love-it is marked by weakness and imprudence. He is weak minded indeed who is easily offended,-takes every thing amiss,-startles at every act or look or word that can bear to be interpreted into a reflection or an insult,-is on fire and in a blaze in a moment, like a heap of combustibles on the falling of every spark,-vows vengeance,-"enters into contentions"-"calls for strokes"-gives his card, or sends his friend, challenging to the death the man who has dared to use a word out of joint and not in the perfect punctilio of etiquette and honour, or the glance of whose eye has seemed to his jealous spirit to speak defiance.-The grounds of such challenges, in the world of fashion, are in many instances-perhaps in most instances, the littlest and most pitiful imaginable,-unworthy of a man of common sense to mind,-such as should make any man blush to own them. True vigour of mind and wisdom, would regard and treat such trifles with the contempt which is their due; would not even allow its tranquillity to be disturbed,-the calm surface of their peace to be so much as ruffled by them. And he is imprudent.-"Entering into contentions"-may refer to the contentions of others, as well as his own. The folly of fools is often thus discovered. They are so fond of strifes, that they quite delight when they find two fallen or falling out. They join the fray. They stir up the

combatants; foment their wrath; touch their pride, and urge them on to all the vehemence of passion. They excite to lawsuits and duels, rather than do what lies in their power for their prevention; and delight to embitter bitterness, and to ensure interminable jars and irreconcileable alienation.

Verse Proverbs 18:8. "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." We have had this character before us already: but it is one which cannot be too frequently exposed, or too strongly and severely reprobated.-The "talebearer" is generally very smooth and insinuating; very fair in his speech; very insidious in his purpose.-Love and regard are professed towards the party of whom the tale is told; and very sincere and deep regret at having such a tale to tell. "Who would have thought it!" he exclaims, "I hardly expect you will believe me. But alas! it is even so-too true." It is with extreme reluctance he repeats it, knowing as he does how very much it will grieve you to hear it. But then the very interest you take in the person renders it quite impossible to keep it from you; and perhaps-who can tell?-you may, by knowing it, be the instrument of doing him good. And many apologies are suggested for the unhappy doer of what he tells,-and palliations pleaded in his behalf, yet still with an insinuated uncertainty that puts a sting into the very plea. The words go deep. The wounds they inflict are deep. They pierce to the very vitals-first, on the reputation and character, and it may be, on the interest too, of the subject of the tale; slaying and destroying both, beyond recovery:-and secondly, on the confidence, the friendship, the peace and comfort of the person to whom the tale is told; infusing the venom of suspicion, or worse than suspicion into his mind; embittering his spirit; engendering feelings the most agonizing in regard to those whom he loved, and whom he still wishes to love, and whom to suspect of treachery or of wrong, is like tearing his very heart asunder. The bite of a viper is not so deadly as the wound of these "talebearers" stories and insinuations. The truth is, they contrive to infuse their poison without a bite. If they would but appear in their true character;-would they but show their fangs, and make us feel them, we should be put upon our guard. We know the viper. We shun it. And when it has unhappily succeeded in wounding us, we instantly have recourse to means for preventing the poison from getting into the mass of the blood, and pervading the system. But these human vipers infuse their poison in the language of kindness and love. "Their words are smoother than oil; yet are they drawn words;"-envenomed fangs, of which the virus gets into our system ere we are aware, works its mischievous and morally deadly effects, and becomes incapable of extraction. Every attempt at its removal still leaves some portion of it behind.-There is, in the original word, an implication of softness, simplicity, undesignedness, which only gives the secret weapon with which the wound is inflicted the greater keenness. By one eminent critic the word rendered wounds is, by a different etymology, made to signify-" like morsels greedily swallowed;"-by which translation the passage is made to express what is certainly too melancholy a truth-the avidity with which the "talebearer's" words are generally listened to and received,-swallowed with eagerness.-The other is the sense generally adopted.

Beware of every approach to the character yourselves; and beware of giving it any countenance or encouragement in others.-If there exists a character that deserves to be hooted out of society, and branded deep with disgrace and infamy, the whispering "talebearer" is that character.-O cultivate openness, straightforwardness, simple-hearted candour, unsuspecting charity-the charity that "thinketh no evil," that "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all

things!"

50-Pro_18:9-14

Proverbs 18:9-14

LECTURE L.

Proverbs 18:9-14.

"He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster. The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility. He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him. The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

It must be obvious to every one, that the tendencies of waste and thriftlessness are the same with those ascribed to sluggishness and idleness* They tend alike to poverty. The slothful man might have more by diligence; the thriftless man might have more by economy. Diligence and economy are sister virtues; laziness and thriftlessness are kindred vices:-the sluggard is brother to the waster.

* See Proverbs 6:6-11; Proverbs 10:4. The practical lesson is, that, in personal and domestic interests, diligence and economy should go together; and that the one without the other, never can avail, for either obtaining or securing, even the comforts of life. Of what use is industry if its proceeds are not prudently managed when they come in?-if husband, or wife, or both, be destitute of discretion, improvident and thriftless?-if there is the absence of all sober and considerate calculation, and, as a consequence, no due proportioning of outlay to income, but a reckless and wasteful expenditure, leaving an unlooked-for deficiency-a woeful amount minus-at the year’s end? The poor inconsiderate fools never think what they are about. They keep no daily reckoning-no accounts; and so their money is gone-they can’t tell how-they had no idea they were living at such a rate!-and even when they have made the discovery, there is no improvement. They say, possibly, they must take care; but they only say it, and immediately forget it. Things go on as before; and still (to use rather a colloquial, but sufficiently expressive phrase) what is taken in by the door is thrown out by the window, and still the wonder continues how it goes! They are ever marvelling how other folks do. They can’t understand it. For their parts, all that comes in finds its way off from them as fast as it comes, and many a time faster!-Thus, as might be expected, there are the same appearances of bareness, and cheerlessness, and want, in the dwelling of the thriftless as in that of the slothful. Extremes thus meet. The lesson of the verse is one for all stations. That which all, in every station, ought to aim at, is-a union of industry and economy; associated with a liberality proportionate to providentially bestowed means-a careful distinction being made between an economical, and a penurious and miserly, disposition,-a disposition that keeps all for self-that grasps hard, and can part with nothing. This is what God commands; and this is what will ever draw the approving and confiding admiration of men. Diligence, let me remind you, is as necessary for the acquisition of spiritual as of temporal good,-of the riches of divine

knowledge to the mind, as of the blessings of the divine life to the heart.-And not less is economy of means. How often may it be seen, that with means of a very limited and stinted amount, there is more of spiritual prosperity in one instance, than is discoverable in another, with means the most varied and abundant. Many believers, it is to be feared, are spiritual spendthrifts. They use their privileges on no principle of economy. They read, they hear, they frequent ordinances,-and yet their progress in spiritual attainments bears no proportion to the extent of their advantages. Rich in privilege, they are poor in both the graces and enjoyments of the life of God in the soul. Why? The answer is plain. They who thrive on slender means, make the most of what they have; whereas they who live in the midst of abundance get into habits of carelessness, and of the prodigal use of what they have-allowing a great deal of it to run to waste. Fellow-Christians, guard against this tendency. Improve every part of what you enjoy, as if it were the whole; uniting thus diligence and carefulness, that "you may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;"-that the prayer of Paul for the Philippians may be fulfilled in your happy experience.*

* Php 1:9-11.

Verse Proverbs 18:10-12. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility."

Between these verses there is a manifest and interesting connexion; and we therefore take them together in illustration. "The Name of the Lord" means his character-his perfections, as revealed in His word;-what any one is, being naturally associated with, and suggested by, his name. When the Psalmist says, "They that know Thy name will put their trust in thee"*1-it is quite obvious, that by knowing Jehovah’s name he means more than merely knowing that God was called Jehovah. It is to know God Himself;-the idiom being quite common in the Scriptures of using the name of a person as a phrase for the person to whom the name belongs. The comparison of Jehovah’s name to "a strong tower" is frequent.*2 There is in this, occasion for grateful wonder; that to a sinner God’s name should be a refuge!-Surely, it was not to have been expected that a rebellious and guilty creature should find his refuge there! It is that from which such a creature might be supposed to shrink and to flee, as yielding him anything but the prospect of protection and safety. It is God as revealed in His word that is meant. The grand object of that word is to make known the gospel-the way of salvation;-God in his true character as light and love; "delighting in mercy;" "in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." It is in this character-in which he made himself known before the law, under the law, and more clearly under the dispensation of "the fulness of time,"-that God invites sinners to come to him, and to put their trust in him; in his name,-in his character, in the truths and promises of his covenant. To "the righteous-the name of the Lord"-the Lord in whom they have believed-" is a strong tower:"-a tower of impregnable security. And in times of temptation, trial, difficulty, and danger, it is always at hand,-so that they may "run into it," and feel their safety. All that can be imagined necessary to ensure protection is combined in Jehovah’s Name. There is the union of mercy and love, wisdom, righteousness, faithfulness, and power, all pledged in covenant promise, by their God and Father in Christ. Thither, then, may the tried, afflicted, imperilled, tempted child of God ever betake himself; and there he will delightfully feel that all is safe and well. There he can sit secure and sing-" God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea,"

Psalms 46:1-2.

*1 Psalms 9:10. rr *2 Psalms 18:2; Psalms 27:7; Psalms 56:3-4; Psalms 91:2; Psalms 144:2. In the next verse, a temptation is mentioned to a very different kind of confidence:-"The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit." This is a "strong delusion," and shows the tendency of our nature, under various influences, to "believe a lie." Surely he is going on with "a lie in his right hand," who is thus "trusting in his wealth, and boasting himself of the multitude of his riches;"-who is thus "saying to the gold, Thou art my hope, and to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence;" who is thus "setting his heart upon that which is not." While he exults in his security, and regards his wealth as his "high wall" of protection from evils and sufferings that abound around him,-and alas! from within its entrenchments even sets at defiance the salutary admonitions of that God who gives him all, and warns him of a reckoning to come,-it is a "high wall" only "in his own conceit." It is a wall of no real strength, and affording no real safety,-either from the ills of time, or from the woes of eternity. It is a wall that is only "daubed with untempered mortar," and to which the words of the prophet may, in all their emphasis, be accommodated:-" Say unto them who daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower, and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall, and a stormy wind shall rend it," Ezekiel 13:11. It is a wall which, even although no desolating storm should overthrow it in the rich worldling's life time, is to him, in the very decay of his own life, mouldering away, and coming to ruin; and leaving him, in the end, to the full and torturing experience of all that is meant by the simple but alarming question-" Then, whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"-Or, to change the figure-Death, like an armed man, in the might of his resistless commission, shall invade his stronghold, at the very moment, it may be, when he is most confidently vaunting of its security;-and before that all-conquering power, no wealth shall profit him; "no, not gold nor all the forces of strength." The "haughty heart"-the spirit of proud and self-confident independence engendered and fostered by "wealth"-is but the prelude to "destruction."

Verse Proverbs 18:13. "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."--Nothing, to be sure, can be more preposterously foolish than the conduct thus described. It is, however, in all departments, strangely common.

It is very common in ordinary conversation. How frequently do you find people who interrupt and answer you, ere you have half finished, or perhaps well begun, what you have to say!-It is common too in causes submitted for judgment-not so much so, perhaps, as in the former case, yet painfully common. A decision is pronounced at once with all confidence, before the statement and the proof are half closed-It is no less common in matters of argument and controversy. Your opponent will not allow you to complete your process of reasoning, but starts into a reply long before you have done, or can possibly be understood.

These are points of fact and character, of every-day occurrence. The sources of the evil are various; and in touching on them, its nature, and the "folly and shame" of those by whom it is practised, will more fully appear. I notice, then-

1. Natural or acquired eagerness of spirit, and impatience of protracted inquiry.-Such minds cannot bear anything that requires close and long-sustained attention. They become uneasy, fretted, and fidgetty; and are ever anxious to catch at any occasion for cutting the matter short and being done with it.

2. The sympathy of passion with one or other of the parties.-One of them happens to be their friend; and whether it be he or his adversary that makes the statement, partiality for him stirs their resentment at the injury done to him; the blood warms; and, passion thus striking in, they hastily interrupt the narration-will hear no more of it,-and at once proceed to load the enemy of their friend with abuse and imprecation. They know their friend, and to them it is enough that he has been a sufferer; they take it for granted that he must be in the right.

3. Indolence-indisposition to be troubled.-This is a temper the very opposite of the first, but producing a similar effect. The former jumped to a conclusion from overeagerness; this comes soon to a close from sheer sluggishness of mind. It is to a man of this stagnant and lazy temperament an exertion quite unbearable to keep his mind so long on the stretch, as to listen even to a statement, and still more to an argument or pleading, that cannot be finished in a breath and done with. His attention soon flags; he gets sick of it; he seems as if he were listening, when he is not, and with a yawn of exhaustion and misery, he pronounces his verdict, and at times with great decision, for no other purpose than to get quit of the trouble. He can stand it no longer.

4. Self-conceit-the affectation of extraordinary acuteness.-This-would be an amusing character, were it not, at the same time, so provoking. The self-conceited man assumes a very sagacious and penetrating look:-sits down with apparent determination to hear out the cause on both sides, and to "judge righteous judgment." But it is hardly well begun, when the self-conceited man sees to the end of it. He starts up; his countenance beams with self-satisfaction; he throws aside the pen with which he had begun to take careful memoranda:-"Not the smallest need to go any farther-the case is clear as day-not a doubt about it-settled beyond a question-it is so, and so, and so." And the same is the case in all matters of controversy. You can’t get leisure to state your argument. Whether it be favourable or unfavourable,-on the one side or on the other,-this man of wondrous penetration sees it all in an instant, as if by intuition; and he springs to the inference and to the answer, before you have well entered on your premises; or each argument in succession he catches out of your mouth, and finishes for you. It is surprising with what agility this spirit of self-conceit gets over difficulties. It sees none-no, never.

"Where others toil with philosophic force, Its nimble nonsense takes a shorter course;

Flings at your head conviction in the lump, And gains remote conclusions at a jump." Did I say that this self-conceit never sees difficulties?-I was wrong. There is one case in which it is very likely, almost sure to see them. I mean, when others can’t. Ah! then, it looks very grave, and shakes its head, and with oracular foresight, discerns a thousand-ay, and great and serious ones too.

"Be not ye," my brethren, thus "wise in your own conceits:" for "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him." It is "folly" from whichsoever of these or of other causes it proceeds. And it is no less "shame." Many a time does it bring a man to shame, and cover him with confusion. In not a few cases, it is twenty to one if he hit upon the truth. And perhaps there can be few better ways to expose the folly and punish the presumption, than to allow the man to go on to his close; and then, when he is in the full flush and triumph of selfcomplacency, to point out to him calmly how completely he has mistaken and misjudged the case. At any rate, such treatment is well merited on his part, if it can only be inflicted (which is not perhaps easy) in a right spirit on ours.

Verse Proverbs 18:14. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?"-"When "the spirit" is fresh and vigorous, bodily infirmities, and even pains of the severest description, may be endured with a great measure of composure by natural fortitude alone: how much more when it is enlivened and sustained in energy by the grace of the gospel! There is no saying what degree of bodily suffering may be borne without shrinking, by a mind in the full action of its powers and principles, and animated by divine influences. "What have Christians, sinking to death under diseases the most agonizing, endured with smiling patience!-and what have martyrs submitted to with cheerfulness, in the dungeon, on the rack, on the scaffold, at the stake!-But when "the spirit" itself is "wounded"-when it is pierced and tortured, the bodily frame is shaken thereby to weakness and to the dust. And what is "a wounded spirit?" The designation may be applied to the soul in various conditions. "The spirit" may be wounded, for example,-deeply, sorely wounded-by disappointed hopes;-especially when these hopes have rested on the attachment of a friend or friends, in whose faithfulness and love we have trusted, but by whom our confidence has been betrayed, and whose pledged affection has misgiven us:-when "our own familiar friend, who did eat of our bread, hath lifted up his heel against us:"-when the bosom on which we leaned and reposed proves false and treacherous:-when we find ourselves left alone, when most we required the sympathy, the counsel, and the aid of faithful friendship;-when we are "deserted at our utmost need" by those to whom we had looked with all the security of an undoubting reliance:-when, it may be, those who are "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," instead of dividing our sorrows and doubling our joys by fond and faithful participation, are cooled, alienated, estranged from us. O this, to such as may have experienced it, or may ever experience it, must be anguish itself. Well may we say, "Who can bear it ?"-The tortures of the joint-dislocating and bonebreaking wheel are not to be compared with the agony of a spirit thus wounded. To bear well-that is, to bear with right principle and in a right manner, even bodily and other providential inflictions, requires more than mere natural fortitude:-and to bear well the agony of "a wounded spirit," requires a measure still larger of the gracious influences of God’s Holy Spirit,-and all the power of promise and of hope. The words may also be applied to a wounded conscience,-a conscience pierced through with the arrows of a thousand convictions,-stung with self-accusations,-agitated, through the discovery of the spiritual and heart-searching character of the divine law, with the "fearful looking-for of judgment."-A "good conscience" is one of the firmest supports under the heaviest ills of life. It was amidst his sufferings from severe persecution, that Paul felt its preciousness. It was his "rejoicing." But-a true believer, enjoying reconciliation and peace with God through Jesus Christ, and "exercising himself to have always a conscience void of offence"-O how different his case, even when alive to a sense of many failings, from that of the poor sinner with unrepented, unconfessed, undeplored, unforgiven guilt lying upon his conscience,-and that conscience quickened to action-roused to its fearful functions-by the "fiery law." This is intolerable anguish. This form of the "wounded spirit who can bear?"* * Psalms 32:3-4; Psalms 38:1-3. By this desperate state of spirit, men are sometimes driven to conduct the most infatuated-and to the most fearful of all extremities-suicide itself; by which they seek refuge from the pangs of earth in the severer pangs of hell. This is one of the forms of that "sorrow of the world which worketh death." The only cure for a wounded conscience is the blood of atonement-of the divinely provided, the divinely accepted, the divine atonement. There is no other way of true and, in the end, satisfactory deliverance from this deepest and most excruciating of all the wounds of the mind. It is a wound which cannot be borne, but in one or other of two ways. Either the conscience must be seared into hardness by

familiarity with sin-drugged into insensibility by its intoxicating cup, (the most fearful curse under the form of a present relief which can ever, in the judicial vengeance of heaven, fall upon any sinner on earth,) or it must be divinely pacified by faith in the atoning Saviour. The wound is one which no influence of God’s Spirit can ever be imparted to enable a man to bear. The Holy Spirit is given to deliver from it, not to sustain under it. And this He does by "taking of the things that are Christ’s, and showing them" to the mind of the conscience-stricken and spirit-wounded sinner, leading him to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Groaning under the load of his sins, which have become a burden too heavy for him to bear,-smarting in anguish with the stings of an awakened and busy conscience,-overwhelmed with the" fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation"-the trembling sinner comes to the cross,-comes to it, under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is there-" looking on Him whom he has pierced"-that he finds his effectual cure; there, that his wounded spirit is healed:- "We sing a note that far transcends The highest angel’s highest strain:- They never knew the pang that rends- Nor felt the grace that heals the pain." With what exquisite and touching pathos does the Christian Author of the Task-drawing from his own experience,-describe the anguish of "a wounded spirit," and the efficient means of cure!- "I was a stricken deer, that left the herd Long since:-with many an arrow deep infixed. My panting side was charged when I withdrew, To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.

There was I found by One who had himself Been hurt by th’ archers. In his side he bore, And in his hands and feet the cruel scars. With gentle force soliciting the darts, He drew them forth, and heal’d, and bade me live!’’

O my hearers, if a wounded conscience-a sense of guilt in the soul-is thus ill to be borne here; what will be the sufferings of the "wounded spirit" in the world to come!-where there will be no pleasures of sin to alleviate or to sear it!-when it will be excited to the keenest sensibility, and its arrows will be dipped in the venom at once of memory and hopeless anticipation!-when the spirit shall be "pierced through with many sorrows," and sorrows for which no softening and no cure shall ever be provided;-"no balm" in the place of final woe,-"no physician there!" "Their worm dieth not."

If such be the agony of a thoroughly awakened and sensitive conscience-will you think me cruel in expressing the wish and the prayer that every conscience in this assembly were thus awakened-thus endowed with sensibility?-Ah! my friends, the wish is as far as possible from being a cruel one. I wish your consciences awakened now, while you are within reach of healing; while you have access to the balm and to the physician. Now the cure is to be found. Now, peace and hope are attainable. The blood that cleanseth from all sin, will heal the very deepest, fiercest, and most agonizing wounds of the spirit. If a conscience awakened and armed with its torturing sting is fearful,-still more fearful, and more ominous of future misery, is a conscience seared and insensible. This is not peace; it is stupor; it is the sleep of death; it is the appalling prelude to death eternal!

51-Pro_18:15-19

Proverbs 18:15-19

LECTURE LI.

Proverbs 18:15-19.

"The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge. A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men. He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him. The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty. A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and their contentions are like the bars of a castle."

"The heart" is here, as in many other instances, apparently used for the mind in general,-including both the intellect and the affections. There is, in "the wise," a love of knowledge; and an application of the mental powers for its attainment. And as "the ear" is one of the great inlets to instruction, it may here, with propriety, be considered as comprehending all the ways in which knowledge may be acquired. "The ear" of "the wise" listens with interested and eager attention, when instruction of any valuable kind is imparted; and as "the ear trieth words" he hears with discrimination,-desirous to distinguish truth from error, that the latter may be rejected, and the former stored up in his memory, and retained for use. "The wise" appreciates knowledge according to its utility, and never loses sight of its practical application. It is his desire that his whole character may be formed by the truth which he receives from the divine record. The Psalmist expresses the "wisdom of the wise," in this respect, when he says-" Thy word have I bid in my heart, that I sin not against thee."

Vers Proverbs 18:16. "A man’s gift’ maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men."* * Compare Proverbs 17:8; Proverbs 19:6.

Some would render, instead of "maketh room," "maketh enlargement," that is, procures release and liberty. On this principle the governor Felix acted toward the Apostle Paul, eager for the gratification of his own avaricious disposition,* His was a basely sordid and unprincipled expectation. Alas! that a feeling so mean and despicable as well as profligate should be so common, under one form or another!-How often does it happen, that, when a man is unknown as to his rank and condition,-however fair and worthy his suit may be,-all is distance, and reserve,-all cold repulsiveness; and recourse is had to any pretext whatever in order to get rid of him;-but when afterwards, his station and wealth are discovered, and he is found to be a man who has a good deal in his power,-from whom something may be expected;-O what a change!-how many apologies, and regrets, and thousands of excuses!-what altered looks and manner! what obsequiousness, politeness, and courtesy! what cringing, what flattery! He who before refused a look or word of ordinary civility, would now go to the ends of the earth to serve one so worthy! nothing too great or too good to be done for him! all at his command!-Shame on our fallen nature! He who can thus basely stoop from the manly dignity of independence; and, instead of taking his

ground in character alone,-in the realities of substantial excellence,-can condescend to accept of civilities and honours and tokens of respect, paid him solely for his conferred or expected gifts,-is, if possible, even more contemptible than he by whom those gifts are received. The "great men" are little men, into whose presence "a gift" obtains admission, when sterling worth would fail of finding it. And when there is any principle involved, and the gift comes for the purpose of bribing that principle out of the way of access,-it ought to be, and by every man of right character it will be, rejected with honest indignation-an indignation that blushes at being thought capable of such disgraceful and criminal pliancy. It will be thus rejected, independently of what the world may say; but a regard to character will. at the same time, concur, with a regard to principle, in commanding its rejection; for even were the giver of the gift to gain his plea fairly, independently of his bribe,-to the bribe the success would be imputed,-and the fairness of the decision in itself would be considered as only accidental and fortunate,-the "gift" ensuring the sentence, let the merits of the case be what they may. He who makes his way by "gifts" deserves to be disappointed:-and he is truly honourable, and proves himself worthy of implicit confidence, and of the happy results of such a character, who, under the dominant power of principle, scorns and repudiates the "gift," how valuable soever it may be, and does disappoint him.

* Acts 24:26.

O! my hearers, remember, every one of you-that there is One to whom no gift of yours can introduce you,-with whom nothing you can ever have it in your power to offer can obtain you favour,-and yet an introduction to whom, and the attainment of whose favour, is to each one of you of infinite value. There is no offering that can "make way for you" to the presence of the God Op Heaven. Could you pour at his feet the treasures of all worlds, you would be giving him only what was his own. Yet, there is a way made for you:-not by any gift of yours,-but by the gift for you of Himself-by the divine Mediator. If you approach in that way to the God of salvation, you may come fearlessly to His very seat; and you will find it a mercyseat; you will have a sure acceptance and a gracious welcome, both now and in the great day.

Verse Proverbs 18:17. "He that is first in his own cause seemeth just; but his neighbor cometh and searcheth him."-We have, in this verse, another evidence of the identity of human nature in all times and places. There are different causes of the pleasure we derive from particular sayings. Sometimes it arises from its profoundness and originality; while at other times it springs from its very striking conformity with every-day fact, and the pithy brevity and terseness with which that is put into words which has so frequently been marked, in every one’s own experience-with which that is said, which every one has seen. The latter is the description under which comes the case before us. Every day is the proverb verified; and in a variety of ways:

1. He who comes first may give a statement which, in some of its particulars, is false-contrary to the actual facts of the case. The falsehood of these particulars may not be detected. The story, as told, may hang well together, being made to wear a very imposing verisimilitude. It may look so like truth, from its very consistency, that its plausibility may almost force belief. But "his neighbor comes." He detects and exposes what is untrue in the statement, and so gives the account an entirely new and different aspect.

2. The statement may in no particular be false; but it may be partial;-the truth being told, but not the whole truth. Now, it is wonderful, how the leaving out of a single circumstance, and one,

perhaps, that appears in itself trivial, often affects an entire narrative, altering its whole complexion. The "neighbor comes," he introduces what had been concealed, and startles you by a surprisingly new view of the matter. The insertion, in its appropriate place, of the omitted fact constrains the instant exclamation-"Ah! that is very different-quite another thing!"

3. There may be additions as well as omissions. Some new circumstance may be left out by the one, which is not to be found in the account of the other. The "neighbor" that "comes and searches," finds this addition, and throws it out,-and so produces as thorough a change as, in the former case, was produced by inserting what had been omitted.

4. There may be nothing false, and nothing partial-that is, all the particulars may be introduced, all the facts told,-and neither may there be any additions;-but they may be arranged, connected, and coloured, in different ways. In one way of telling the story, prominence is given to some particular, which in the other account is indeed introduced, but is represented as of little moment, and thrown very much into the shade. In the different statements, this is before that, and that is before this:-and you can readily conceive how the inversion of the order of facts, and of their relative positions in regard to each other, their mutual dependencies and casual relations, may produce two stories essentially different. The effect produced in this way on a narration may be illustrated from the effect produced by grouping in a picture. The very same set of objects may be in two different paintings; but by their different arrangement or collocation,-an object being in the foreground of the one, large and distinct, which, in the other, is thrown far back into the distance, diminutive and hardly visible; while some other object, which was in the shade of diminutiveness, is brought forward into magnitude and prominence,-two pictures may be produced as different as possible in appearance and effect. The same thing might be illustrated from the different and even opposite sentiments which may be brought out by changing the collocation of the same set of words;-and by the difference too of effect produced, without any change in the arrangement of the words, by a change in the emphasis from one word to another. The colouring and grouping of the facts of the same story may be the result of an intention to deceive and to produce a false impression. Yet it is wonderful to what an extent it may arise, almost unconsciously, from the secret influence of self-love, which really makes the very same things appear widely different, in their relative bearings and comparative importance, to ourselves, from what they do to another;-even to a neutral party-far more to an adversary. It has become proverbial, that there are always two sides to a story.

Let us see, then, what are the lessons of practice, deducible from this: for we do nothing to purpose, when we merely attend to the fact, as one of the characteristics of human nature. There are lessons for parties in a cause, and lessons for those who may be called to decide between them. As to the parties, then-let them learn, in the first place, not to be too easily, hastily, touchily displeased and irritated by each other’s statements; but mutually to make allowance for the natural tendencies of self-regard to make the best of a case for self, when there is no actual falsehood or obviously intentional mis-statement of facts.-Let them further learn to avoid being unreasonably dissatisfied with those who hesitate, or even refuse, to decide upon their single statement; remembering the tendency just noticed to favour self, and how hard they would esteem it, were the cause to be decided on the single representation of the other party. Let them apply, in this as in other cases, the great general law of equity and love. As to others,-especially when called to form a judgment between parties,-let them learn to maintain a rigid and determined adherence to the

rule of hearing both sides before deciding. The rule should be regarded as indispensable, even in the ordinary occurrences of everyday life:-and it is of special importance in exercising the functions of judges, jurymen, arbitrators, and members of churches in cases of discipline. The judgment should be kept entirely in suspense, till both sides have been fully heard. The first may "seem right;" but we must not allow-not only our lips to pronounce any decision, but even our minds to be prepossessed by his statement, till we have called in "his neighbor" to "search him." Not even the representation of the dearest, the most confidential, upright, and best-principled friend on earth should be taken at once, and without a hearing of the other party. As self makes the very same things appear to the opposite parties in different lights; as they see them with different eyes, and through different mediums,-how under these different impressions, can their statements fail, though both are ever so conscientious, to make correspondingly different impressions on others? We may frequently have cause to say, even to the friend in whose integrity we place the most unbounded confidence, Really, dear friend, you have taken too strong a view of this matter:-the thing does not seem to us to have been done or said in the spirit in which it appeared to you to have been; nor can we regard jt as in itself possessing anything like the importance you ascribe to it, or calculated to produce the consequences you apprehend from it.

We ought not to allow ourselves to be driven from a strict adherence to this rule by any offence which either party, that happens to come first, may be disposed to take at his statement not being at once and unqualifiedly accepted. If persons will be unreasonable, we cannot help it. We may endeavour to show them that we are not suspecting at all their veracity; but, whether we succeed or not, we must abide by our rule. Every man of sound sense and right principle will be satisfied, on reflection, with the necessity of an unswerving adherence to it; from which he will feel, that he has no more right to insist on his being an exception, than another has. We are not commanded to have the same confidence in the representations of one as in those of another. Difference of known character may put this quite out of the question. But in all cases, Hear both sides must be our rule; and the longer we live, we shall feel the duty the more imperative of holding to it with unfailing constancy. The subject of next verse we considered in a former lecture:*-"The lot causeth contentions to cease, and parteth between the mighty." As the lot was had recourse to when causes were such as admitted not of determination otherwise, there seems to be a natural enough relation of suggestion between this verse and the preceding. In cases when representations differed, and the evidence between them was such as to leave it impossible to say certainly on which side was the preponderance; or when the parties would not submit to arbitration; or when they were too powerful to be safely meddled with;-then "the lot caused contentions to cease, and parted between the mighty."

* Proverbs 16:33.

Perhaps it might not be amiss if "wars and fightings," from which such an amount of misery and all evil is ever arising, were to be prevented in a similar way, both between individuals and nations: unless-as arbitration ought to be resorted to by individuals, when they cannot come to an agreement themselves-there might be instituted, on the principles of national honour and good faith, some great general tribunal of appeal for the countries and governments of Europe, whose decision, in cases of international differences, should, by mutual convention, be binding, and to which such differences might be referred.

I must not leave this subject without an additional remark or two, especially to my younger hearers. I formerly offered a few observations on "chance games," in connexion with this subject. These, I have some reason to think, have not, in some quarters, been rightly understood. I have been represented as not condemning such games. Now, if I heard of a youth saying, in these terms or in the spirit of them-"Oh! the minister tells us that cards are not the devil's books they have been called; that there is, after all, no harm in them,"-I should tremble for that youth. I should fear he had contracted, or is in course of contracting, a liking for such play. Should the simple expression of a sentiment respecting the abstract evil of "games of chance" as such, take off from his mind any portion of the salutary restraint which I am anxious he should feel, bitterly should I mourn his delusion. Let such a youth recollect, that they have deceived and ruined many a precious soul; that they have dissipated many a fortune, and turned, in ten thousand instances, plenty to beggary, freedom to a jail, life, health and vigour to emaciation and the grave; that they are marks of a worldly character; that they do stir up the worst passions of the heart; and that they have covered many a fair character with infamy:-and let him tremble when he ventures on such ground. O beware of beginnings! You only show inexperience, and ignorance of yourselves, if you fancy you are sure of never going beyond a given limit. Small stakes lead to greater. Losses themselves seduce onward by the hope of retrieving. The meshes of the net entangle the feet more and more inextricably. Temptation presses on temptation. Dishonesty, and pilfering, and mayhap forgery, supplies the exhausted purse. Tho horrors of an evil conscience are drowned in intemperance and dissipation. The conscience becomes seared. Health gives way. Character and confidence and credit are lost. Phrenzy tempts to self-destruction, or the body pines to the dust, and the soul sinks into perdition.-Who are they, let me ask you, among the young people you know, that indulge in play-in the various species of gambling? Are they the sober, the virtuous, the godly? or are they the idle, the dissipated, the profligate, the worldly, the reckless of God and of eternity? The youth who joins himself to such, or who begins to look favourably on any of their ways-is in imminent peril. He is on the verge of a precipice. He is on the way, it may be, to the gaming-table and to hell. Let him start and turn, ere it be too late,-as he values his everlasting happiness. And I affectionately beseech you, let not your perdition, by your misunderstanding or perverting any sentiment of mine, be traceable, even were it but as the innocent occasion, to me!

Verse Proverbs 18:19. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle."-The word offended signifies here, evidently, provoked, roused to resentment. And the words imply, that when a brother is thus offended, the resentment is more violent, and the reconciliation more hard to be effected, than where the difference is with a stranger. And so it is whether the offence be without just ground, or with it. I might refer to the cases of Cain and Abel; of Joseph and his brethren; of Absalom and Amnon; of Esau and Jacob. In each of these cases, nothing short of death was plotted and resolved.-The verse seems to point chiefly to cases of offence given; and the words contain a caution against offending, as well as against being offended. It is supposed, however, that offence has actually been taken as well as given. Unbrotherly conduct;-ungrateful returns for favours bestowed,-for efforts and sacrifices made, to promote a brother's interests; a course perhaps of provocation long borne with,-the irritating and offensive conduct often passed over, and as often repeated,-has led at last to a rupture: patience and forbearance have been worn out, and anger and alienation substituted for long-suffering affection. "A brother" thus "offended is harder to bo won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle." The matter of fact is here stated-and there are natural

enough reasons to account for it. More is justly expected from a brother than from a stranger-more of affection, gratitude, kindly treatment, fidelity and trustworthiness. When such expectations are disappointed, the wound in the spirit is proportionally deeper, and more difficult of healing,-the breach wider, and harder of being made up. Besides, the slower a person is to take offence,-the longer he forbears,-the more he forgives,-the more difficult it is fairly to overcome the yearnings of affection, and break the bonds of brotherhood,-the more inveterate may the spirit of resentment be; the more sullen and distant the alienation, when it is actually produced. The offended brother cannot get the better of it. He broods over it;-and the more he broods, the more he feels. The more he reflects on the offender's violated obligations, the more aggravated does his culpability appear. He looks, and justly, for acknowledgment; while the offender, possibly, thinks the less, instead of the more, of his offence, because it is only a brother against whom it has been committed, and is apt to expect forgiveness without acknowledgment. Thus, on both sides, there is too much of stern unbending pride; and continued distance widens more and more, instead of diminishing.

Persons are in danger of taking undue advantage of their near relationships, and of using unaccountable liberties;-of forming and cherishing the most extravagant expectations, insisting on their fulfilment, and absurdly and pertinaciously resenting their refusal;-of doing to a brother what they never would think of doing to another person. They forget, that to use a brother ill is worse than the same ill-usage to a stranger. It is strongly felt to be so; and when mutual alienation has actually taken place; when brother has cut brother; when intercourse is suspended,-their doors respectively closed against each other; and when, if they have families, these make the quarrel their own, each taking part with him whom they regard as their injured husband and parent;-the spectacle is indeed a sad one. And, as each, instead of feeling the duty of himself giving in, or being the first to attempt a reconciliation, looks for the first step from the other side, and cannot bring himself down to make the first advances, (O false and unworthy pride!) the castle-bars remain undrawn; and, rusting in their hold, become more and more difficult to force open:-and the unseemly contentions the unhappy and mischievous feuds-pass down from generation to generation! It is not always thus. The grace of God ought, in all its subjects, to prevent such breaches, and, if unhappily they have at any time taken place, it should have power to heal the wounds, to draw heart again to heart,-to unfasten "the bars," and open the gates of mutual reconciliation:-"The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated." Christians are brethren. They are members of one family. It becomes them to love and live as brethren; to be slow to give, and slow to take, offence; to be humble, and ready to pardon; to delight in reconciliation and peace themselves, and in successfully mediating, and making peace between others. The gospel is the gospel of peace; of love; of forgiveness; of harmony between God and men, and between all who are reconciled to God and to one another through the blood of the covenant. Their "bars" should be those which shut out causes of offence, and will give no admission to the demons of discord. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments, as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore!" Ps. 133.

52-Pro_18:20-24

Proverbs 18:20-24

LECTURE LII.

Proverbs 18:20-24.

"A man’s belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be tilled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. Whoso findeth a wile findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord. The poor useth entreaties: but the rich answereth roughly. A man that bath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

It is evident that in this passage "the fruit of the mouth" and "the increase of the lips" mean the same thing-namely, that which the mouth and the lips utter,-the nature of their customary communications. And the general sentiment conveyed by both clauses of the twentieth verse is, that the effects, or results, will correspond with the kind of "fruit" thus produced; or, in other words, with the general style and character of a man’s conversation. It shall be so amongst men-in the intercourse of social life:-a man will be respected according to the wisdom, trusted according to the truth, beloved according to the sweetness and benevolence, of "the fruit of his mouth;" whereas foolish talk will procure contempt; the utterance of falsehood distrust; harsh, austere, and haughty words dislike and aversion.

There is a sense in which we may understand the language, even taking the former clause of the twentieth verse literally-"A man’s belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth." You may smile and say, A man cannot live upon words! Very true. But the way in which a man uses his lips and his tongue, as the organs of speech, may contribute not a little to his getting, or his failing to get, "the meat that perisheth." I mean not that any of you should, in the slightest degree, try to work your way in life by words of flattery: but when a man’s general conversation is such as to procure for him a character for discretion, courtesy, gratitude, straightforward integrity and trustworthiness,-this may surely contribute, eminently and directly, to the temporal sustenance and comfort of the man himself and his family: while an opposite style of intercourse may tend to penury and starvation. A man may, in various ways, make his "lips" the instrument of either want on the one hand, or plenty on the other.

It must have been observed, however, by careful readers of the Bible, that the belly sometimes stands for the inward parts-the mind, the conscience, the heart; just as the bowels do for the compassionate sympathies.*1 In this verse, then, the words may mean that a man’s inward satisfaction or the contrary, shall arise from "the fruit of his mouth." His conscience shall have peace,-his heart true enjoyment. According to the excellence of a man’s words-according as they tend to righteousness or unrighteousness, to good or evil, to the glory of God or his dishonour,-will be the inward satisfaction or the inward bitterness of spirit with which the man is "filled:"-with which he is filled now, and with which he shall be filled for ever.*2 In this highest sense, then, "death and

life are in the power of the tongue." The dutiful, or the wayward and rebellious use of it may tell effectually on the "death" or the "life" of eternity.-The words, at the same time, are strikingly true as to the effects of the tongue upon others. One word of perjury or falsehood may consign an innocent man to "death," or obtain unmerited "life" to one who is guilty:-so too, in different circumstances, may one word of truth. One word of slander may go far to break a sensitive man's heart, and send him pining to the grave;-while one word of comfort and merited commendation may bring up and cheer into new life the sinking spirit of despondency. And so all the intermediate stages, between the full sweetness of life and the wormwood bitterness of death, are capable of being affected, to a large extent, by "the tongue."

*1 See, among various examples, Proverbs 20:27. The belly is evidently the whole inner man:-John 7:38. "Out of his belly" means simply from within.

*2 See Matthew 12:33-37.

What has been applied to the testimony of a witness,-to the verdict of a jury,-to the sentence of a judge,-bears a still higher and stronger application to the preaching of error and of truth. Well may it be said here, that "death and life are in the power of the tongue." According as it gives utterance to the one or to the other, it may send souls to hell or to heaven,-sealing them in spiritual "death," or quickening them to spiritual "life." Oh! how solicitous should this consideration make public teachers to be sure that their lips utter nothing but the truth of God; what shall be "for edification and not for destruction,"-for "life," and not for "death!" The latter clause of the twenty-first verse (Proverbs 18:21) is somewhat ambiguous:-"And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."-By one translator the words are rendered-"They who indulge it." If this be the kind of "love" that is meant, then the indulgence of the tongue is probably, we may almost say certainly, intended for its evil indulgence; its natural tendency, according to Solomon, being to evil, and requiring constant vigilance and restraint.-We may remark, however, that love operates in two ways-wisely and foolishly. Thus it is with parents. He who loves his children wisely, will restrain them; he who loves them foolishly, will indulge them. If we only take the love of the tongue in a similar way, we shall have again the two opposite descriptions of results. The wise love of the tongue will lay it ever under salutary restraint,-withholding it, by a firm coercion, from the utterance of what is evil, and would recoil in mischief on itself and its owner:-the foolish love of the tongue will give it unbridled license,-allowing it, like a spoiled child, to have all its own way: and according to the one course or the other, will the fruits be sweet or bitter,-lifegiving or deadly. (James 3:5-10.)

Verse Proverbs 18:22. "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." Nothing can be more manifest than that this cannot be meant indiscriminately of all who may happen to sustain the relation. In the Septuagint we have it a good wife. The Vulgate has the same supplement, though the form of expression varies. So also in the Syriac.-Matthew Henry says "a bad wife does not deserve to be called by a name of so much honour." The wife meant is evidently such a one as answers to the design of the original institution of the marriage relation, and is a "helpmeet" for her husband.* It is such a wife as Solomon himself describes in the last chapter of this book,-where he gives her full-length portraiture. And he there represents the character as one that is far from being very easily found,-a precious jewel, and precious by its very rarity. Observe- * Genesis 2:18; Genesis 2:21-24.

1. We may regard the words as associated in Solomon’s mind with the wretched and ruinous tendency of that sin which is so strongly condemned, and against which the rising youth are so emphatically, so repeatedly, and so affectionately warned.* Of how many thousands and tens of thousands has that sin been the temptation and the destruction! Blessed, then-blessed of God-is he who escapes the snare; who gives his heart to one object of virtuous and fond attachment; whom such early affection and conjugal union are the means of saving from temptation, vice, and ruin; who "lives joyfully with the wife of his youth;" who "drinks water out of his own cistern, and springing water out of his own well;" who, contemning the maxims of a vain world, which would demand a style of starting in life beyond his means, resolves, with the prudent partner of his heart’s choice, to set out happily together, in the spirit of contented moderation! Where there are the means at all of anything like comfortable subsistence, there is not a more desirable preservative from personal and diffusive vice, than early wedlock.

* Proverbs 5:7-13.

2. Solomon, you will observe, recognizes here the original law of marriage. He speaks of one wife, and only one. He had, in this point, grievously transgressed himself. Had Solomon "found a wife," instead of crowding a seraglio with hundreds, he would have experienced the truth of his own saying-he would have "found a good thing, and have obtained favour of the Lord." By acting otherwise, in "the days of his vanity," he was led fearfully astray; his "heart departed from the Lord;" and the Lord withdrew His favour from him, and raised up against him the agents of His avenging jealousy. It was, moreover, by the course which he pursued that he failed to find the "good thing" which he here commends,-a wife that could make him happy. Mark the record of his experience-"One man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found." Was it any wonder? No, verily. He took the worst way possible to find a virtuous, worthy, female character. What woman of reputation would choose to be found in such company?

I believe every departure from the original law, without exception, by whomsoever practised, was sinful; and in all cases, the fruits were bitter. Patriarchs, and judges, and kings broke the law; and good men and bad alike suffered for it. Jesus, in instituting the Christian law on this subject, only re-affirms what was the law from the beginning. And it is only when that law is attended to, and the union of two hearts maintained with the devotedness of conjugal fidelity, that the full meaning of the verse before us can ever be experienced.

3. Such being the law of God,-and the laws of European countries being in harmony with it,-few things are more wonderful than the reckless inconsideration with which the choice is often made of a partner for life. How little consideration is there, in multitudes of cases, of what is so essential to social happiness, congruity of principles, of tempers and dispositions, of objects of pursuit and sources of enjoyment! In how many instances is it the purse that is wedded, not the person!-in how many the person, merely as respects bodily appearance, not mental or moral character!-and in how many is it a rash and heedless risk, independently of all serious attention to character or grounds of promise for future concord and happiness; or, if there is anything that seems ominous of the contrary, a self-flattering assurance that it will be done away afterwards! Marriage was the institution of a kind and benevolent God. It was meant for the happiness of His creatures. When formed and maintained on right principles, it answers, in an eminent degree, its original intention. It is not the fault of the institute, nor of the God with whom it originated, that in any case it is not so

formed; or that, when formed otherwise, it fails of yielding what it was meant to confer. I am fully persuaded that nineteen-twentieths of the failures complained of have their causes in the "unequal yokings" of the parties:-and for these, unless in cases of extraordinary previous simulation, who but the parties themselves are to blame?-And on this topic-

4. Let the duty be specially noticed, on the part of believers, that they marry "in the Lord." I might trace the history of the conjugal relation from the beginning, and show you how mischievous and fatal, in regard to the spiritual character of individuals and communities of God's professing people, has been the disregard of this restriction. I might show you, in a variety of particulars, both in regard to the parties themselves and to rising families, the reasonableness of the restriction. The law is expressly laid down in 1 Corinthians 7:39. The case, indeed, is of such a nature, that a law should not have been necessary. Christians might well have been expected to be, on such a subject, "a law unto themselves." It ought to be a proposition of selfevident truth, that to a believer, an unbelieving wife, or an unbelieving husband, can never be "a good thing;" and that for such a one to look for "favour of the Lord" in the very act of violating His will, is a very vain and a very presumptuous expectation. A wife may have all other qualifications a man can well desire; she may be wealthy, beautiful, wellconnected, accomplished, prudent, and even in natural temper amiable:-yet still, with all this, O what a want must be felt, when there is no coincidence of principle, of feeling, of desire, of pursuit, of prospect, on the most important and interesting of all subjects-no union of heart in spiritual affection, in prayer, in converse, in domestic education, and in the anticipations of hope! Such union ought to be regarded by all believers as primary and indispensable. At the same time, in itself it may not always bo enough. There may be agreement in religious principles, while yet, in not a few points, there may be a want of congruity too great to render happiness very likely. The choice ought, in all cases, to be a matter of very serious deliberation; and, with Christians, of earnest prayer. If a "prudent wife is from the Lord," from the Lord should such a wife be sought. It is itself a favour from the Lord; and it brings His favour along with it. In every stage of such a union, it has the smile and the blessing of heaven. Few sights are more lovely, or more full of interest, than that of a youthful pair, setting out in life together,-united by the bond of virtuous, tender, and fervent love;-and their intercourse hallowed, sweetened, and beautified by the sacred influence of Christian piety; when the bond of grace is intertwined with that of nature, each adding its strength to the other. And then-what sight in the world more delightful, than that of a family, the result of such an union,-trained for God,-"brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,"-early manifesting the happy influence of religious instruction; all mutually affectionate, all cheerful, their hearts beating in unison in the sympathy of one another's joys and sorrows; and all living in the pleasing though pensive hope, that though they must part on earth, they shall meet in heaven! This is indeed a sight on which the eye rests with beaming delight,-lovely as the very bowers of Eden,-grateful to the feelings as a garden of spices. And this too is "from the Lord,"-even the invaluable blessing-first in the list of all earthly joys,-the blessing of domestic happiness. (Ps. 128.) Nor must we stop here. We must look to the end as well as the beginning. Think of an aged pair, who have journeyed together through a long pilgrimage, sharing the joys and the sorrows of their common lot, and, by the sympathy of love, doubling the one and dividing the other,-"heirs together of the grace of life,"-bound together and mutually endeared by the faith of Christ and the hope of heaven! Their children have risen up, and call them blessed. And at the close of their long day of life, the shadows of the evening are gently lengthened out, and they sleep together in peace! How delightful to think of those who have been

one in life, being one in death, and one for ever!-one even in that happy world, where they "neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."-I would fain not reverse the picture;-but, as a further inducement to Christians to beware of all "unequal yoking with unbelievers," affectionate faithfulness obliges me to add-how sad, how agonizing the thought of an eternal separation-of parting for ever! What a pang of unutterable anguish must that be, with which a man follows to the grave, and deposits there, the remains of one respecting whom he has no good reason to believe that she was united to Christ! With what a knell of agony must the sound of the shovelled earth come upon his heart, that covers from his sight "the desire of his eyes," the companion of his life,-when the consolation of the "sure and certain hope" is a stranger to his bosom!-never again to meet, save only where the seal of eternity shall be put upon their separation!

Verse Proverbs 18:23. "The poor useth entreaties: but the rich answereth roughly."-This is one of those general sayings which express rather tendency and frequency than universality. There are many exceptions to both sides of the statement. The poor are sometimes insolent, and the rich gentle and kind. But, generally speaking, although pride belongs to our fallen nature, and is to be found in the poor as well as in the rich,-yet necessity is still stronger in its demands. The poor are fain to master their feelings of pride;-they must "use entreaties"-and persist in using them, even amidst many refusals. The tendency of riches again, and their too frequent effect, is, to engender in their possessors a fueling of superiority, a supercilious haughtiness, and a harshness of manner and of language to their inferiors. And I think it may be observed with truth, that the temptation to this is strongest, and the fact most frequently to be witnessed, in those who have risen, or are rising to affluence from comparative poverty. It is among that class that the greatest amount of that most pitiful of all principles is to be found: purse-pride. We have an instance at once of the humble, necessitous entreaty of the poor, and an instance of exception to the haughty roughness of the rich, in Ruth and in Boaz.*1 On the other hand, an example of purse-proud surliness is to be seen in the character of Nabal;*2 and we have the entreaty of felt dependence, and the harsh severity of lordly insolence, in the case of the oppressed Israelites and the merciless king of Egypt.*3-The rich are not here justified in treating with insolent roughness the entreaties of the poor. Far from it. The poor are entitled to sympathy and kindness, both in speech and in behaviour. It is enough that providence has visited them with privation, and the humiliation of dependence, without advantage being taken of their circumstances to crush the fallen, and add insult to suffering. There may be cases of poverty which require to be treated with firmness, and with steady refusal;-but not on account of the poverty, but of the character with which it is associated. There is a manner even of giving to the poor-of answering their entreaties by an alms,-which, to a mind of sensibility, (and the poor have their sensibilities as well as their betters in station) takes off half the value of the benefaction. The alms are given with a churlish rebuff; it is a "rough answer" after all. The very refusal of kindness-when circumstances necessitate it, may be far less offensive than the very alms of unfeeling and gratuitous rudeness.

*1 See Ruth 2:7-13. rr *2 1 Samuel 25:10-11. rr *3 Exodus 5:13-18. In one sense, we are all poor-all dependent-having nothing that we can call our own. We must "use entreaties." God has made this our duty. And when we come before Him, in the true spirit of dependence, and plead as He prescribes,-we may rest assured, we shall never be "answered roughly" there. The Proprietor of the universe "has respect unto the lowly;"-he is the friend and patron of the poor. "The poor

committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless;" and no poor, dependent, suppliant does He ever "send empty away." He says to all, in the accents of inviting condescension and kindness-"Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."-The rich should in this "imitate God." They are never so truly dignified, as when they treat those beneath them with kind and courteous affability, and make the poor, instead of cowering under their scowl, feel at ease in their presence; taking off the pain of dependence by the grace of generous benignity.

Verse Proverbs 18:24. "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."-Friends are persons who, from congruity of character, are mutually attached to each other in close and benevolent intimacy. In this verse, the man is supposed to have friends: and it contains a lesson how to retain them, and a motive to so doing.

1. The lesson is one of consistency. Towards those whom we call by the endearing designation of friends, friendly dispositions must be shown in a corresponding behaviour. If the "man who has friends" treats those whom he so calls with coldness, reserve, and distance; and still more, if he goes beyond this, and adds neglect and selfish injury; he has nothing to expect but the forfeiture of friendship on their part. He constitutes himself unworthy of its blessings. He may complain of his friends having forsaken him; whereas he has no right of complaint. The cause is in himself; the fault his own. He has put them away-driven them off by wrong, or allowed them to drop off by neglect. And if, having thus lost them by his own fault when he did not feel his need of them, he comes afterwards to experience such need and to be sensible of the want of them, who is to blame but himself? If those whom he has thus disfranchised from the obligations of friendship do they take compassion upon him,-feel the renewed yearnings of old attachment, and spontaneously offer their restored intimacy and kind services, they act nobly; but he has not to thank himself for it.-All friendships must, from their very nature, be, on both sides, voluntary; and founded not in circumstances or condition merely, but in character, in harmony of mind and heart, in reciprocal esteem and love. If a man, on rising in the world, makes those who before were his friends feel themselves inferiors and dependents, friendship is at an end. If they choose to resign the position of friends and to allow themselves to be regarded as pensioners, or as hangers-on upon his condescension,-they may. But if, with a becoming spirit of self-respect, they decline exchanging the equality of friendship for the position of obsequious debtors to a lofty condescension, the blame lies, not with them, but with him who has virtually discarded them. There are few things more wounding to the spirit than the failure of those who have called themselves our friends. We may bear long with their seeming neglect or inconsistent dealings,-finding excuses for them, and anxious to retain them. But there are limits to such good-natured forbearance; even to the charity which "believeth and hopeth all things." "The man who has friends" must, if he would keep them, "show himself friendly."-We have then-

2. A motive to the keeping of them: "and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."-"The friend that sticketh closer than a brother," has with many become a favourite designation of the Saviour-the blessed Jesus; so that they use it, as if, in the Bible, it had really been meant of him. Now, it is true of him; no designation could be more appropriate. He is "the sinner’s friend." He expressly calls his people friends; and he founds the designation on the intimacy of his communications with them.* And in this relation he is constant and consistent-"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"-"whom ho loves, loving unto the end,"-and in every step of his

conduct towards them acting in uniform congruity with his character and the claims of the graciously assumed relation.

* John 15:13-15.

I need hardly say, however, that there is no such reference in the proverbial saying before us:-of which the obvious meaning is-that there have been friendships of which the bond has proved itself stronger and more tenacious than even that of natural affection. It has withstood the tuggings and wrenchings of severer trials of its strength and tenacity. Friends have remained fast in their friendship when brothers themselves have parted. This has especially been the case, when the friendship has been cemented by grace,-by the tie of a common faith common sensibilities, and a common hope in matters of religion,-compared with other relations when without this bond. Such was the friendship, formerly adverted to, between David and Jonathan. It was, on Jonathan's part, severely tried,-put to tests before which fraternal affection would, in many instances, have given way: but "Jonathan loved David even as his own soul;" and David, in his pathetic and touching lament over his friend "fallen in battle," exclaims-"I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." The preciousness of such friendships has ever been felt, and has been the theme of story and of song. Life has been made a sacrifice on the altar of faithful friendship. It is unspeakably valuable;-to have a heart on which you can repose, with confidence of tender interest, your most secret solicitudes and desires, and from which you receive a return of the same confiding love. What a support in trial!-what a stimulus in duty!-what a guide in difficulty!-what a solace in despondency!-what a zest and relish of every joy!

"Thy bounteous hand with worldly bliss Hath made my cup run o'er; And in a kind and faithful friend Hath doubled all my store."

If such be the sacredness, the intimacy, the pleasure, and the permanence, of true friendship;-with what gratitude should we bless the name of our gracious Lord, for having assumed this relation to his people!-"calling them friends!" He afforded the highest evidence that the designation was not with him a name without a meaning:-He "gave his life for his friends." And what is his promise to them now?-the promise of faithful friendship-of a love which "many waters could not quench, nor the floods drown?" It is one which comprehends in it all that they can wish-all that they can need:-"I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee!" To have an interest in His friendship, is to be honoured and blessed indeed!

Let the feeling of holy friendship be mutually cultivated among the followers of "the friend of sinners,"-friendship, "not in word and tongue only, but in deed and in truth,"-friendship practical and self-denying. He who "gave his life for his friends" teaches those friends to be ready to give their lives for each other:-"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

O let all, if they would be truly and permanently happy, choose the friendship of Christ and of God, and cast in their lot with God's people. The right hand of divine friendship is held out to every one of you. The voice of the gospel-in the name of Him "in whom God reconciles the world unto himself" is-"Be ye reconciled unto God!"-and all God's people, with one heart and one soul, unite in saying to you-"Come with us, and we will do you good: for the Lord hath spoken good

concerning Israel."

53-Pro_19:1-3

Proverbs 19:1-3

LECTURE LIII.

Proverbs 19:1-3.

"Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool. Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth. The foolishness of man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord." The fool, being here opposed, not only to him "that walketh in his integrity," but to "the poor" that so walketh,-is evidently intended to be regarded as occupying a superior station-as wealthy. The sentiment, then, is, that the pious and upright poor man "is better" than the perverse and foolish rich Man 1:1. He "is better"-as a man. He is so, because more truly estimable and honourable. It should be a settled maxim-and with all that are wise it is-that character is the true dignity of man, and the want of it his true* disgrace. He is to be estimated, not by what he has, but by what he is. That which is merely extraneous is not the man. Moral and spiritual excellence dignifies human nature, and ennobles the possessor of it, with whatever external condition it be found in union. An enlightened mind and a renewed heart are the true glory of our nature-"the best style of man:"-and the poorest, with these, is "better," in real respectability and solid worth, than the richest without them.

He "is better," also as a man, because more truly happy. He carries the constituent elements of happiness within him. They are, as it were, a part of himself. They cannot, therefore, be alienated. They are like the "treasures in heaven," which "no thieves can break through to steal." They lie in the heart, and no "stranger" can "intermeddle" with them. His inward peace and satisfaction, incomparably surpass, both as to intrinsic value and abiding security, all that wealth and rank and worldly honour can ever yield.

2. He is better-as a member of society. He is more useful, and therefore more valuable. The "perverse" and "foolish" exert an influence most pernicious and lamentable. The tendency of their example is to corruption and degradation; and thus to all that is fitted to prevent, instead of promoting true happiness. And the higher his station, and the more commanding his wealth, the contagion of his character becomes only the more diffusive and the more virulent. "Better"-far better, in this respect, "is the poor that walketh in his integrity"-diffusing around him, in the sphere in which his lot is cast, an antiseptic virtue, counteracting evil and promoting good. And, as the stability, prosperity, and happiness of a nation depend so much on the character of the working classes,-who form, as it were, the extended base of the social pyramid,-he is the best patriot who most effectually advances the knowledge, the religion, and the virtue of these classes;-who most effectually contributes to multiply the number of those who, in the lower departments of life, "walk in their integrity." The "perverse lips" and the perverse life of the unprincipled fool do incomparably more harm to society, than his wealth can ever do it good. An augmentation of wealth is not always, either to individuals or to nations, an augmentation of happiness. Too often has it proved

the very reverse-the sapping and undermining of the individual’s and the nation’s well-being,-instability and downfall having many a time dated their commencement, and graduated their progress, from the entrance and accumulation of unwonted wealth and luxury.

Ye upright and godly poor, "hold fast your integrity!"-O let nothing prevail with you to forfeit your inward peace! Stoop not to the use of any means to better your situation, by which you would be deprived of this. How great soever your success, your loss would be far greater than your gain. Poverty is no disparagement; dishonesty is. Cost, then, what it may, keep your character; keep your honour; keep your conscience; keep your assurance of God’s love; keep your hope of God’s glory. "Cast not away," for any earthly consideration, "your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward."

Verse Proverbs 19:2. "Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth."-The connexion of the two clauses of this verse has led critics to attach different senses to the word knowledge in the former, and has given rise to various translations, to convey what each has conceived to be the sense:-"It is not good for the soul to be without caution; for he that hasteth with his feet sinneth:"-"Quickness of action, without prudence of spirit, is not good; for he that hasteth with his feet sinneth:"-"Fervent zeal, without prudence, is not good; for he that hasteth with his feet sinneth:"-"Ignorance of one’s-self is not good; and he that is hasty of foot sinneth."-These various free renderings (for such they are) express, respectively, correct sentiments,-truths, and truths of practical value. But there does not appear the least necessity for any alteration of the received version. It is quite sufficiently confirmed by experience, that the tendency, not of self-ignorance alone, but of ignorance in general, is to produce that "hastiness of foot"-that imprudent precipitation,-which the latter part of the verse associates with the commission of sin, as being its natural and frequent cause. The haste of ignorance or superficial knowledge, has marred many an experiment in science-deprived the world of its possibly valuable results; and has prompted to conduct which has laid up for the agent the bitterness of regret, the sighs of penitential sorrow.

Considered as a general maxim, the former clause of the verse is a very important one.-A "soul" is a rational and intelligent spirit:-and what is such a spirit "without knowledge?" It seems as if there were, in the supposed case, the absence of an essential property. It is reason, with nothing on which, and nothing by which reason can work;-intellect, without what intellect is given to acquire;-powers, without instruments;-faculties, without means of putting them to profitable account;-mind, in destitution of that without which it might as well be matter. "Knowledge" is the soul’s very element,-in which alone it can "live and have its being." When man came, in his purity, from the creative hand of his Maker, his soul was put in possession directly of "knowledge." This was the great good of his soul. It was capable of enjoying, and did enjoy-clearly and amply, we have every reason to believe, the best of all knowledge-the knowledge of God himself,-that wonderful Being from whom he had received his sensitive and his rational existence,-the infinite concentration of all greatness and all goodness, of all purity and of all love; and the knowledge of the works of God, as brought under his immediate or more remote cognizance; and of the character of God as manifested in them, to his observant and delighted mind;-those works on which, when they were finished, with man as their rational superintendent, and as God’s high-priest amongst them, to present to Him, on their behalf, the incense of their praise,-the eye of the Maker looked, and pronounced them all "very good."

There was introduced by sin a description of knowledge which it had been for the soul's good to have continued without-the experimental knowledge of evil. This was what man obtained by listening to the temptation which held out to him the deceitful promise of such an augmentation of knowledge as would place him, in a manner, on a parity with the Most High. Such was the temptation presented by the artful seducer. It was not,-as some malignant minds have alleged, and some weak minds have inconsiderately believed,-the fruit, but the promised results of the eating of it: "Ye shall be As God, knowing good and evil." The temptation was thus no little, trivial, contemptible one, but one of the highest apparent excellence and worth. Man, however, was, by the experiment, a fearful loser. His moral dispositions became perverted and opposed to God,-and, in the things of God, his understanding became, by this very means, obscured. "He did not like to retain God in his knowledge," and the knowledge of God was lost. This was emphatically "not good." And from that day to this, in every age and in every clime, has the truth of the words before us been sadly experienced.

There is now a "knowledge of God"-in the same character as before the fall. but manifested in a relation and in works more appropriate to man's fallen condition,-to which, with peculiar emphasis, the language must apply-the knowledge of God in the great work of redemption. This is the knowledge which it is the main design of revelation to impart. And what says He respecting it, who is himself the Word and Wisdom of God?-"This is LIFE ETERNAL, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."* O! can it, then, be "good" that the soul be without this knowledge? Let men of science say what they will, we must claim for it the very first place. Graduate, as you will, the scale of the comparative value of all other descriptions of knowledge, we demand the highest point for this. Though a human soul were able to embrace, and did embrace, the entire circle of knowledge comprehended in all its other departments,-yet, without this knowledge and its appropriate influence, it would have no more than the character of Satan, as expressed by a poet of our own, shortly but well-"Intellect without God."

* John 17:3.

Yet even to general knowledge may the words before us be applied. It is good;-and "that the soul be without it is not good." It gives better occupation to time; and, in various ways, contributes to fit its possessor for usefulness, preventing, both as to ourselves and others, that "hasting with the feet" which leads to sin. But still, even to render general knowledge truly available for a man's usefulness, in the highest sense and degree, it must be associated with the knowledge of God. To that it must all be subordinated,-and by that it must be hallowed. General knowledge must be principled by divine knowledge, and by it directed in its application. Without right principle to guide the use of it, it may be (and in many instances, without question, it has been) only the means of enabling a man to be the cleverer villain,-endowing him with powers of evil,-with resources and arts of fraud and mischief. And, although I am very far from saying or thinking that, even without religion, thus is always the effect of such knowledge,-yet it is a consideration which should put Christians on the alert, that, while means so various are in requisition for the diffusion of science and literature, there be efforts made to maintain a corresponding diffusion of valuable religious instruction; that so, as far as lies in them, the imparting of the power may be accompanied with the imparting of the principle that shall insure the right and beneficial use of it.

Verse Proverbs 19:3. "The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord."-We have, in Scripture, many exemplifications of the state of mind which this verse describes. How frequently does it appear in the history of the dealings of Jehovah with Israel! To themselves-to their own folly and sin,-they owed all their judicial sufferings; yet how incessantly do they "fret against the Lord," and throw the blame of them on Him!-saying in their impatient petulance, "The way of the Lord is not equal?" Even when, in serving idols, they were indebted to the patient and long-suffering forbearance of God for the good they continued to enjoy, they ungratefully, and in the spirit of fretful murmuring, impute this good to the false gods they were criminally worshipping! And at a later day-when, in consequence of their rejecting the Messiah, the judgments of God began to come down upon them,-how did they, to the very last, instead of humbly "accepting the punishment of their sins," persist in "fretting against the Lord!" *1-In Ahab, when he was reproved for letting Benhadad escape;*2 in Asa when he was wroth with the faithful seer who reproved him in the Lord’s name;*3 and in Jehoshaphat, in his treatment of Micaiah the son of Imla*4-we have, as in many more, individual exemplifications of the spirit.

*1 See 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16. rr *2 1 Kings 20:42-43. rr *3 2 Chronicles 16:9-10. rr *4 2 Chronicles 18:25-26. with Proverbs 19:7. rr

We shall endeavour to apply the principle of the verse to a few of its various manifestations, both in regard to temporal, and in regard to spiritual things. In the former, the error reprehended is exceedingly common. We meet with it every day:-and alas! our own hearts are all sadly prone to it. A man, for example, undertakes a business for which he is in no way qualified either by nature or by education, by talent, temper, or habit:-or he conducts the business which he has undertaken, with inconsiderate carelessness and indolent negligence:-or he adopts hasty and rash steps, on the suggestion of some fool like himself, or on the sudden and sanguine thought of the moment-it strikes him, it takes his fancy, and it is done:-or he deliberately enters into speculations that are at best doubtful, problematical and perilous, depending on many chances, and ruinous if unsuccessful:-he goes perhaps still further aside by the adoption and prosecution of measures that are in their nature unprincipled and wrong; or by following out projects, in themselves sufficiently clear of objection, by means that cannot be justified. In these, and other descriptions of conduct, "the foolishness of a man perverteth his way." His schemes and pursuits fail; and disappointments and losses, difficulties, privations, and distresses, necessarily follow. In these circumstances, the man’s heart too often "fretteth against the Lord." His lips may or may not give utterance to his fretfulness:-no matter, the sin is the same. The evil lies in the heart; and there the "Searcher of hearts" sees it. But the fretfulness is sadly misplaced. The blame lies with himself; and to "fret against the Lord" is at once unreasonable and impious.

I believe that both Satan on the one hand, and Providence on the other, get a great deal of blame that does not belong to them: Satan, in regard to men’s conduct, and Providence in regard to their circumstances. We are fond of shifting the blame off ourselves. "The serpent beguiled me, and I did cat," was the first apology for sin. And with far less reason has the apology been often made since. Satan, even with all his hosts, cannot be the author of all the evil men do;-and I fear he gets the blame many a time that should lie with men’s own corrupt hearts. They "pervert their way," and they accuse Satan:-they fail and suffer, and they accuse God. The depravity of our nature renders us much more prone to impute the evil that befalls us to Providence than to trace to the same source the good which we acquire. With regard to the latter, we are ever disposed, in the pride of

our self-sufficiency, to say-"By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent."-But the very same principle makes us very averse to ascribe the former to ourselves. We fondly look for causes that will save our own credit, and throw the reflection upon anything rather than upon our own folly or our own sin. As Providence does superintend and control everything, nothing can be more convenient, as an off-get from any imputation against ourselves. The foolish heart of the unsuccessful man finds it so: he "fretteth against the Lord." All fretting is fretting against the Lord,-for the reason just assigned, that the providence of the Lord does exercise an universal control over events. Men may not in so many words direct their complaint against the Lord. They may foolishly talk of their bad fortune; they may curse their ill luck. But these are only other modes of "fretting against" Him. They are only the more foolish, that terms are used expressive of what has no existence. They are, in expression, atheism; but, in spirit, they are fretful murmurings against what is actually the ordering of God. This "fretting against the Lord" is often exemplified, when a man sees others succeed in schemes which he looked upon, and perhaps with justice, as foolish and most unpromising. In such case, the more successful man frets the more. He has "perverted his way," and brought his troubles on himself; but another, whose way was in his estimation still more perverse, has succeeded; and why should not he succeed too?-But success to folly and perverseness is the exception; and nothing can bo more unreasonable, surely, than for a man to "fret against the Lord," because He has not, in his case, reversed the natural tendencies of things!

There is one case in which the tendency to "fret against the Lord," rather than to acknowledge His kindness, is strikingly apparent. It is every man’s duty to "acknowledge God in all his ways." He who neglects or despises this, "perverteth his way and sinneth." He violates every dictate of gratitude, of sound reason, and of Scripture. This "perversion of his way" may be the very cause why he has not obtained the object of his desire; arid yet his heart "frets against the Lord," as the author of the evil that comes upon him, although he would not at all own Him in the pursuit of the good on which he had set his heart! There is something very shocking in this:-when a man never thinks of God, as it were, but with a curse; never thinks of Him but as bringing evil! When in the full pursuit of wealth and pleasure, "God is not in all his thoughts," to own his dependence upon Him. When he succeeds and prospers, "God is not in all his thoughts" to bless Him for his kindness. But whenever he fails; whenever misfortune crosses his path; whenever evil comes upon him-then he thinks of God; but only to "fret against" Him and accuse Him of partiality. How unjust and ungenerous this spirit!

Another of the ways in which the principle of the text is exemplified is in the pursuit of happiness. A man seeks it in various ways, but he does not find it. Still there is remaining vexation of spirit; still an aching void; still some Mordecai, on whose account all else avails him nothing; still some "dead fly" that spoils the odour of the precious ointment; still something "crooked which cannot be made straight, something wanting which cannot be numbered." He acquires wealth; but wealth does not bring him the satisfaction he anticipated from it. There is still some annoyance; something that does not go to his mind; something that galls his spirit; something which he finds riches cannot do for him. He gets learning; he gets honour; he gets fame; but it will not do. There is a want. He cannot, perhaps, tell how; but, somehow or other, he is not happy. "His heart frets" to find it so. But the truth is,-he is foolishly "perverting his way." He is taking all ways to find happiness but the right way. He is seeking it, and expecting to find it, without making God himself his Chief Good. If,

instead of vainly "fretting," he would only be persuaded to come to Him, he would then find what would effectually fill the void; what would settle the disquietude; what would put a perpetual end to the discontent and the felt but unknown want. He has been "hewing out to himself broken cisterns that can hold no water," and "fretting" that he cannot get his thirst quenched. Would he but cease thus to "pervert his way," and come to "the Fountain of living water," to which he is graciously invited, he should drink and thirst no more. To everything here below which yields at the best but a temporary gratification, and leaves behind a feeling of its insufficiency, it may be said, in the language of the Saviour respecting the water of the well of Sychar-"Whoso drinketh of this water must thirst again:"-but when a man once drinks of the "fountain of living water," he shall "never thirst:" that water becomes in him "a well of water springing up into everlasting life!"

There is another way in which this principle operates-another department in which it displays itself-I mean in regard to the prohibitory laws of God, and the dictates of conscience when they are violated. "The foolishness of a man perverteth his way." He follows the world. He chooses evil rather than good. He is quite sensible he is doing wrong. Conscience remonstrates, and reproaches, and sharply stings him. He is uneasy, and sometimes when alone, very unhappy. Solitude is irksome to him; for it is then, when other voices are still, that she most effectually makes herself heard. He is disquieted and restless. He frets,-but alas! it is often "against the Lord." He is displeased with the law. Why should it be so very strict? Why not allow a little more indulgence? He is sullenly displeased, at the stinging reproofs of the inward monitor. Why cannot he do as he will, but conscience must be pricking and tormenting him? Can’t it let him alone?-He frets too at the penalty annexed to sin. Why so heavy a punishment? Why such fearful threatenings-of the "undying worm" and the "unquenchable fire?" Why cannot he take his indulgence, but hell with its fiery gulfs must yawn before him? Why, in a word, are there so many things that keep him from having peace in sin?-Or, still further-Why is his nature what it is? He throws the blame on his Maker for giving him, as he alleges in the bitterness of a fretful spirit, such passions, and then damning him for the indulgence of them. He cannot believe He will. If He does, He must be a tyrant!

Vain and fool-hardy sinner!-how reckless the presumption that would throw the charge of thy sins on that "God who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all!" Be considerate and humble. Think, ere you venture to speak, on what regards existing and incontrovertible facts in the administration of the infinite God! Presume not to imagine you can sound the depths of His counsels.-If you will go on in sin, and make your fallen nature your excuse, and expose your immortal soul to the jeopardy of damnation because you cannot solve all the difficulties, and unravel all the mysteries, connected with the origin of evil and the mode of the transmission of a sinful and tainted nature, and the grounds of a fallen creature’s responsibility:-there is no help for you. "Your hearts may fret against the Lord," for not having prevented the entrance of sin, and kept man in his first estate. But this is not wise. You are in "foolishness perverting your way." Your wisdom is, instead of puzzling yourselves with fruitless metaphysical perplexities about how the disease originated, and why it was permitted, humbly and thankfully to embrace the remedy which God, in love, has provided:-instead of "fretting against Him," to "come to Him that you may have life." You are acting an ungrateful, an unworthy, an infatuated part, in "fretting" at your fallen state, and refusing the means of recovery. But the plain truth is, there is guile in your very fretfulness: it is not with your fallen nature that you are dissatisfied. You are in love with it:-you have no desire to part with it; no

desire to be freed from its existing propensities:-your "fretting" is, not that you are possessors of such a nature, but that you cannot get it indulged with impunity. Again:-men seek peace to their consciences by various means; and in this respect too "the foolishness of a man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord." He tries to find it in ways of his own devising:-he thinks he may make a compromise for the indulgence of some sins by abstinence from others:-he thinks he may do with a partial, if it be, as he fancies, a sincere obedience:-he imagines he may atone for his sins by penances, and pilgrimages, and charities :-by these and other means he tries it; but still he fails.-When he thinks of God and of God's law, the peace which at times he fancies he has found will not abide the test. The foundation on which it rests will not stand scrutiny in the light of Heaven. He is still subject to misgivings and fears, and distracting forebodings, and questions that cannot be answered to the mind's satisfaction. Peace still flees from him: the worm still gnaws-conscience still brings its charges; and there is a distressing feeling that they cannot be satisfactorily met, nor its remonstrances duly pacified. He wonders why he should not have peace. He "frets" because he cannot find it. But why should he fret? and above all why should he "fret against the Lord?" He is "perverting his way." He is not seeking peace in God's way. There is peace for every sinner through the blood of the cross. This is the only way in which the peace can be enjoyed consistently with the mutual relations between the sinner and God;-the only way in which the sinner is duly humbled and God duly glorified, If any poor presumptuous creature's spirit shall "fret against the Lord," because he cannot have peace and salvation in a way more flattering to human nature,-more palatable and gratifying to his pride of heart,-let him remember, that, as a sinner, his pride is unseemly and impious; that his "fretting" on such a ground is infatuation and presumption alike without a name. The pride of the sinner, who thus frets against sovereign mercy, must be his ruin; and he will have brought it upon himself. His heart must be broken down to the acceptance of a gratuitous salvation, through the blood of the cross. If he cannot bring himself to this; if he persists in spurning it-in "fretting" against it,-he must continue to try for himself, and to "fret" at the felt failure of every successive trial. The God with whom he has to do cannot alter His measures, infinitely wise and honourable to Himself, as well as kind and merciful to His creatures, to suit and to please the proud spirit of unsubdued rebellion? If you will not have life on His terms, is the infinite God to surrender the glory of his name and government, to gratify the humour of an ungrateful and haughty despiser of it?-of a perverse spirit that frets in discontent at what ought to fill it with "joy unspeakable" and gratitude such as his heart cannot contain?-O the folly of a poor sinner, "fretting against the Lord," when He offers him-just what he needs-mercy! "Refuse it!" He might well say, "fret against it!-is such a thing possible?" Alas! it is more than possible. Many, in pride of spirit, refuse to bow to mercy, and, by thus "perverting their way," sink into perdition: and thus perishing, they will through eternity have cause to "fret," not against God but against themselves!

Once more: let no sinner "fret against the Lord," because the grace that pardons sin associates inseparably with pardon, holiness of heart, and life. The scheme of mercy could not be from God, were it otherwise. There can be no "perverting of our way" more strange and fearful than that which "turns the grace of God into licentiousness," and "frets against the Lord" because, instead of saving us from our sins, He does not save us in our sins! The scheme of God is a scheme of salvation: and a salvation that comes from God must be a salvation from what exposes to hell as well as from hell itself-a salvation from Sin. No other would be His. It is perfect. It cannot be broken into parts. It must be accepted as a whole, and its blessings enjoyed in their inseparable union.

54-Pro_19:4-15

Proverbs 19:4-15

LECTURE LIV.

Proverbs 19:4-15.

"Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour. A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. Many will entreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him. He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he mat keepeth understanding shall find good. A false witness shall not be unpunished and he that speaketh lies shall perish. Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes. The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression. The king’s wrath is as the roaring of a lion: but his favour is as dew upon the grass. A foolish son is the calamity of his father; and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping. House and riches are the inheritance of fathers; and a prudent wife is from the Lord. Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger."

There is a sense, and an important one, in which "wealth" not only may, but ought to "make friends;" in which, to the extent of its possession, it is the Saviour’s injunction to his disciples so to. use it:-"Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail. they may receive you into everlasting habitations." * "The mammon of unrighteousness," is a designation given by our Lord to the riches of this world, because among the men of the world it is so very frequently the occasion of unrighteousness-gotten by unrighteous means, and used for unrighteous ends.

* Luke 16:9.

He inculcates on his disciples its legitimate use; it being, of course, implied, that they who use it according to his will, have also so acquired it. The employment of it in the benefactions of kindness, is evidently what is commanded; by which the grateful affections of others, the objects of that kindness, may be secured; and, having become the source of satisfaction, and, it may be, of benefit, in the present world, may meet us even in the world to come, giving us a cordial welcome to the "everlasting habitations" prepared by our heavenly Father for his redeemed family, whom his mercy has pardoned, and his Spirit has renewed and made like himself. But this way of "making friends" is evidently not what is meant by Solomon here; as the antithesis sufficiently indicates:-"Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour." "Wealth" has many means of "making friends," of which poverty is destitute. It can operate, for its own selfish ends, on the selfish principles of others. These principles lead those under their influence to court the favour of the rich, and to catch with eagerness at every symptom of it, while, in many instances, it is only selfishness versus selfishness;-the showing of the favour, and the catching at

the favour, being prompted alike by the same motive. "Wealth" can "make friends," by gifts, entertainments, and various modes of aid to others, which the poor cannot command; and even by exciting and maintaining expectations, which are as foolishly formed and cherished, as they are selfishly encouraged. Let wealth become poverty; then comes the test of the friendship. Let "riches make themselves wings and fly away;" and the selfish friends find wings immediately too. The attraction is gone. The magnet has lost its virtue; or rather its poles are reversed, and it has become repulsive, driving away what before it held in close cohesion. He who, when rich, was surrounded by flattering friends, is now, when poor, found troublesome. Excuses are devised for keeping him at a distance; he is "separated from his neighbour." The reason is, that formerly he could give, but now he needs; and the selfishness of human nature likes better to get than to give. O how different from the tendencies of that corrupt nature is the divine maxim of Jesus-"It is more blessed to give than to receive!" What a world would this be, were this maxim universally adopted, and consistently acted upon! The former part of this verse would continue true:-wealth would still "have many friends;" but they would be all of the description of grateful friends, made and held by its benevolent use. But the latter part of the verse would bo true no longer; the poor being courted as the object of kindness, for the sake of the blessedness of giving-the luxury of doing him good-would no longer be "separated" and shunned.

It is a comfort to the poor who fear God, that there is One from whom their poverty never "separates" them. "God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him;"-and of Him who, when on earth, "had not where to lay his head," it is said-"He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper." In Him let "the needy" put their trust.

Verse Proverbs 19:5. "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape."*-Truth is a part of the conventional morality of the world. Society could not subsist without it. There is a constant tendency in our corrupt nature-I will not say to prefer falsehood to truth when there is no temptation to the former,-no end to be gained by it; but to set truth aside when there is a temptation,-any object of self-interest to be attained by its opposite. And falsehood is too frequently practised, to defeat the ends of justice. Were it not for the corruption of our nature, there would be no use for oaths. When an oath is administered in any case, falsehood becomes perjury; against which the laws of every well-regulated community direct severe punitive visitation. And even, should the "liar" and the "false witness" escape discovery and punishment among men-"he shall not escape" when "God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing." "All liars"-and not less false swearers-"shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone."

* See Proverbs 6:19; Proverbs 14:5; Proverbs 14:25.

Verses Proverbs 19:6-7. "Many will entreat the favour of the prince; and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts. All the brethren of the poor do hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him." The contents of these verses are, in their spirit, very similar to those of verse fourth. The truth of them arises out of the same principle-the selfishness of our fallen nature; and it was practically evinced then, as it is still. Wherever the gratification of its wishes is to be got, selfishness will be found,-plying all its arts. The throne, as might, from the power of this principle, be anticipated, has many parasitical and

self-interested attendants; hangers on for places, and pensions, and gifts. The gates, and halls, and antechambers of royalty,-or of the representatives and almoners of royalty, will ever be found crowded with applicants. This is one, it may be, of the gratifications and honours, but surely also of the annoyances and mortifications of power and station. It is an annoyance, from the frequent troublesomeness and importunity of the applicants; and it is a mortification,-the prince being well aware that it is not for his own sake that the court is paid,-not from any attachment to his person and character,-but solely to his princely power. If he sinks, and another is about to succeed him, he will be forsaken for the successor,-for him who is about to have the gifts and the berths at his disposal. The worship will be withdrawn from the setting, and devoutly paid to the rising sun. In the latter of the two verses, "brethren" means, as in many other places, near relations; while "friends" signifies simply companions, or persons who have become intimate, but have no consanguinity.-We must not suppose "the poor" to have merited dislike by their own conduct. Then, indeed, they would not be entitled to love. The dislike and distance would be only their due. Idleness or profligacy would disfranchise them, in regard to the obligations of their friends to help them. The general sense of the words relates to the tendency of poverty itself to cool affection and to alienate friendship. This may arise from two causes-both alike selfish and unworthy. First, "the brethren of the poor" are not fond of owning him as one of their circle. They court alliance with the rich, the honourable, the great,-those who have their place in what the world call good society. They take every way of making their connexion with such persons known. They speak of it themselves, and are delighted when it is spoken of by others:-but their poorer relatives they rather keep out of sight. They make no mention of them themselves; and when others stumble upon the mention of them, they try to make the connexion as distant as possible, and to put the best face on what they feel to be disreputable, and do not like to hear of. And this, alas! is too frequently the case, even when, in regard to character, and the qualities which should render men estimable, the advantage is all on the side of the poverty. If any kin can be claimed with the great, it is eagerly done, even let their characters be ever so profligate; while connexion with the poor is concealed and all allusion to it avoided, although they are of the "excellent of the earth" in whom God himself has complacency. Even God’s people are too much in danger of being tempted, by a false and unworthy shame, to feel and act thus,-and to let their countenance sink when a poor relation is mentioned, and brighten at the notice of the rich connexions of the family;-although they know how different is the estimate of Him whose followers they profess to be.-O let Christians be on their guard against such conformity to the world! What are children to think, when they see it in their parents;-and when they are thus taught, by example, to value men, and to value relations, not according to character but to mere wealth and station! But there is another reason for the dislike and the distance. Poor relations are burdensome relations. They stand in need. They present demands, directly or indirectly, upon the purse; and this touches selfishness in another point. They are apt to be thought intrusive and troublesome. They are looked upon with jealousy. Their visits are discouraged. They are received with coldness; and are given to understand that the longer they are of coming back, so much the better. If they do venture sooner, their repulse becomes sterner. They find a deaf ear, or are put off with fair but indefinite and distant promises; and when by such means they are got rid of for the time, they are followed with a fretful wish that it may be many a day ere their face is seen again.

If such the treatment by relatives, what is to be expected of mere friends and acquaintances?-The latter part of the verse is very pouching:-"he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to

him." Exigency produces importunity. The poor reduced relation or companion urges his suit; reminds of former days of intimacy, and of past professions of friendship-of the claims of kindred-of the urgency of want. But this becomes irksome. It frets the temper; and sometimes frets it the more, in proportion as the justice and truth of the appeal are felt, because then conscience secretly puts in its sting; and they are sent away with an imperious and angry scowl.-O! that we would but accustom ourselves, in the true spirit of the "royal law," to exchange conditions, and to consider how, in such an exchange, we should ourselves like to be so treated!-And if Christians would but bethink themselves what would become of them, if God were to deal with them, in their time of need and of application to Him, as they are thus tempted to deal with needy, dependent, and importunate relatives and friends!

We have had the lesson of the next verse, in its spirit and substance, and almost in the very terms, repeatedly before us. It is a lesson of which the importance is so fundamental,-lying as it does at the root of all happiness for time and eternity, that it cannot be too often or too urgently pressed on practical attention, and immediate and hearty compliance:-"He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good." Let a man’s intellect be ever so clear and sound on other matters, he is insane if he forgets God, and neglects his "Soul." This is the prevailing insanity of the world,-the monomania of the entire race.

Verse Proverbs 19:10. "Delight is not seemly for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes."-The word rendered "delight" is here to be understood as meaning prosperity, and abundance of life’s desired enjoyments, from which the delight of men arises:-and a "fool" means a man who is little in mind, destitute of knowledge and discretion, or base in character; or all the three. There is an incongruity between the man and his situation. His prosperity and condition attract notice and attention. There is a certain admiration and influence connected with them; but these are ill supported by his mental and moral qualities. What he has is out of keeping with what he is. You would smile, if you saw a poor man’s ass decked out in trappings of embroidery and gold. Not less incongruous is the union of prosperity and folly. The man occupies a conspicuous position; but there is no corresponding dignity or elevation of mind and character. Besides, in most cases, the "fool" cannot bear his good fortune, it renders him vain, insolent, self-sufficient, consequential, and overbearing. He assumes airs, such as only make his imbecility and folly the more apparent, and the unseemliness the greater and the more offensive. And still further-he has not wit enough to use his prosperity rightly. He perverts it to foolish, improper, unbecoming purposes; not only failing to apply it for the glory of God and the true benefit of men, but actually applying it to useless, silly, frivolous, fantastic ends, which expose him to universal ridicule.

"Much less," adds Solomon, "for a servant to have rule over princes."-The case is one which has not unfrequently been realized in history. Even when the servant, as sometimes happens, is superior in mental talent and vigour of intellect, and discretion of management, to the prince,-yet still there is unseemliness,-an inversion of established and necessary order. He ought not to be a prince, whose imbecility subjects him to a servant’s rule. It seems evident, however, that by a servant, or slave, is meant a person who, while he is of low extraction, has mind, and education, and habits correspondingly low; a base-born, grovelling, ignoble spirit. The influence and authority of such a one is of all things the most unseemly and disgustful. In whichsoever sense the words are taken, the unseemliness is equally great. The sense has been given by one interpreter very briefly thus:-A fool knows not how to use abundance, nor a slave authority. The slave may not be

naturally inferior; yet his education and habits of life render him altogether unfit for the acts of government. There have been exceptions. Among such, however, it is quite improper to place the case of Joseph; inasmuch as Joseph, though, in the mysterious providence of God, a slave in Egypt, was not such by birth or education; but by both, as well as by the grace of God, fitted for rule.

Verse Proverbs 19:11. "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression."* * Comp. Proverbs 12:16; Proverbs 14:29; Proverbs 15:18. A man of true "discretion" and sound understanding will not be "easily provoked." This is one of the attributes of genuine prudence, as really as of genuine charity. A quick and touchy irritability is the mark of a weak and foolish, rather than of a vigorous and sensible mind. Wood that is light and porous,-in which the sap, which is its life and strength, has ceased to circulate,-is proverbially the most easily fired. When provoked, the man of discretion exerts his self-control; restrains resentment; checks and curbs it; knowing well that the instant indulgence of anger,-giving loose to its first emotions, so that they burst forth in ebullitions of violence,-is sure to carry the subject of it to extremes; and that when this is the case in the administration of reproof or reprehension, it at once exposes the man himself, and wrongs his neighbour. "It is his glory to pass over a transgression." It is so because it is much more difficult-self-control requiring far greater effort than self-indulgence; because it shows the operation of high moral and spiritual principle,-a regard to God’s authority, such as overcomes the fear of man, especially of his contempt and ridicule, the worst of all to bear; and because it is the greatest glory of man, or of any creature, to be like God, whose Name is still, as it was of old-"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," Exodus 34:6-7.

Verse Proverbs 19:12. "The king’s wrath is as the roaring of a lion: but his favour is as dew upon the grass."-The "wrath of the king" affords indication of the danger arising from it in the effects which may follow:-just as the "roaring of the lion" does. The power of offended Majesty is thus intimated, and warning given for timely escape from its punitive inflictions. On the other hand, "his favour is like dew upon the grass." The image presents the natural association of freshness, beauty, glory, growth fruitfulness. The dew falls softly on the face of nature-refreshing, beautifying, adorning, enlivening, fructifying. Thus comes upon its fortunate object, as the world esteems him, the favour of the prince. O! if he is regarded as fortunate who escapes the one, and enjoys the other; what shall we say of the "wrath" and "the favour" of the King of kings!* Above all things to be shunned, O shun His wrath; above all things to be desired and sought, seek and desire His favour. There is no misery like the endurance of the one; there is no blessedness like the enjoyment of the other. The one will sink you to hell; the other will raise you to heaven. Nay, the one is hell; the other is heaven.

* Comp. 2 Samuel 23:4; Psalms 72:6; Amos 3:6-8.

Verse Proverbs 19:13. "A foolish son is the calamity of his father; and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping."-In this verse there are brought before us two sources of great unhappiness in domestic life. The first of the two is the subject of frequent reference.* Let not the words be understood as if this source of unhappiness were always to be regarded simply as a calamity in providence. Let not parents too readily so regard it, and thus "lay a too flattering unction to their souls." The blame may lie, and in most instances, if not in all, does lie, and must be, with

themselves. Have their instructions been sufficiently scriptural? their admonitions sufficiently faithful? their example sufficiently consistent? their guardianship sufficiently vigilant? their entreaties and persuasions sufficiently affectionate? their efforts sufficiently united? their prayers sufficiently fervent and importunate? their faith in the promises of the covenant sufficiently firm and influential? O ponder, ye parents, such questions as these, and lay them deeply and solemnly to heart.

* See Proverbs 10:1; Proverbs 15:20; Proverbs 17:21; Proverbs 17:25.

Then we have-"the contentions of a wife"-presented under the figure of "a continual dropping." The idea is not simply that of uninterrupted constancy, although that is what is directly expressed;-it is in the effects of that constancy that the spirit of the comparison lies: As, first,-the most vexatious discomfort. The image is not that of mere falling rain, but of rain finding its way through the roof, and everywhere "dropping;" so that there is no escaping it:-it comes upon you in every corner:-you cannot abide in the house; or, if you do, it is amidst unceasing annoyance. Thus is it where dwells an angry, contentious, brawling woman. She banishes husband and children from the house. There is no living under the same roof with her. Or if a sense of duty, or a feeling of necessity obliges them to remain, it is in the midst of incessant irritation, and vexation of spirit. It is not easy, I should think, to determine, whether the clamour of the scolding termagant or the ill-natured discontented peevishness of the shrew, be the worse to bear. The man is to be pitied who happens upon either; the one ever passionate, the other ever complaining; the one angry at everything, the other pleased with nothing; the one ever furious, the other ever fretful. But further, their vexation and annoyance is not all:-the "continual dropping" is very injurious and destructive to the house,-rotting its timbers, loosening and disengaging its cement, and endangering its stability. So are "the contentions of a wife" ruinous to the family interests, as well as to its comfort and peace. They dishearten, dispirit, and paralyse exertion; they fret and sour the temper abroad as well as at home. When a man has cheerful domestic enjoyment at his own fireside,-unbending there after the toils of the day,-tasting with a happy husband’s and father’s relish the sweetest of earthly sweets, the sweets embosomed in the one word Home,-O with what cheerful alacrity does he set about and pursue his labour through the day, and, at its close, bring his earnings to the kind, smiling, industrious, frugal, managing, partner of his life! But when it is otherwise, his "hands hang down and his knees are feeble." He goes out to his daily labour with a heavy heart-and, instead of anticipating the evening as a time of relief and ease, and compensation for his day’s fatigue, he sees the hour of his return home coming on with a sigh,-and lifts the latch of his door to enter his abode, with a heart still heavier than when he left it. Ah! this is a sad case.-But still further:-the respectability of the family is affected. Friends and neighbours keep aloof; and while the wife is blamed, and the husband is pitied, the blame and the pity are blended generally with feelings, and accompanied with expressions, that are more akin to scorn and ridicule than to respect. And what, in many cases, is the sad result? The poor man, finding no attraction at his own fireside has recourse to the club and the alehouse; and the history of a family, which might have been decent, wellprovided, respected, and happy, ends in destitution, wretchedness, and dependence:-like a tenement, which by a "continual dropping" has mouldered and decayed, and comes to ruin ere it has stood half its time. And O! what shall be said, when the two evils in this verse unite! There cannot be a case more pitiable. Under the former alone, a man may be sustained and comforted by the cheering society and converse of a fond wife, the sharer and the

soother of his sorrows, as he is of hers:-and under the latter alone, his misery may be not a little mitigated by the prudence, the sympathy, and the aid of a pious and affectionate son. But when the two come together-how deplorable!-the husband and the father alike wretched,-neither relation alleviating, but each aggravating, the affliction of the other!

Though my illustration, as you perceive, has been taken from inferior life,-from the dwellings of the labouring poor; yet be it remembered, the misery of such paternal and conjugal disappointments is very far from being confined to that class of the community. It is to be found in the highest circles of society, as well as in the lowest.-Nor let it be forgotten that the case might be reversed. It is not husbands alone that are made unhappy by peevish or passionate wives: many a wife leads a life of daily irksomeness and grief from the behaviour of a hasty and furious, or a selfish and sullen, and unreasonable husband. Let husbands then look well to themselves, how far they may be accountable for the tempers of their wives. "Few women have so little of the heart of a woman, or a human creature, as to make those men unhappy that treat them with discretion and tenderness; or, if women really deserve this character, gentle admonition and kind usage are the best means of reclaiming them." The next verse is a following out of the same subject.-"House and riches are the inheritance of fathers"-the paternal inheritance; that is-not what fathers inherit, but what fathers transmit as an inheritance to their sons. They are things which a man may receive by inheritance from his father, without any labour for them of his own:-"But a prudent wife is from the Lord."-Not that "house and riches" are not from the Lord too. But the meaning seems to be, that when a young man has succeeded to his father's "house and riches," there is something yet before him incomparably more important and more closely connected with the happiness of his future life; namely, his obtaining a suitable companion to share that house and those riches with him-"a prudent wife." If he errs here-his inheritance will be of little avail to his happiness. The antithesis in the verse seems evidently to convey the idea that the latter of the two blessings is unspeakably the more precious of the two. The former-let the house be a palace for splendour, and the riches the most abundant that ever were accumulated,-could not confer happiness, were there strife and brawling, alienation and coldness, in the family. The poor peasant, to whom neither "house nor riches" have descended, but who labours with manly industry- "From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve," to share his little all with the active, economical, affectionate partner of his life,-for whom, on his return home- "The busy housewife plies her evening care;- Whose children run, to lisp their sire's return. And climb his knees the envied kiss to share," has an infinitely happier lot than the wealthiest Nabob of the East, without that love-feast of connubial and domestic peace, contentment, and cordial harmony.

"A prudent wife"-called elsewhere "a virtuous woman," is one in whom "the heart of her husband can safely trust," in regard to rectitude of principle, and propriety of conduct; whose dealings he does not require to be for ever watching; who, from his full reliance on her judgment and integrity, keeps him "without carefulness;" who, in the language of the Apostle, "loves her husband, loves her children, is discreet, chaste, a keeper at home, good, obedient to her own husband:"-one who counsels him in difficulty, cheers him in depression, and, by joint participation, doubles to him every joy and divides every care and sorrow. Certainly, among temporal blessings there is not a more precious gift of heaven to man below. It is "from the Lord."-The meaning is, not, as some have, most falsely, and calumniously to the female character, alleged, that there is no possibility, from the artfulness of woman, of forming any right estimate of what any one of the whole sex is to

be after she has become a wife,-that it is all a lottery. This, I repeat, is a false and calumnious representation. It is not that we must look to providence, as in a matter where any consideration and care of our own are of no avail. It is true, there are cases of artful concealment and simulation, in which, subsequently to union, tempers discover themselves, of which the existence was never previously suspected. But, generally speaking, the fault lies on the side of the choosing party. "A prudent wife" is not to be got by an imprudent mode of choice. The gift must be sought "from the Lord." But this does not mean that the Lord is supernaturally to point out the individual. Our own discretion must be put in exercise, along with prayer for the divine superintendence and direction, so as to bring about a happy result. And then the precious gift should be owned, and the all-bountiful Giver praised for his goodness in bestowing it.

Verse Proverbs 19:15. "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger."* The tendency of a slothful spirit is, to grow by indulgence; yawning indolence ending in a "deep sleep." And this is a time of defenceless exposure, both of person and property, as well as of entire unproductiveness. "He awaketh, and his soul is empty." But he must "suffer hunger;" and, as being the effect solely of his own folly, it is right that he should be left to feel it.

* Comp. Proverbs 6:8-11; Proverbs 10:4; Proverbs 15:19. The sentiment holds as to spiritual concerns. Spiritual lassitude and sloth grows on the professor who indulges it. It becomes lethargy. It puts the soul in danger of falling into "a deep sleep." A torpor comes over all its living energies; and then, incapacity for any active exertion increases. This is a period of special peril to the divine life in the soul. Its last spark is in danger of becoming extinct, and spiritual death of ensuing. Satan takes the advantage; plies his temptations; drives the listless and indolent into the grossest and vilest sins, and fills the conscience with a despair, that rivets the bonds of iniquity. The second part of the verse applies equally to what is spiritual. There is "hunger" in the spiritual, as well as in the natural or animal life. When the soul is in sound health, it "hungers after" the word and ordinances of God, and finds constant gratification and relief from the enjoyment of them But the "hunger" which the soul is here spoken of as suffering, is a painful feeling of want:-the result of indolence and inactivity, and that cannot be immediately relieved; an unsatisfied longing, a gnawing emptiness. When the divine word is neglected, or not studied with attention and care; when no new knowledge is acquired, and there is no enlargement of the old, there is a vacancy in the mind,-a painful craving,-an appetite that is in need of supply, and ill at ease without it. When the stomach, the principal organ of digestion in the bodily frame, has not a sufficiency of aliment to keep its chemical powers in action,-its digestive juices give pain-sometimes most severe-by acting gnawingly upon itself. Now the renewed soul lives on divine knowledge. This is its food. It must have something to keep its powers in action; new supplies of its appropriate and necessary nourishment. There is a peculiar satisfaction to the soul, in the acquisition of fresh knowledge; like the satisfaction experienced by the corporeal appetite from the introduction of food to relieve and satisfy the appetite of hunger. The pain produced by felt ignorance, arises from the unnatural state in which the soul is placed by the want of that on which its powers can operate, and from which their operation may extract enjoyment. This pain in reality springs from conscience. It is right it should be felt. When felt, it will prove a stimulus to seek the nutriment by which alone it can be removed, and which alone can restore the healthful activity of the vital principles of the divine life, and renewed and corresponding growth. If our souls "suffer hunger;" if they pine and starve-the fault is our own. In the divine stores there is no lack of suitable provision. Every kind of supply is to

be found in abundance, laid up for us in God’s word and ordinances. But there must bo diligence to obtain it. As corn in the granary will not nourish the body; so knowledge in the book will not nourish the soul. If you would not suffer from the gnawing "hunger" of ignorance, but would have the satisfaction and growth produced by knowledge, you must work for it; you must put forth effort to obtain it; you must find it, by such effort, in its native variety, and, by the process of "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," you must appropriate it to the varied wants of your higher nature. Attend, then, to the duty enjoined upon you, to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour;"-to "add to your faith, knowledge;" to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom;" to "work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling, that God may work in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things ye shall never fall, but have an entrance ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And let all remember,-that, although they may have no relish for the provision of God’s word, as the nourishment of the soul,-this absence of spiritual relish is their sin; and that their souls, thus famished, shall "suffer hunger" in the world to come, for evermore; endure all the pangs of "the second death,"-all the means of life, which they had here rejected, being eternally withdrawn.

55-Pro_19:16-20

Proverbs 19:16-20

LECTURE LV.

Proverbs 19:16-20.

"He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul: but he that despiseth his way shall die. He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again. Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying. A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again. Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end." The phrase "He that keepeth the commandment" appears to be one which comprehends the giving of an appropriate reception and treatment to every part of the divine word. Every part of that word comes with authority,-has the full force of law. It is God’s commandment that we receive His truth, as well as God’s commandment that we do His will. "What, in Scripture, is called the obedience of faith, includes both;-the believing reception of truth, and the surrender of the heart and life to its holy practical influence,-which, in consequence of the perfect harmony between God’s mind and God’s will, is the same thing with conformity to the precepts of the divine law. We are equally bound by "the law of faith" as by the "law of works." The first of God’s commandments to men, as sinners, is that they accept His salvation,-that they acquiesce in the terms of His offer of mercy. The rebel mind has not resumed its subjection to God till that is done. It remains in the spirit of rebellion; and in that spirit, obedience to no precept can be acceptably rendered. We must first give "the obedience of faith" to God’s testimony; and then the obedience of practice to God’s precepts. The latter is the result and evidence of the former:-and it is by both that we "keep the commandment." And this, as we have frequently had occasion to urge, is connected with the life and well-being of the soul. It is by the faith of God’s truth that the soul first receives life-spiritual life; and it is in "keeping" God’s precepts, under the influence of that faith, that this life of the soul is maintained, enjoyed, and advanced. Everything that is contrary to God’s "commandment," wars against the life of the soul. Hence it is added-"But he that despiseth his way shall die."-"His way" we might naturally suppose to mean God’s way. But the name of God not occurring in the previous part of the verse, the phrase seems rather meant to describe the man who scornfully disregards all admonitions, both divine and human, who smiles indifferently at every warning; who follows the "sight of his eyes and the imagination of his heart;" walking at random, instead of carefully and constantly "cleansing his way, by taking heed thereto according to God’s word." "He shall die"-"die the death;"-not merely the death that consigns the body to the grave, but the death that consigns the soul to hell-" the second death." He shall be lost for ever.

Verse Proverbs 19:17. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again."-The "pity" in the verse before us, is practical pity; the pity that gives,-the pity that acts,-the pity that visits, and comforts, and relieves. It is not the whinings of an unprofitable sentimentalism. It is not the pity of words, that says "Depart in peace-be warmed, be

filled;"-it is the pity of deeds, that "gives those things which are needful for the body:"-not evaporating in sighs, or drowning itself in tears, but testifying its sympathy by substantial acts of kindness. Its practical character appears in the very words before us. He is supposed, in the exercise of pity, to give: "he that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." The words imply, first, the Lord's own regard for the poor. The intimation of this in the words, is strong. We can hardly give a more satisfactory assurance of our regard for any one, than when we become responsible for all that is given to him; declaring whatever is done for him a favour to ourselves, and an obligation laid upon us to the doer or the giver. Thus the Lord here tells us, that all gifts to the poor are loam to Him. The mode of expression before us, implies further, a right principle on the part of the giver. It is of great moment to mark this. There is much of giving to the poor, that has no principle in it, properly so called, at all; and there is not a little that springs from such principles and motives as have anything but the sanction of God's word. A man may give to the poor, from the mere imitation of others; from the mere wish to be rid of them; from the ostentatious love of eclat; from the presumption of self-righteousness, and the hope of "covering" by it "the multitude of his sins." Surely the Lord, in such cases, cannot be regarded as approving and accrediting the gift, and placing it in His book of remembrance as a loan to Himself. He looks to the heart. He has respect to motives. The giver must evidently be considered as having, when he gives, a regard to the Lord; as acting in obedience to His will, in imitation of His example, in humble and lively gratitude to Him as the author of all his mercies. He loves and pities the poor, because God loves and pities them, and has made it his duty, and the appropriate manifestation of his gratitude, that he should feel for them, and seek their good. And he does so all the more in the view of the divine example as embodied in the perfect character of the incarnate Redeemer; whose whole life on earth exemplified the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning him,-"He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight," Psalms 72:12-14.

It is implied also, specially, that the gift is bestowed, with no expectation of any return from the poor himself. It is not a loan to him, but a gift; and a gift bestowed, not from any hope of his becoming available for some selfish purpose at a future time; for then it would have in it, whether the receiver knew the purpose or not, the essential spirit of selfish bribery. It is this disinterested giving that is enjoined, and that is pleasing in God's sight.*1 The loan is not to the poor, but to the Lord. Hence the words imply still further, the certainty of a divine return,-and confidence in that certainty;-"and that which he hath given will He pay him again." Such is the security. What is given is not lost. It is laid up in the bank of faith,-in the exchequer of heaven. It may be returned in blessing here, in the present world. Thus it was promised of old;*2 and so stands the promises still.*3 And it shall be returned in future rewards of grace, the recompences of Him who himself "delighteth in mercy."*4 What a motive is here to the practice of generous, openhanded charity. When given on right principles, the gift is a "laying up of treasures in heaven!"*5 The invisible character of the security, and the distance of the time of the return, are both trials of faith;-and were there more "faith in God," there would be more giving to the poor; were there more "full assurance of hope," there would be more of the lodging in loans to the Lord, of property above.

*1 See Luke 6:31-36; Luke 14:12-14. rr *2 Deuteronomy 15:7-11. rr *3 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. rr *4 Matthew 10:41-42; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Hebrews 6:10. rr *5 Comp. Luke 12:33-34. rr

Verses Proverbs 19:18-19. "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying. A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again."-This too is a subject which has already been considered.* The verses before us, however, suggest some additional views of it; and it is a subject on which-as occasions for the use of the rod are occurring every day and every hour, and thus every day and every hour may good be done by the right, and evil by the wrong application of it-parents need to be frequently admonished. Observe, then-1. It is here assumed, that to the parent the infliction of chastisement is painful,-that it is a measure adopted with reluctance, involving as it does a strong and distressing conflict between feeling and duty, between the heart and the judgment. All parents who come not under the description-"without natural affection"-are tenderly sensible of this.-2. Correction with the rod should never be resorted to when the end designed can be effected by other means. God himself expostulates before he smites. The parent is not to be charged with "sparing the rod," who can effect the ends of discipline without it;-whether by touching the springs of affection, or, where they are at all understood, appealing to higher principles. The Lord’s look to Peter had more effect than the severest visitation could have had. And if a parent has the affections of his children in such a degree, as that a look of grave displeasure shall affect their hearts more deeply with a sense of wrong than a hundred stripes,-why should the hundred stripes, or any one of them be inflicted?-3. When the rod is used-as used it must at times be-the end in view should be, purely and exclusively, the benefit of the child, not the gratification of any resentful passion on the part of the parent. Should the latter be apparent to the child, the effect is lost, and worse than lost; for, instead of the sentiment of grief and melting tenderness, there will be engendered a feeling of sullen hostility, a bitterness and alienation of spirit, a secret spurning at the rod, if not even of angry scorn towards him who has manifested selfish passion rather than parental love in the use of it. To avoid so sad a result, I repeat, no parent should allow himself to correct in a passion. If the hand that is trembling with rage seizes the rod, there is almost a certainty of harm rather than good being the result.-4. The verses direct, that it should be used early, by which, of course, must be understood, as soon as the nature and end of correction can be at all supposed to be apprehended. Not, sooner, certainly. It were unnatural and reckless cruelty to "chasten with the rod," before there could be any understanding of its design,-of the connexion between the chastisement and the fault for which it was inflicted. This connexion it is of essential importance, distinctly to point out and impress; and as early as there is reason to think that the correction can be so understood as to serve the purpose of salutary restraint, it may and ought to be begun. The reason is, that it is so much easier to prevent the formation of the habit of evil, than to overcome it when formed. Nip the first blossoms of sin, as soon as they appear; lest they ripen into "the fruits of Sodom, and the clusters of Gomorrah."-5. You are here taught further, that firmness must be in union with affection in applying the rod. The words seem to express a harsh, yet it is an important and most salutary lesson:-"let not thy soul spare for his crying." The words do not mean, that you should not feel, very far from that. It was the knowledge that feeling was unavoidable, and that the strength and tenderness of it were ever apt to tempt parents to relent and desist, and leave their end unaccomplished,-that made it necessary to warn against too ready a yielding to this natural inclination. The child may cry, and cry bitterly, previously to the correction; but, when you have reason to think the crying is for the rod rather than for the fault, and that, but for the threatened

chastisement, the heart would probably have been unmoved, and the eyes dry;-then you must not allow yourselves to be so unmanned by his tears, as to suspend your purpose, and decline its infliction. If a child perceives this, (and soon are children sharp enough to find it out) ho has discovered the way to move you next time; and will have recourse to it accordingly.-This leads me to remark-6. The rod must be used with discriminative proportion according to the magnitude of the fault committed, and according to the variety of tempers with which you have to deal. This variety is very great. A look or a word will go deeper into the heart of one child than the severest punishment will affect another. One child is yielding, another stubborn; one gentle, another fiery. The great principle is, that you must not yield till you have gained your end. Violent, ungovernable tempers must be met with calm but settled and determined firmness; they must be subdued: your point must be steadily and peremptorily maintained; to give way, would only be to increase the evil. and greatly to augment your own difficulty and suffering on a recurrence of the need for chastisement, and the necessity of giving way again. In this sense, and in this connexion, the nineteenth verse is understood by many, and, at any rate, the principle of it bears a clear and forcible application to the case of correction:-"A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again." Just substitute child for man; and mark how true the statement is. If the child is "once delivered" from chastisement,-if "his crying," which in this case is the crying of tumultuous and bitter passion, once prevail to induce the giving up of the point, and of the attempt to inflict "the rod,"-the presumption grows. Passion, thus accomplishing its end, will rage with the greater fury next time;-will cry, and writhe, and spurn, and kick, with the more determined violence:-and "thou must do it again." The words may be used either of the deliverance or of the correction. Your delivering him, or allowing him to escape once, will, in the way just mentioned, produce the stronger necessity for your letting him off again:-or (which is better) punish now; for if not, it must be done, and done with the greater severity to him, and the greater pain to yourself, in consequence of indulgence having confirmed and accumulated the evil, and rendered it the more hard to subdue.

* Proverbs 13:24.

I have taken the 19th verse in connexion with the 18th as applying remarkably well to the case of high-spirited and passionate children. They need not, however, be thus limited. They are understood by some commentators, as signifying that violent passions ever inflict their own punishment upon their unhappy subjects. These men are their own tormentors. They are never at rest. They are ever falling into scrapes and difficulties, and quarrels, and suits. You may "deliver" them-but they are no sooner freed from one, than they run into another,-thus punishing themselves, and keeping their friends in incessant vexation and trouble. The words may also mean, in regard to wrathful men, what we have considered them as signifying in regard to wrathful children;-that they ought to be punished,-punished now-in order to break and subdue their violence. It is better to coerce them firmly at once, as the only likely means of bringing them to their senses, and preventing incessant repetitions of their offensive and violent conduct.

Verse Proverbs 19:20. "Hear counsel and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end." This brief counsel is in harmony with the whole of the introductory portion of this book, as well as with others of its proverbial sayings. "Thy latter end," there can be no doubt, refers to death; to the time of bidding a final adieu to the world and all its relations and interests. That "latter end," indeed, is not the end of our being. Were it so, the words-"that thou mayest be wise in thy

latter end" would be bereft of all their meaning. The wisdom, in that case, both for life in its prime, and life in its close, would be, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" Wisdom in our "latter end" has reference to our preparation for what is beyond,-for the subsequent eternity of our being:-compared with which the present life is "less than nothing and vanity," and from its relation to which, as its preparatory stage, the present derives all its value. He who, at the end of life, is unprepared for the life to come, will then feel himself to have been a fool all his days. He reaches the verge of a never-ending and never-changing state of existence;-and the time given him to prepare for it has been wasted-all wasted, on its own worthless and passing interests. Even if the man has lived what is called a virtuous life, without any extraordinary out-breakings of the grosser vices-yet, if he has been a man of the world,-without God, and without any such anticipations of eternity as to induce preparation for it in earnest, in the only way in which such preparation can be made by a sinful creature-by an interest in the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, by obtaining through the one the pardon of sin, and through the other a renewed and holy heart;-he will then be found, in regard to all that is before him-all the vast and incalculable interests of the future world, emphatically a fool. It is a sad thing to live a fool; it is a much sadder thing to die a fool. But the one generally follows the other. The greater proportion of men die as they live. Wouldst thou then be wise in "thy latter end?"-attend now to the affectionate admonition:-"HEAR COUNSEL, AND RECEIVE INSTRUCTION."

What can all the science and philosophy of the world do for a man, any more than its wealth, to make him "wise in his latter end?"

"Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door, Pillow and bobbins all her little store, Content, though mean, and cheerful if not gay, Shuffling her threads about the live-long day, Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light:- Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true, A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew, And in that charter reads, with sparkling eyes, Her title to a treasure in the skies!- Oh! happy peasant! Oh! unhappy bard! His the mere tinsel, here the rich reward:- He, praised perhaps for ages yet to come, She, never heard of half a mile from home:

He, lost in errors his vain heart prefers, She, safe in the simplicity of hers!"

All the wit of Voltaire, and all the fulsome flattery of his friends, could but ill suppress the horrors of his dying hours. He could not hear the very mention of the name of Jesus. Hume died "as a fool dieth." The concealed but, it is believed, authentic accounts of the nurse that waited upon him, attest the secret misgivings, groans and agonies of his dying chamber:-but, even were there no truth in them, his low pitiful jestings were more affecting by far than the direst distress. Even on his own principles,-even on the supposition of death being the final cessation of conscious existence,-was that a time for indulging in dull attempts at drollery? Surely, the very idea of the complete and everlasting extinction of all those powers of thought and speculation and inquiry, which had engaged his life, and which were on the stretch for further effort and further acquisition,-the quenching of all this light,-the transition from a living, intelligent, active mind, capable of everlasting expansion and corresponding enlargement of knowledge and delight, to a clod of earth, a mere handful of unconscious dust,-was enough to make any man seriously thoughtful, and to render joking, and such joking, most unnatural and unreasonable, and to excite more than a suspicion that there was a lurking unbelief of his own philosophy, and an appalling

apprehension of a life to come, which this drivelling facetiousness was meant to cover from observation. And what is the wisdom that can only enable a man to say, as Tindal said-"If there be a God, I desire that he may have mercy upon me?" Is it wisdom to leave even a doubt on such subjects to the "latter end?" It is he who " hears counsel and receives instruction,"-the counsel and instruction of God-whose "latter end is peace." It is he, who, viewing the full harmony of the divine perfections in the salvation of sinners through the mediation of Jesus, can look forward without alarm,-can cast himself on the covenanted mercy of God, and anticipate death as a release from the sorrows and the sins of mortality, and the introduction to perfect purity and "fulness of joy." It is he who can say, in triumph over the fears of death and the grave, of judgment and of hell-"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing," 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

56-Pro_19:21-29

Proverbs 19:21-29

LECTURE LVI.

Proverbs 19:21-29.

"There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand. The desire of a man is his kindness; and a poor man is better than a liar. The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil. A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again. Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware; and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge. He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach. Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. An ungodly witness scorneth judgment: and the mouth of the wicked devonreth iniquity. Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools." The first of these verses contains a very important truth;-a truth which may occasion many crosses and pains in the present experience even of the children of God, but which, in the final winding-up of the entire system of His providential administration, will, on the retrospect, fill their minds with admiring satisfaction, their hearts with gratitude, and their lips with praise. The words are susceptible of a more limited, and of a more enlarged, interpretation. By some they are understood as meaning no more than that human counsels succeed only to the extent to which God purposes they should;-that "all our ways" are entirely under His control; so that in no case can we go one step further than He permits.

This, however, is but a branch of a more general position;-namely, that while in the hearts of men there are "many devices,"-many desires, intentions, and resolutions,-many objects, with the plans and means of their attainment,-God has counsels of His own,-specific ends to work out;-and that not only shall these be accomplished in spite of the "devices" of men, but that these very "devices" shall be rendered subservient to their accomplishment-that all that is human shall be so directed and overruled, as to effect what is divine. Many and striking are the exemplifications of this in the records of inspired history:-and these records contain a specimen of the principles by which the divine administration of the government of the world is still, and shall to the end be, conducted. Look at the "device" which was in the hearts of Joseph's brethren:-"They said one to another, Behold this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, "Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams!" (See Genesis 37:19-27) These words were uttered with a bitter sneer-with a "leer malign" upon their countenances, as their eyes glanced to each other, and their jealous and resentful pride kindled the more. They were devising, as they thought, the most effectual means for frustrating all that those dreams had seemed to import:-there should be an end of them now. And no doubt, had they fulfilled their present purpose, an end to them there had been. But so it was not to be. There were other "devices" suggested-"Shed no blood," said Reuben, "but cast him

into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him;"-and then there was that of Judah-"What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him."* This their last "device" they thought as likely to be effectual in bringing his presumptuous dreams to nothing as their first. But what was the result?-"the counsel of the Lord, that stood." This act of theirs was the very means of accomplishing it. How speaks Joseph himself to them twenty years afterward?-" Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life."*1-And what were all the "devices" which were framed and executed by the "wicked generation" that "crucified the Lord of glory?" When they had taken their counsels, had got Judas successfully bribed, had got possession of their victim, and by intimidation of Pilate, had obtained his sentence of death, and had "nailed him to the tree;"-did they, by all this,-carried out by them in the freedom and the guilt of their lawless passions,-frustrate any purpose of heaven?" The counsel of the Lord, that stood:"-" Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," said Peter to them afterwards, ye "have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."*2 And thus it is in every event. Jehovah, the Universal Ruler, carries forward the designs of His providence, great and small, amidst, and by means of, the infinitely varying and crossing, the apparently conflicting, capricious, and random volitions and determinations of agents, who, all the while, feel themselves free, and who, in all that is necessary to moral responsibility, are free,-acting under no mechanical impulses or destinations of fatalism, but doing what they please, as disposition and motive influence them, without restraint and without compulsion!" Such knowledge is too wonderful for us." Every attempt to comprehend it quite overpowers us. It is one of those many things in the moral world, as there are many too in the physical, which make us feel the limitation of our faculties, and, if rightly considered and improved, may impress us with a becoming and salutary "humbleness of mind."

*1 Genesis 45:5. rr

*2 Acts 2:23.

I have said that the operation of tins truth may be often painful. We are naturally fond of our own "devices." We fancy them wise. We anticipate from them the most beneficial results; and we dwell on the anticipation with delight. But impediments come in the way. Obstacles present themselves, and sometimes from quarters whence we least expected them, and where their occurrence occasions us the bitterest disappointment. Our great difficulty then is to see the hand of God,-or to retain the firm conviction that "all things are of Him." Yet so assuredly it is. "Clouds and darkness" may be "round about him." This is the trial of our faith. There will be light in the end-all light-He will give us to see that "His counsel has stood," and that it has been well for us that our "devices" have not.

We must not, on the other hand, forget, that while God in mercy frustrates many of our "devices," that "His counsel may stand," it is sometimes a part of His counsel to chasten His people, both individually and socially, by allowing their "devices" and plans to succeed. He may frustrate the purpose of one, and give effect to the opposite purpose of another. In both ways He may chasten; or the one may be favour, and the other correction,-correction, such as may not be felt at the time, but felt in all its bitterness afterwards.

Verse Proverbs 19:22. "The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar."-The meaning commonly affixed to this verse is probably the true one-that kindness is to be measured by the amount of a man's desires to do good, rather than by the amount of his ability. Any other principle of estimate would be most unfair in regard to a very numerous class of our fellow-men. There may be a great deal of genuine and generous kindness in the heart of a poor man, who has nothing beyond desires and wishes in his power. The heart may be full, when the hand is empty. In this respect, the Bible principle is that of the purest equity-" It is required according to what a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." But let it be observed and remembered-" the desires of a man are not his kindness," when he has the ability to be practically kind, and confines himself to desires. No. In that case, there is the clearest of all evidence that the desire is not sincere;-mere profession, without reality-"love in word"-which is only another phrase for no love at all.* * Comp. James 2:15-16.

While, therefore, there are cases in which we cheerfully, according to a common phrase, "take the will for the deed," knowing that there is a want of ability to do what the heart wishes,-there are other cases, in which we demand the deed as the only proof of the will,-the gift as the only evidence of the charity. The poor man, who is sincerely willing and desirous to serve us, had he but the power, is as much entitled to our lively and affectionate gratitude as if he had actually done us the service.

Such, in this connexion, seems to be the import of the second clause of the verse-"A poor man is better than a liar."-The liar is the hypocritical and empty promiser; the man of many words, but no deeds,-of large and flattering assurances, but no performance. The poor man, who is sincere in his kind desires, is "better"-better incomparably in himself, in the sterling principles of his character; and better to us, in the comfort and satisfaction imparted to our minds in our times of need,-than the man who talks as if his whole heart were love, but who proves by his conduct that his heart is all in his tongue, and that it is there only to teach it to lie;-the man who gives us to expect much, but from whom nothing is obtained; who turns out "a cloud without water;" or-to use the apt comparison of Job respecting his friends,-is like the "stream of the brooks" in the parched and burning desert, that rapidly passes away, and balks the eager anticipations of the thirsty and fainting caravan. The true sense, therefore, seems to be given by an interpreter and translator, who renders the verse freely-"The glory of a man is his beneficence; but better is the poor man than he that falsely professeth it."*1 This rendering indeed, of the former part of the verse proceeds on the supposition of "desire" meaning that which is the object of desire;-and so it is understood by others. An eminent critic renders-" That which is desirable, or praiseworthy, in a man, is his kindness or beneficence."*2 I prefer the sense we have before put on this part of the verse. And, from the whole, we should learn, first, to beware ourselves of all false, lying, hypocritical professions of kindness,-of which the sincerity is not evinced by the gift and act. The mouth and the purse are far from being always equally open. On the contrary, it is often where most is said that least is done; and where there are fewest words that most is got. Let us be of those who say little and do much, rather than of those who say much and do little. And we should further learn to be just to all, in our estimates of their "kindness." We are in great danger of forming our estimates, and cherishing our feelings of gratitude, according to the amount of relief or of benefit actually obtained and enjoyed by ourselves. Yet it is the "kindness" not the mere gift considered in itself, that should be the measure of our gratitude. When a man pinches himself to

help us, but can do comparatively little, we are more indebted to him than to the man who may give largely, and yet hardly touch even his superfluity.

*1 Hodgson.

*2 Schulz.

There is another sense-closely connected with the one which the clause preceding suggests-in which "a poor man is better than a liar." Men may not only lie in their promises to give; they may lie as a means of getting. Now, it is better far that a man remain poor, than that he make rich by lying,-that is, by any false, deceptive, dishonourable means. Yes, ye upright poor, it is better-far, far better for your reputation, for your peace of conscience, for your trust in Providence, and even for the probabilities of your ultimately getting on in the world. On your "honest poverty" rests the smile of Heaven; and the very sense of your integrity places you in regard to respectability and happiness immeasurably above the man who is rich at the expense of truth.

Verse Proverbs 19:23. "The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil-Supplements, in any translation, generally indicate some degree of obscurity in the original. There is obscurity in the middle clause of this verse where our translators have supplied-he who hath it; a supplement which is sufficiently bold. The word for satisfied may be either the verb to be full, or the adjective full or filled. The word rendered "abide" may signify to pass the, night-to lie down-to rest. From these significations of the different words, various have been the senses affixed to the clause. "The full" has been understood of those who are full of prosperity and the pride which it engenders; and by an alteration in the connexion of the words in the latter part of the verse, it has been made to declare of him, that "he shall lie down in it, and that he shall be visited with evil." But this interpretation, like one or two others, does not seem at all natural or satisfactory. To myself it appears, that, taking the word for "satisfied" more literally as meaning full or filled, and the word for abide as signifying rest, or passing the night in quietness and peace-the verse might be rendered-" The fear of the Lord is unto fife; and he who is filled with it shall rest; he shall not be visited with evil." The sense is thus not materially different from that of our received version. The idea is the delightful one of felt security-tranquil, settled repose and serenity of spirit, from confidence in God’s wisdom, faithfulness, and power, and an assured sense of His love. While in person, in family, and in substance, the fearer of God is not exempt from trials: while he has sufferings, and feels them, and they are not, in themselves, to him more than to others, "joyous, but grievous"-yet in them "he is not visited with evil;" for that is not really evil, which is the divinely ordained means of his greatest good. He knows-" that cannot hurt which comes from God." He knows that there is not a power in the universe that can "visit him with evil," independently of God’s will;-for "if God be for him, who can be against him?" And if the "evil" that comes, comes under the direction of His will, the gracious nature of the purpose for which it is sent, changes, in the estimation of the sufferer, its very character-transmuting it into good:-temporal privation being spiritual acquisition; the pains of the body, the health of the soul; the sufferings of time, the preparatives for eternity. Thus-" the fear of the Lord is unto life"-tending to the enjoyment of the present life; and, springing as it does from the faith of divine truth, to the final attainment of "life everlasting."

Verse Proverbs 19:24. "A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again." It is agreed among critics, that the word translated bosom ought to be

rendered, according to its more direct and literal signification-dish.* And, so understood, it is hardly possible to conceive a stronger or more graphic description of the sluggard:-he "droppeth his hand into the dish, it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth."-Indolent, lazy men are generally fond enough of their meat; but they like their ease even better. They would fain make the two compatible, and have their meat without the trouble of taking it. O! if it would but just drop into their mouth! You have here the poor yawning wretch at his meal. It is quite a toil to him. Having got a mouthful, he lets his hand drop heavily into the dish; and, while his jaws go lazily about the process of mastication, it is long before he can be at the trouble to raise it again with another. It is literally with him, according to the proverb-"Slow at meat-slow at work."

* See 2 Kings 21:13; 2 Chronicles 35:13. But there is a general sentiment under the particular figure. The sentiment is, that indolence, growing upon its miserable subject, comes to feel even the very slightest exertion, however necessary, an insufferable annoyance. A good may be within immediate reach-quite at hand-the smallest possible trouble may obtain it; yet it will remain unsecured. The opportunity will pass. He will yawn, and wish, and resolve, but do nothing-still saying "time enough!"-till it is gone; and then, having yawned out his ineffective wishes, he will, in the same spirit of listlessness, yawn out again his unavailing regrets. Or perhaps he may fall back on fatalism-a system most congenial to the spirit of sloth, and find out that it was not ordained that he should have the thing!

Verse Proverbs 19:25. "Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware; and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge." Observe here-1. There is an intended contrast, in the two clauses of the verse, between smiting and reproving; the one signifying the severity of punitive discipline, the other simply verbal admonition and rebuke. The former required in the case of the froward "scorner;" the latter only in the case of the "man of understanding."-2. The scorner and the simple, in the first clause, are understood by some of the same person:-" Smite a scorner, and the infatuated man will beware." * The "scorner," however, in other parts of this book, as we have more than once seen, is distinguished by the very fact of his incorrigibility in his selfwilled frowardness: "A reproof entereth more into a wise man than a hundred stripes into a fool." It is much more likely that by "the simple" we are to understand, not the "scorner" himself, but those who are in danger of being brought under his influence, and corrupted by his example. They are those-the young especially-who are not yet hackneyed in evil; who have not yet learned to "mock at sin," but who are exposed to the peril of the wayward and hardened "scorner's" power over them. Although we would be far from laying down the principle that any man should be punished beyond his desert for the sake of others;-that a heavier infliction should be laid upon him than his crime will at all justify, merely that the in terrorem example may have the more powerful effect; yet it is a perfectly legitimate motive for the infliction, promptly and firmly, of such punishment as is deserved, that others may be warned, and may be dissuaded from similar courses; or, in the language of our criminal courts, "maybe deterred from such crimes in all time coming." To go beyond desert, would be unjust; it would be injuring one man for the benefit of others; it would be "doing evil, that good might come." But that the warning of others is a legitimate end in the infliction of merited punishment, is universally admitted; and it has the sanction of God's word. * Simplicity, when taken as at all meaning what is evil, signifies inconsideration-heedlessness. "The simple will beware"-literally "will be cunning"-means their being put on their guard, so as to apply a caution as artful to repel seduction as the guile employed

to seduce them.-3. While the punishment of the "scorner" benefits others, the reproof of the wise man benefits himself. He takes it in good part, and profits by it.

* Schultens.

Verse Proverbs 19:26. "He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach." On reading this verse, we are ready to start, and to exclaim-A son "that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother!" Can such a monster exist? Can there be one who thus resists the strongest impulses, and belies the tenderest claims of his nature?-Would that the character existed only in fancy! It was a reality in Solomon’s time; it is a reality in ours. Amongst the black and base characters, of which catalogues are at times given in the word of God, "without natural affection" is one. It is not the mere waywardness and passion of childhood that is meant in this description. Oh! it is something incomparably worse than that! We have here before us a youth, who has fallen into habits of profligacy-who casts off parental restraint, as unworthy the regard of a lad of spirit; who, for the gratification of his foolish extravagancies and his expensive vices, "wastes his father," making free, in every way in which he can lay his hand on it, with his substance, reckless if he should bring both him and the family to poverty;-who "chases away his mother," driving her from him, when, even with the tears of maternal love she would expostulate and plead with him; caring for nothing but coercion, and taking advantage of her known inability to use it; scorning her tears-it may be her widowed tears,-tears with which tears of kindred sympathy have ceased to flow, and whose tender pleadings there is now no sterner authority to enforce!-Such youths, alas! the fatal power of evil has made;-and such youths "cause shame, and bring reproach." They are a scandal to their parents and their families; and a nuisance to society:-and their doom is reprobation and ignominy, as the merited consequence to themselves. The youth who can so use a mother-is "fit for treasons." There is not a crime in the whole catalogue of infamy, of which I cannot suppose him capable; nor is there any symptom more sadly portentous, of a life of crime, and a death of shame and misery.

* See Deuteronomy 13:11; Deuteronomy 21:21. In the verse we have what may be regarded as the extreme of the evil. It is evidently susceptible of many intermediate degrees: and they are all bad.-Of what Solomon calls "wasting a father" some youths are apt to form a very false idea of the wickedness. The circumstance of its being their father’s property they are appropriating and squandering, makes them think of their conduct with comparative lightness. Yet if wrong is to be measured by the amount of obligation to the party wronged, in what case can the crime be more atrocious than in that of a son robbing a father?-And let every child and every young person hearing me beware-as they value their own peace of mind, the approbation and esteem of men, and the favour of God,-of acting such a part as would send one pang to the heart, or draw one tear of bitterness to the eye, of the mother that bare them. O! knew you but a tithe of what you owe to that maternal fondness that watched and wept over your cradle; would you appreciate the meltings, the solicitudes, the fears, the hopes, the sorrows, the joys of a mother’s bosom,-affection for that mother would be the last of the affections that could take leave of your hardening heart; its warm drops the last that the iron hand of vice could wring out of it.

There appears to be a connexion between this verse and that which follows-"Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge." In regard to the young, who

have, under parental tuition, received "the words of knowledge,"-the knowledge that teaches them the "fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom," and lays them under the restraints, the salutary restraints, of the divine law,-not unfrequently does it happen, that the delusive reasonings and sophistical plausibilities of scepticism and infidelity,-supporting as they do a system that has many recommendations to the carnal mind, and aiming at the unsettling and subversion of that which, though it has the secret sanction of conscience, is far from palatable to the natural inclinations of the heart,-serve to undermine the influence, and to loosen the hold, of better lessons. The lies of systems of error, like the first lie itself, have generally in them something fascinating,-something that the wayward heart likes, and which gives a deceptive colouring and speciousness to the arguments by which they are maintained. They are agreeable and insinuating. Their advocates season them with wit, and impart to them the aspect of great liberality of spirit and freedom from restraint,-a restraint which is represented, tauntingly, as unmanly, and fit only for the nursery and the leading-strings of childhood. This is all very taking and bewitching to young, inconsiderate, and hardly settled minds. When such principles enter, and get hold of the passions, and through the passions bribe and corrupt the understanding, restraint is thrown off-timidly, it may be, at first, but with a growing scorn and boldness;-the reins are cast on the necks of the passions; a course of self-indulgence, in every way that vice and fancy dictate, is pursued; the family patrimony is invaded and squandered; a mother’s tenderness,-the tenderness of remonstrance and tears, is indignantly resisted;-he "wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother."-I am fully persuaded, that in by far the greater number of cases, the principles of action are corrupted before the principles of belief; that the first thing is, the "putting away of a good conscience" by temptation to sin, and then the "making shipwreck of faith." Enticements are held out, in various ways, to that which is evil. The evil is done. The conscience is for the time ill at ease. But the evil is sweet, and it is repeated. Conscience drives its stings still more tormentingly into the bosom. The fretfulness and sullenness of self-dissatisfaction ensue. But conscience gets gradually seared. The emollients of selffluttering error are applied to its wounds. The principles are accommodated to the practice. He who began in vice ends in infidelity. And the final result is, a course of wild and ungovernable licentiousness. Mark, then, ye youth, the counsel now before you; the counsel of human experience,-the counsel of compassionate kindness,-the counsel of divine authority:-"Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge." Cease. If you have ventured to open your ear, shut it now; and open it to "the words of knowledge"-the words of divine instruction.

Verse Proverbs 19:28. "An ungodly witness scorneth judgment; and the mouth of the wicked devoureth iniquity."-Observe here-that the designation "an ungodly witness" is, on the margin, "a witness of Belial." Sons of Belial is a common appellation of impious and unprincipled men. "A witness of Belial," or "an ungodly witness"-is not, I think, to be understood, in this connexion, of a witness called to give evidence in a cause, between parties, before magistrates or arbitrators. The two parts of the verse, taken together, appear to contain a very apt description of the characters of those alluded to in the previous verse-by whose "instruction" the youth are made "to err from the words of knowledge;" men, who, instead of witnessing for God, witness for Belial-that is for wickedness and folly personified; all whose conversation is on the side of evil,-their testimony, by word and act, favourable to it, and unfavourable to goodness, and to the great concentration and prototype of all goodness. The verse, then, contains the character of those from whose counsel the young are warned to cease. They are men who vaunt themselves of their freedom from the

restraints of law and justice,-laugh at scruples of conscience,-cast away the cords of authority,-set at nought threatened judgments; their "mouth devoureth iniquity,"-opening wide to receive, and greedily and voraciously swallowing down the pleasures of sin and of the world. And the closing verse presents a warning to flee their counsel-verse Proverbs 19:29. "Judgments are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the back of fools." "Judgments" are not merely temporal chastisements-those visitations of Heaven which sometimes overtake the God-defying sinner even in the present life:-they are to be understood more especially of those final and fearful "judgments" which are denounced from heaven against all the workers of iniquity-the "scorners" and the "fools."-"Scorners" are those who tempt and seduce; and "fools" are those who listen and yield to their seducing temptations, and follow them in their evil courses. The former shall be "beaten with many stripes." But the latter shall not escape. Having cast in their lot with them here, they must lay their account with sharing it too hereafter. And both the one and the other shall suffer according to the amount of light and privilege they have respectively enjoyed. O how powerfully does all this recommend and enforce the advice-or rather the authoritative though gracious injunction-"Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge!" Cease-as you would avoid the judgments and the stripes of offended holiness and omnipotence. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" In conclusion-Let all, young and old, remember, that there is one point, in regard to which, let what devices soever be in their hearts, "the counsel of the Lord-that shall stand." God has fixed the way of a sinner’s salvation. He has made it known in His word. There you find His counsel in this matter,-the first of all to you, both in order and in importance. It stands there, the unchanging counsel of the unchanging God. He can never depart from it. It is framed in adaptation to the glory of His own character and government, and to the exigencies of man’s condition. It admits not of alteration. It cannot be improved; it must not be modified. As the counsel of God for a certain end, it is the only counsel by which that end can be answered. "BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED, THROUGH FAITH"-faith in Christ-faith in the righteousness and atonement of a divine Saviour. This-and this alone is the counsel of God, for your salvation.

57-Pro_20:1 (A)

Proverbs 20:1 (A)

LECTURE LVII.

Proverbs 20:1.

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

It is now nearly five years since, in illustrating the "fruits of the Spirit" enumerated by Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians, I called your attention, in three discourses, to the subject of temperance. It is by no means my purpose to enter into the subject at so much length at present, or to attempt anything like what might be called a full discussion either of the claims of the total abstinence system, or of the merits, on the one side or the other, of what has now been technically denominated the wine question. All that I intend is, as briefly and as simply as I can, to collect, upon two or three points, the lights of Scripture; and to do this in such a manner as to show that even to ordinary readers of the Bible, there is no difficulty in the matter, if they will only bring to the inquiry the principles of sound and unprejudiced common sense. The text brings before us three things:

1. Certain articles-" Wine and strong drink:"

2. Certain tendencies ascribed to them:-" Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging:"-and 3. The folly of yielding to these tendencies,-"Whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

I. We have two articles-"Wine and strong drink:"-and, since the introduction of recent discussions on the abstinence question, the English reader has got so familiar with the original Hebrew terms, that it has ceased to be pedantry, and has become almost necessary, to use them.-The word for wine is yayin:-the word for strong drink shekhar. In not a few of the publications on the subject, we have page after page bedizzened with the characters of Hebrew and Chaldee, and Arabic, and Syriac and Greek-and with the words of these various languages in English letters. We have, at the same time, minute and multiform descriptions of the various processes to which, in ancient times and countries, the juice of the grape was subjected,-of the different articles produced by these processes, and the several modes in which they were respectively used. All this possesses a certain description of interest. It is gratifying to the curiosity both of the critic and the etymologist; of the naturalist, the chemist, and the man of general information. But considered as bearing on the answer to the question-What, in Scripture language, is meant by "wine" and "strong drink,"-especially the former?-it does appear to me to be, to a great extent, a waste of learning. What is a plain man to make of his Bible, if on so seemingly simple a subject as the use and abuse of intoxicating drinks, he finds himself wrapt in a cloud of learned dust about the very meaning of the words in which his duty and his danger are pointed out to him? Further; how useful and desirable soever it may be to trace terms to their etymological origin, it should not be forgotten, that even the clearest ascertainment of this, is very far from being a sure and satisfactory way of

determining the meaning of a word:-that depending so much on particular associations at the time when the term is specifically applied, and varying greatly in the progress of every language. It is by usage alone,-and usage undergoing changes far from slight at times, in the history of the language,-that the true sense of any term can be ascertained.

There are different words employed, in the Old Testament, to express, under various modifications, beverages or preparations from the vine. By some, seven are enumerated; by others, even nine or ten. One of them is the second of those in our text-the shekhar. This word, however, is more general, meaning "strong drink" of any description, whether the material from which it is made be the fruit of the vine or any other substance:-and respecting the import of it, as always used for what is intoxicating, there is no dispute. Setting it, therefore, in the meanwhile, aside, there are of all the rest two only which, on the present question, call for any remark. They are the former of the two words in my text-yayin, and the word tirosh.

Yayin is supposed to be derived from the verb which signifies to squeeze or press; an etymology natural and simple,-this being the process by which the juice, which is the material of the wine, is obtained from the fruit. Of tirosh different etymologies are given;-the one, from the verb signifying to possess or take full possession; by which its influence on the man who freely uses it is conceived to be strongly conveyed: it takes possession of him, so that he is no longer himself or under his own control. It has been thought, indeed, that, from this etymology, tirosh may simply mean vineyards, considered as the symbol, by a part for the whole, of a man’s possessions, property, or inheritance. But this wont do. Tirosh, beyond all question, means a particular drink. This is its ordinary import. And men do not drink their vineyards any more than they eat their lands. Another derivation of the word is from the term signifying head. And if this were the true etymology, it would seem to me much more likely that the association by which it was suggested was still the influence of the liquor,-its headiness, its effect in unsettling the understanding,-than any resemblance between the head and the berry or cluster. But, as I have said, it is not etymology, but usage that must settle the question. Etymology seems to favour the intoxicating properties of the tirosh as well as of the yayin. In considering the question of usage, I begin with the latter.

Yayin is the word in our text, and there can be no doubt of its intoxicating character in this occurrence of it. It is, I may say, the word for wine in the Old Testament Scriptures. The word for the same thing, in the Greek, the Latin, the German, the Dutch, the English, and other European languages, is a derivative from it,-or rather is the very same term appropriately varied. It occurs about one hundred and forty times in the Hebrew Bible:-and it denotes, almost invariably, the fermented juice of the grape; and of course an intoxicating beverage when taken in excess. I have said "almost invariably." I might suppress the qualifying almost; for the alleged exceptions are on no legitimate principle of criticism to be regarded as such. They are Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 48:33:-"Gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field; and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses; I have made their vintage-shouting to cease." "Joy and gladness is taken from the plentiful field, and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to fail from the wine-presses: none shall tread with shouting; their shouting shall be no shouting." To say that in such passages the yayin signifies the grape-juice while in the process of expression, is incorrect,-proceeding on a principle of strict literality which cannot be admitted. It clearly means the wine anticipated as the result of the

process;-on a principle universal in language. The gardeners and vinedressers of Germany are said to call their grapes in the cluster, at this day, their wine. A principle of interpretation so literal would yield curious results; such as, that the Israelites fed on corn without its being baked into bread, because Jehovah says-" I should have fed them with the finest of the wheat;" and that the manna was, in like manner, eaten as it fell, without any culinary process, because it is called bread-God promising to "rain bread from heaven" upon them.

Yayin, then, (the proper word for wine,) signified fermented or intoxicating wine. Yet observe- This is the wine that was used in the ordinances of ancient ceremonial worship. It was the drink-offering which was enjoined to be presented, in various quantities, with the animal sacrifices. It is invariably-and you are aware how frequent the ceremony was-the yayin.

Observe further:-This yayin is, on various occasions, promised as a divine bestowment and blessing;-and the deprivation of it, on the other hand, threatened as a judicial calamity. It is true, that the word tirosh is also used, and it may be even more frequently, in similar connexions. What of that? It is enough that both are used, without discrimination, when the blessing is promised, and when the judgment is denounced.*

* I refer for the use of yayin, in such connexions, to Genesis 49:11-12; Psalms 104:15; Hosea 14:7; Amos 9:14; and Deuteronomy 28:39.

Again:-In various instances, when God is giving promises of blessing, both words are used in association with corn and oil, and other articles of sustenance,-whether of necessity or of comfort. It is not the tirosh only that is thus associated and thus promised. The yayin is in the same predicament. It is, therefore, a point of fact, about which there can be no reasonable doubt, that God promises as a good, as a blessing, that which possessed intoxicating qualities. The reason and principle are very plain. He promises that of which the use (for which alone it was given) was a benefit,-but of which the abuse (which was the result not of God’s goodness, but of man’s perversion of it,) was prejudicial. How few gifts of God are there, of which, on one ground or another, the same thing might not be said t

Again:-The law of the Nazarite laid him under an interdict during the period of his vow, as to the use of wine, and of whatever came of the vine:-but whenever his vow ceased, the same authority gave him liberty to take wine. The restriction neither existed before nor after the time of his vow. Mark too the permission given, in certain specified circumstances,-when any Jews resided at a distance from Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 14:24-26.) And mark also the more than permission, (as indeed the language referred to also was,) the encouraging direction given to the pious Israelite, when he complied with divine counsels, under the influence of principles and motives that were well-pleasing in God’s sight:-" Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works," Ecclesiastes 9:7.

There is no proof whatever that the tirosh was not intoxicating when used to excess, as well as the yayin. We have seen that the etymology rather favours its having been so. And as to the effects actually ascribed to it, one passage alone, were there no other, should be enough to satisfy every unprejudiced mind:-"Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart," Hosea 4:11. The "new wine" here is tirosh:-and I can imagine nothing more unworthy of all candour,-more an outrage on all fair and honourable criticism,-than the attempt to show that, in such a connexion,

tirosh may mean no more than the luxury of syrup of grapes and water, the harmless refreshment of a summer's day!-as if we were to say, when denouncing the vicious causes of alienation from God and moral destruction-"Whoredom, and strong drink, and lemonade!" The truth is, if any distinction is to be made between the yayin and the tirosh, the "wine" and the "new wine"-in such a passage, we must proceed on the principle of climax, and consider the latter as the stronger of the two! The yayin was also a common beverage in use by the best of men. It was this that Melchisedec the king of Salem brought out to Abraham on his return from the slaughter of the kings: and on various occasions, "bottles," or skinfuls, "of wine"-of yayin,-form a part of the supplies provided for the sustenance and refreshment of those standing in need of such supplies, when hungry, athirst, and weary. The example of the Rechabites is a favourite one with our total abstinence brethren; and some of them have even adopted the designation. With what propriety, a glance at the case is enough to show.*-It is not at all, you will observe, their abstinence from wine that is the subject of the divine commendation. We are not even certain whether Jonadab their father was justifiable in laying them under this interdict or not. The ground of commendation is simply their obedience to their father; which Jehovah, justly and pointedly sets in contrast with the ungrateful and unnatural rebellion of His people.-And further, Why do not the admirers and professed imitators of the Rechabites dwell in tents, as well as abstain from wine? There is the very same ground for the one as there is for the other.

* Jeremiah 35:1-10.

It seems to me, then, an utterly vain attempt to make it out that the wine of the Old Testament, under whichsoever designation mentioned, was without intoxicating properties. The question is not at all whether other articles were prepared from grapes, and were in common use. This is granted. That the Hebrews, like certain other peoples, were in the practice of boiling down the juice of grapes to one-third or one-half its quantity, and bringing it to the consistence of a syrup, who cares to question? Be it so. Two things require to be noticed:-first, that in no passage of the Old Testament scriptures do we ever find any allusion whatever to any such practice, or to the use of such syrup as a beverage;-and secondly, that this syrup and water, supposing it in use, was no more the liquor called in the Old Testament wine, than molasses and water would, in the West Indies, be the liquor called rum.

It is at once and freely admitted, that the ordinary wines of Palestine were not so intoxicating as the brandied wines of Europe. What is contended for is, simply the point of fact that they were intoxicating;-and no reader of the scriptures of the Old Testament, who observes with what frequency wine and drunkenness are there associated,-and how often the wine stands in union, and, as it were, identification, with strong drink, in the production, by its abuse, of this monstrous evil of inebriation, can be at any loss as to the conclusion to which he should come. It will not do, first to fill ourselves with a horror of the thing itself, on account of the abuse of it; and thence to conclude that such a thing could not possibly be promised and bestowed as a blessing; and then to set to work an ingenuity, of which the principle and motive may be good, but of which the ultimate tendency is most mischievous, to strain words and force distinctions, to bring the meaning into harmony with our previous conceptions. Our proper business is, to take facts, as they stand plainly before us; and, if these facts cannot be made to harmonize with certain principles which we have adopted respecting good and evil, and the conduct becoming the divine Being, to rest assured that in these principles there is an error. The facts should correct the judgment.

I come now to the language of the New Testament. I might almost say, there is there but one word for wine. It is just the Hebrew word Greecised. In one instance, that word is accompanied with the epithet unmixed; where the epithet evidently means-undiluted-in all its strength. It is where the wine is the emblem of divine wrath:-" The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation," Revelation 14:10. In only two instances does another designation for wine itself occur. The first-" Others mocking, said, These men are full of new wine," Acts 2:13. In this passage new wine is not the literal nor proper rendering. It should be "sweet wine;" there being then, as now, differences in the mode of preparation, by which some of the wines were rendered sweet and others not. At that time of the year there could not be had what is properly termed "new wine." It is thought to have been a strong sweet spiced wine-with honey and pepper. The only other exception from the use of the common Greek word for wine is in the institution of the Lord's Supper; where Jesus calls it "the fruit" or produce, "of the vine." I call it one instance of exception, because, although it occurs in three of the evangelists, it is only the record by three historians of what was but once said. The question, then, is-What is the meaning of this word-not etymologically, but according to its actual use in the inspired narrative? There is a passage which brings us directly to this point:-" No man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also, having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new; for he saith, The old is better," Luke 5:37-39. I need not say, this is fermented wine. It will not do to say that the putting of it into new and strong skins was to prevent fermentation. There is fermentation; and it is the strong working of the fermentation that renders new bottles necessary, to prevent the loss of both bottles and wine. If any thing further were needed in proof of this, it is to be found in the thirty-ninth verse:-inasmuch as old unfermented must, or wine, could never be better than new:-it is only of fermented wine that the saying could be true. The newer and sweeter the must, the better, if it is unfermented. To those who know their New Testament I need not say, that its oinos;-its wine-is ever represented as possessing inebriating properties.* In the character of bishops and deacons, mark this particular feature: "Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre," 1 Timothy 3:3; 1 Timothy 3:8. And-"For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre," Titus 1:7. Most assuredly, they're not being given to wine-not given too much wine,-does not mean that they should not use it at all. The expressions imply the use, while they interdict the excess. Compare it with another feature of the same character in the passages just quoted, that they should not be "given to filthy lucre"-"greedy of filthy lucre" (the same word in the original). This does not mean that they never should touch money. So is it with the wine. Moderation in regard to both is the spirit of the injunctions; in opposition, in the one case, to covetousness, or that "love of money which is the root of all evil;" and, in the other, to inebriety and the disturbance of reason, or unnecessary waste.

* Compare, for example, Ephesians 5:18; 1 Peter 4:3.

We are entitled to take what our Lord says of wine, in the passage before quoted, as the key to all the occurrences of wine in the New Testament. We have seen that the key fits in regard to those already referred to. Let us look to another. It relates to the character of Jesus himself:-

"John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But Wisdom is justified of all her children," Luke 7:33-35. Here observe first, There is a contrast between the character of John and the character of Jesus. John was a recluse. He retired from society, and frequented the solitudes of the wilderness, living a life of abstinence from the social gratifications of human intercourse:-whereas Jesus went about among his countrymen, ate and drank with them, and on such occasions as he knew would prove suitable for his own gracious purposes, accepted invitations to be a guest at their tables. In the course pursued by John, he acted in accordance with the charges which had, by the angel of God, been given concerning him, before his birth-"He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb," Luke 1:15. Secondly, no one will question the perfect rectitude of the character of Jesus. He conformed to ordinary practice in whatever could be done without sin. It follows, therefore, that there was no sin in drinking wine; no more than in eating bread;-the two things being mentioned together in the very same manner. The only question must regard the nature of the wine of which he partook,-which leads me to notice, Thirdly, that while, even were there no further proof, we are entitled to understand it of the wine spoken of by the same name in other parts of the New Testament, which, we have seen, was the ordinary fermented wine,-we have further evidence. It is in this very passage. It is in the fact of his having been slandered-as a "wine bibber." That this was a vile slander we of course assume. It was the misrepresentation of base malignity-the construction of what was perfectly innocent into a charge of evil. But if the wine in ordinary use had not been of an inebriating character, it would not have been such a charge. Had it been true, that the wine was of such a quality, that a man might drink it as freely and copiously, without harm, as he might of "the water of the Ganges,"-then the designation of a wine-bibber would no more have been a reproach than that of a water-bibber. The fact, however, of his having conformed to ordinary practice in the use, not the abuse, of this divinely provided beverage, is to all Christians sufficient proof that there is no sin in it;-that all use is not abuse; and that they who employ strong and unqualified terms of reprobation of the use of wine, pronouncing water "the best and only drink, without question, which nature designed for man;" and exclaiming, in the spirit of indignant renunciation of anything stronger,-"give me the pure water-which the Saviour enjoyed at the well of Jacob!"-would do well to take heed, that they be not in effect bringing afresh against that Saviour the old slander. They surely forget themselves. While they thus extol the water, as the only beverage which nature has provided, and which the God of nature, by so providing it, sanctions, they may well blush at the recollection that the wine, as well as the water, was the drink of Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Let them think on whom their charges and their taunts alight!

Let us now go to Cana of Galilee. You are all familiar with the facts of the "marriage in Cana of Galilee;" with the innocent festivities of that occasion, and the manner in which Jesus supplied the deficiency in the means of maintaining them. These feasts, as we learn from Old Testament history, were kept up for seven successive days. It is not unlikely that a larger number of guests had, on this occasion, come than had been expected. At what time of the feast we cannot say-but the company ran short of wine; and, by an act of miraculous power, Jesus furnished a supply which, from its extent, even on the most moderate computation, is conceived by many to have been intended to go beyond the limits of the feast, and to form a temporary stock for the

newly-married pair.

Now here, as in a former case, there is a common way of begging the question. From the character of the Saviour, it is at once inferred, with-I do not call it an affected, but a sincere and well-meant horror at the very supposition of the contrary,-that the wine thus produced could not possibly be wine with inebriating qualities. But this is far from being the fair way to take up such a case. It is assuming, what can never be granted, that to make for legitimate rise an article that was liable to abuse, even although in the particular case there was no abuse of any kind, would have been inconsistent with our Lord’s character. The question is still one of fact; and if we can ascertain the fact, we should humbly conclude that it was in harmony with the Saviour’s character, and the imitation of it not to be hastily and harshly condemned in the disciples of that Saviour. Look, then, at the case. First, we are quite sure (thus much may with confidence be certainly inferred from the character of our Lord,) that there was not, on the occasion at which he was present,-I do not say intoxication, but any approach to inebriety or indecorum. To nothing of the kind, we may be assured, would He by his presence have given countenance, or the remotest appearance of sanction. And observe, the very language of "the ruler of the feast" respecting "the water that was made wine," shows, that with regard to him at least there was at the time the perfect retention of his discriminating taste; and we have no reason to imagine that there was one in the company of whom the same thing was not true:-for, Secondly, this same language of "the ruler of the feast" clearly refers, not to what had at the time taken place, but only to what was customary, on similar occasions, among the men of the world. And then, thirdly, mark what he says-"Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now," John 2:10. It will not be disputed that the designation "good wine" means, in both of its occurrences, wine possessing the same qualities in a similar or superior degree. Now it is very evident, that the setting forth of the inferior wine "after men have well drunk" is to be explained from the inebriating quality of the "good wine" having begun to be so far experienced as to impair that delicacy of taste, and that particular attention to what they were thinking, and so to prevent the change from being observed. "The good wine" therefore, spoken of as usually produced at the beginning of a feast, was fermented, inebriating wine:-and if so, "the good wine" now produced by the Saviour must have been of the same description. If any man shudders at this, he shudders at a shadow-at a phantom of his own imagination. He is weak enough to forget the distinction between use and abuse; between wine as given by God to "make glad the heart of man," and wine as taken in the excesses of sensuality, and to the unsettling of sober reason. The man who feels thus, should not be able to bear the sight of money, seeing nothing can be worse in its results than that which is "the root of all evil;" and yet "money answereth all things"-good ends as well as bad:-the evils arise from its abuse,-whether in the excess of the desire after it, or in the extravagance, the meanness, or the turpitude of its application. All that can be concluded from the incident, as recorded, is, that our divine Lord graced and honoured and blessed with his personal presence the innocent festivities of a connubial party, probably within the circle of his mother’s kindred; and that He supplied to the full, by miracle, the means of its enjoyment. This is enough. Had such a thing been wrong in himself, Jesus never would have done it. Had such a thing been wrong in his followers, He never would have given them the countenance of his example, or his countenance in any way, in the doing of it.

There is no light in which the strong language that has been used against the use of wine or of anything that can intoxicate, has shocked and grieved me more, than when I regard it in its bearing upon the character and conduct of my Lord and Master. I take the most lenient and charitable view in my power, when I impute to inconsideration and to hasty zeal for a favourite cause, the terms of unmeasured and undiscriminating censure with which some good men have condemned the use, and especially the social use, of wine; their banishing it from their tables, and from their houses; and their having brought themselves under a solemn pledge not to take, nor give, nor offer, what was taken, and given, and offered, and even miraculously created, for social use, by Him whom they profess to regard as having, in all things, "left them an example, that they should follow his steps!" Surely, surely, fellow-Christians who have taken such a position may well be startled at the presumption involved in it. It is matter of no light concern, to occupy ground that, if just, reflects upon the conduct of the Christian's Lord,-and sets the disciple "above his Master." This is a transcendentalism in morals, at which I should feel it impiety to aim!

There is one other point to which, before closing, I must advert. It was my wish and intention to have finished the whole subject in one discourse:-but the second and third heads are of too great practical importance to be thrust into so narrow a corner as must remain when I have finished the first. The point to which I have alluded is-the question as to the wine used in the institution of the Lord's supper.-Much has of late been made of this question; a great deal more, in my apprehension, than its importance warrants. Why should it be at all necessary to ascertain the precise kind of wine, any more than the precise kind of bread? The wine used was that used in the paschal solemnity; and doubtless this was the ordinary yayin, the fermented wine of the country. Some indeed have fancied that the exclusion of leaven during that solemnity extended to fermented liquors as well as to the "leaven of bread." We have, however, pretty clear proof to the contrary in the fact, that on the morrow after the passover, the quarter-hin of yayin, or fermented wine, was to be the libation, or drinkoffering with the enjoined sacrifice; and that the hin of the same wine was to be offered day by day as usual, during the days of unleavened bread, as at other times. And if it was the ordinary wine of the country, should not that which we use be the same? We properly conform to the custom of the country in other particulars. We sit, because it is our ordinary posture at table, without ever deeming it necessary to conform to theirs, which was reclining. We observe our Sabbath from morning to morning, instead of from evening to evening, because the mode of reckoning the day differs with us from what it was with them. Why, then, any scruple about the use of whatever is the ordinary wine of the country? But I shall be told, it is not called wine at all:-it is "the fruit of the vine."-I feel it difficult to fancy those in earnest, who gravely found anything on this. If "the fruit of the vine" is to be taken literally, it must be the fruit which the vine bears-that is, grapes. We are very sure, however, that it was not grapes that were the contents of the paschal cup, and consequently of the cup used in the institution of the Lord's supper. What then-considering the fruit of the vine as signifying more generally the produce of the vine,-what was it? One or other of three things-fresh must,-the newly expressed juice of the grape; the inspissated syrup of grape juice, diluted with water; or, fermented win". The first it could not be; for this reason, that the time of the year when the Passover was celebrated, was full five months after the last vintage of the preceding year; so that fresh must, or grape-juice, was out of the question. There are some who, on this subject, seem to forget the seasons altogether, and to have the notion that the fresh juice of the grape might be had at any time. With regard to the second, our friends seem to forget another thing. They speak of the juice or blood of the grape in its natural

state:-but they should recollect that the inspissated syrup of grapes is not the juice in its natural state; that it is obtained by an artificial process,-a process much more artificial than that of fermentation; namely, that of slow and repeated boilings; by which it becomes a syrup, but ceases to be the natural unaltered juice of the grape. To the juice of the grape fermentation is, strictly and properly, a natural process. So soon, and so unavoidably, does this process begin,-that there appears to be hardly less evidence that grapes, the fruit of the vine, as given by God to man, were intended to ferment for him, as that they were intended for him at all. They will ferment in spite of him. And, since it is represented, when spoken of as God's gift in the same sense with bread, as "making glad the heart of man," and since it is as a fermented beverage that it especially possesses this cheering or exhilarating property, we seem warranted to regard its fermentation as in the divine purpose in the bestowment of the boon. From these considerations, as well as from the whole tenor of the New Testament respecting wine, as in use among the Jews, we feel ourselves justified in concluding that the cup, in the hands of the Saviour when he instituted the commemoration of his dying love, contained nothing else than the ordinary fermented wines of Judea.

It arises from the cause before alluded to-a morbid horror (the result of undue attachment to a system) of all that is capable of producing intoxication, how innocent soever in itself,-that any man should ask the question-" How could fermented wine, which so generally and so directly leads men into sin, be an emblem of that blood which was shed for the remission of sin?"-with a variety of questions of a similar description, still more strongly and antithetically put.-" To the pure, all things are pure." There is nothing in fermented wine in itself evil, or in the use of it detrimental:-the very reverse. And why should not the two things in nature, which are represented, the one as "making glad the heart of man," and the other as "strengthening man's heart," be appropriate symbols in an ordinance, of which the design is to commemorate the dying love of Him from whose atoning death we derive both our joy and our strength? It is by the remembrance of him,-by musing on his person and his work,-the freeness of his grace, the riches of his love,-that our hearts are gladdened, and we "go on our way rejoicing;"-that our spiritual strength is renewed, so that, "going from strength to strength," we at length expect to "appear before God in the heavenly Zion!"

It is distressing to think of the lengths to which ultra views on this point are carrying individuals and churches. It is like a mania. I had a letter not long since from the pastor of a church in the South, in great perplexity, in consequence of the scruples of some of his members about fermented wine in the supper, and consulting me whether it would be right to allow them, according to their desire, to follow the practice of the priest ridden laity of the Romish Church, and to take the sacrament in one kind,-that is, partaking of the bread only!-Members of churches, I believe, have handed the cup past them; some have withdrawn from communion; and in some, it is said, of the American churches, extraordinary substitutes have been resorted to! And then, with regard to church-membership,-the virtue which, on this subject, the Bible requires of Christians, is "sobriety"-"moderation"-" temperance." There is no command that goes further than this; no injunction of abstinence. And, all the commands being to temperance, and the very idea of temperance involving that of use,-all the commands proceed upon the assumption of use being lawful. And this, we have seen, accords with the example which we are taught to look up to, as the pattern of sinless excellence. Who, then, is entitled to demand more, as the condition, so far as

this one department of duty is concerned, of fellowship in the church of Christ. Or how can the not requiring more ever form a legitimate ground for the withdrawment of any member from a church?-Or how can any church be warrantably constituted on terms of communion that are not to be found in the Bible? It is a very just sentiment of a very sensible and judicious writer on the subject of this morning's discourse:-" To set up a standard of morality which God has not set up, and to forbid that which God has not forbidden, is not the way to ensure the blessing of the Almighty, or the co-operation of his servants; and we shall best promote the interests of the temperance cause, by endeavouring to understand the Scripture argument on the subject, and by confining our requisitions and prohibitions within the limits of Bible morality." *

* Medhurst.

58-Pro_20:1 (B)

Proverbs 20:1 (B)

LECTURE LVIII.

Proverbs 20:1.

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise."

Last discourse was entirely occupied with the consideration of the two articles here mentioned-" wine and strong drink," and every one who has paid attention to the questions on the subject which of late have been so largely agitated, will be aware how indefinitely it might have been extended. The main drift of that discourse was simply to show,-what it does not require a parade of learned criticism to establish,-that the attempts to make out anything like a uniform and designed distinction between the words used, in the Old Testament Scriptures, for wines that are approved, and wines that are disapproved-the latter as possessing powers of inebriation, and the former not,-have entirely failed:-that the wines of the Old Testament employed in sacrificial libation, promised as a boon, produced from the earth by the power and goodness of God, and in fully warranted use as a common beverage,-were fermented intoxicating wines:-and that such too was the fact with the wine of the New Testament as described by Jesus, used by Jesus, miraculously made by Jesus, and employed by Jesus in the institution of the ordinance of the supper. It was further my object to show that the duty required in the followers of Jesus is temperance; that in His word, and by His example, more is not required; and that they who do require more, in evidence of Christian principle, or in order to Christian communion, are chargeable with going beyond the record.

II. Our second head was-the tendencies ascribed to the articles mentioned:-"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging."

I do not intend to illustrate the two separately,-as if one description of tendency belonged to the "wine," and another to the "strong drink." On the principle of parallelism, and from the frequency with which the two stand associated as conducing to the same results, they may be taken together, and considered as identified. The latter may be more violently exciting than the former, more fiery and more rapid in its operation; but each of the tendencies specified belongs to both, "Wine," when taken in excess, "is raging" as well as "strong drink;" and "strong drink is a mocker," as well as "wine."

Taking the two clauses, then, together, there are four things which may be considered as included in them:-

1. A beguiling tendency;-the tendency, I mean, to entice onward;-one sip leading to another, and one cup or glass to another; and this, especially in social drinking. Whatever opinions I may hold as to the principles of the total abstinence system,-God forbid that I should ever be so unfaithful as to conceal or extenuate the dangers which wait upon the use of whatever possesses inebriating

qualities. There is no question on the subject of their seductive tendency,-a tendency which varies in both kind and measure, according to peculiarities of circumstances and of temperament. There is danger,-danger of a man’s being led on step by step, especially when inexperienced, from little to more, from one stage to another, till, without any previous purpose, nay even in opposition to such purpose, he is brought under the power of the intoxicating cup,-drawn unawares into the snare,-deceived and cheated into insobriety. That this is one description of the mockery in our text, I have no doubt. It is mockery. One man would surely be said to mock another, when by plausible and subtle arts he drew him into a situation of which he is ashamed himself, and becomes the jest and laughing-stock of others, or-what to many a man is worse-their scorn and pity.

2. Along with a beguiling, there is a befooling tendency, According to varieties in the constitutional or acquired temperament of different individuals, it produces, in excess, one or another of two effects. It renders the subject of its power either a reckless madman, or a drivelling idiot. I might describe the one, and describe the other; but it is unnecessary. Many of you may have witnessed miserable specimens of both. And in either case, surely the "wine," or the "strong drink, is a mocker." The man under its power ceases to be himself:-he says and does extravagant and mischievous things; or gives utterance, with maudlin look and stuttering and stammering tongue, to the incoherent babblings of folly; or reveals what ought to be secret, and makes himself the easy and unconscious prey of every one who chooses to take advantage of him,-giving away, or allowing to be taken, whatever others like, and coming under obligations of which, in his subsequent sobriety, he may find it no easy matter to shake himself loose. Or, worse still-the understanding gets beclouded and bewildered, and unfitted for the fulfilment of important functions, on which the interests of others as well as his own depend. Thus is often realized the description of the prophet-" They have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment," Isaiah 28:7.

3. There is the tendency to excite the passions:-"strong drink is raging."-It is true, that in some cases the subject of inebriation is rendered silly and ridiculously good-natured. It is the vacant good-nature of the gaping and laughing idiot,-more pitiable, though more harmless, than when the blood is fired and the passions roused. It is, in the latter case, like a temporary phrenzy. Excited himself, and beyond all power of Self-government, the madman says and does things that excite others,-especially when they are in a state approaching to his own. Thus quarrels, all hot and furious, are originated and fomented;-and many a time they terminate in fighting, and wounds, and blood, and even death. What multitudes of the brawls that end thus miserably and sometimes fatally,-and by which culprits are brought to prison, to the bar, to banishment, or to the scaffold, have this for their origin!-And this inflammatory tendency is ascribed to wine as well as to strong drink:-"Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!" Isaiah 5:11.

4. While there is the excitement of the proud passions, there is produced also the stimulated and heated action of other vicious propensities those "fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Intemperance and incontinence are kindred vices; as the words of the wise man teach us-" Thine eyes shall behold strange women." The one leads on to the other. Fully persuaded as I am of the greatly more extensive prevalence of lewdness than of drunkenness, and believing that for the

thousands slain by the latter, the former slays its ten thousands,-yet still, this is quite consistent with the tendency of the latter to excite to the former, and to expose to its temptations. It is, in unnumbered cases, to the influence of intoxicating liquor, that the infamous monster has recourse, to accomplish his purposes of foul seduction. In these ways, and in others that might be mentioned, "wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging."-The tendencies will come out still more fully, in considering-

III. The folly of yielding to them. When is a man "deceived thereby?" When he takes of either at all? Certainly not. Solomon proceeds on the assumption of the use, and of the use being lawful. But a man is deceived, when he gives way to the tendencies; when he allows himself to be thrown off his guard, to be seduced into excess, to get his foot entangled in the snare, and to incur the risk of the consequences. He "is not wise," when he does this even once, at any time, and in any circumstances:-and far more Unwise is he, when, by repeated instances of such deception and mockery, he allows a habit to be formed, from which recovery may become difficult and hopeless. And what are the consequences, on which the charge of folly rests? They are various, and they are serious. And, as the man is a fool who allows himself to be imposed upon and duped in any way,-the worse the consequences, the greater the folly. I might show you how the acts and habits of intemperance affect the body, operating with deleterious and deadly influence on every department of the animal system;-how it works corresponding ravages on the mind, debilitating and debasing its noble powers;-how it destroys character and reputation;-how it thus deprives of confidence, and ruins interest and estate;-what wretchedness, both in the form of poverty, and of discord, and disease, and vice, it introduces into the domestic circle, eating out the very vitals of all enjoyment, and turning the sweetest of heaven’s blessings to the "gall of asps;"-and how, above all, as being a sin in itself, and as producing other sins, it tends to the destruction of the soul and the loss of eternity-the forfeiture of its bliss, and the endurance of its never-ending woe. Yes; it is the enemy of the soul; and, if allowed to get the mastery, must be its death. The indulgence of it is utterly incompatible with spiritual life,-destructive of its principles wherever it finds entrance. The contrariety between the two-(not between wine and the influence of the Spirit, for wine is used as one of the appropriate emblems of the spiritual blessings of the gospel-" Come, buy wine (Yayin) and milk without money and without price:"-and the best and strongest of wine-that which is preserved most carefully in its strength, purity, and flavour-" The Lord God will make unto all people a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined")-not, therefore, I repeat, between wine and divine influence, but between its excess and such influence-" Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit."*1-And there can be no doubt, in the mind of any one, who believes the Bible to be God’s word, that intemperance excludes from heaven; since no terras can be more explicit and peremptory than those in which this sentence of exclusion is affirmed.*2 Ah! then, "not wise" indeed is the man, who is "deceived" by the ensnaring influence of the "wine" and the "strong drink!" He is a fool, for body and soul, for time and for eternity!

*1 Ephesians 5:18. rr *2 See, among many passages, 1 Corinthians 9:9-11; Galatians 5:21. The advocates of total abstinence may very naturally think I have been making out a good case for them; and they will marvel that I should not instantly and strongly draw the inference, which to their minds seems so clear and immediate that it cannot be resisted. There is one ground, however, on which I can rest contented in being marvelled at by them;-namely, that in marvelling at me, they

must marvel at the Bible and its divine Author. While they say,-"If such be the tendencies, and such the consequences of yielding to them, it is best to renounce entirely articles of which the danger is thus great,"-it is nevertheless matter of fact, about which there can be no dispute, that such is not the inference drawn in the Word of God; that there, no such abstinence is, on any such grounds, enjoined. On the contrary, as we have already seen, the "wine that gladdens the heart of man" is as much the gift of God for his use, and for the purpose which it is described as answering, as the "bread which strengthened his heart;" it is numbered amongst promised blessings, and the privation of it among threatened judgments; and our Saviour used it, and countenanced the use of it, and produced it by miracle for the purposes of innocent conviviality. Surely from all this it ought to be admitted, that abstinence is not incumbent. The use, so far from being interdicted, has the clearest and strongest of all possible sanctions;-the gift and promise of God, and the example of Jesus Christ. On all it is incumbent to beware of excess,-of going beyond the bounds of temperate enjoyment. We shall have occasion hereafter to speak more largely of the questions, What is moderation? and What is excess? Meantime I can only offer a single remark on the logic ’which concludes against all use from the danger of abuse, and which infers the propriety and obligation of entire abstinence from the indefiniteness of the terms moderation and excess, and the difficulty (if, indeed, in the present instance, such difficulty there be) of drawing with accurate precision bounding line« between the one and the other. How many of the virtues are there which are, even to a greater degree, in the same predicament with moderation! Who will draw the exact line between covetousness and generosity? Who will define the precise limits of profusion and penuriousness? Are we then to attempt no mean between the extremes? Must we give all away, that we may not be charged with penuriousness, or keep all to ourselves, to avoid the charge of profusion?-Because there is great difficulty in determinately fixing the limits of the precept-"Be not conformed to this world," are we to adopt the course of doing nothing that the world does at all ?-There is such a thing as temperance, for the word of God commands it:-and there is a possibility of ascertaining, sufficiently for all practical and salutary purposes, the legitimate limits of the virtue; for the word of God does not enjoin impossibilities. We have admitted, however, the dangers; and it is the duty of every individual to be on his guard against them; and the duty of every public teacher and guardian of religion and morals, to put others on their guard against them; and to accommodate their warnings to the various peculiarities of temptation. I would, first of all, warn of his danger the man who sees none; for in this and some other things, the danger is seldom greater than when there is no sense of it, but a feeling of careless security. I would warn the man, and especially the youth, who is fond of company, to beware of the enticements which arise from that source to the free use of the exhilarating glass, and to the habit of associating the two together, and of the hazard of thus contracting the same fondness for the one as for the other,-for the glass as for the company. I would warn those who, by any kind of regular custom of taking a certain quantity, however small, (in general a bad practice) feel themselves beginning to contract a liking for it, and a craving sensation that they cannot do without it, to break off the habit ere it obtains a single day’s further mastery. I would warn those who are tempted to have recourse to the wine or the spirit cup, for the purpose of banishing or suppressing the morbid horror of low spirits and nervous and hysterical affections, to beware of purchasing a temporary relief at the fearful expense of the formation of a permanent habit, a thousand times worse than the evil it is intended to abate; and which, while it may abate for the time, it in the end most miserably augments. I would warn the man who, by his very hatred and

scorn of tee-totalism, is in danger, for the very sake of showing how heartily he does hate and scorn it, of taking what he should not take, and flying to the contrary extreme. But both the general and the special warnings may be sounded, while the liberty of use is maintained, and the obligation to entire abstinence denied. There are certain points respecting which we are all agreed, and our agreement about which ought never to be lost sight of. They are such as these. We are all of one mind as to the sinfulness and guilt of intemperance in itself:-we are all of one mind as to the vastness of the variety and amount of crime and misery to which this sin gives prolific and fatal birth;-the many streams of bitterness and pollution that flow from this foul and noxious spring:-we are all of one mind as to the extreme desirableness of having this enormous aggregate of crime and misery diminished, and, as far as within the limits of possibility, removed. For an equally deep conviction and heartfelt sense of these things, we are all entitled to claim equal credit: and he who is disposed to question it in his neighbour, only shows that there is one virtue at least which his system has failed to teach him,-the precious virtue of charity.-We contend, that it is possible to hold all such convictions, and cherish all such feelings, in the most perfect sincerity, without coming to the conclusion of its being a duty to have recourse to total abstinence. And the ground we take up in maintaining this, is,-that although, in the word of God, the moral turpitude of the sin of intemperance is, in the very strongest terms, affirmed; although its sentence of condemnation is, in all its fearfulness, pronounced, and the denouncing admonitions of Heaven are everywhere pointed against it; although all the varieties of trespass and of woe to which it leads in time, and the "worm that dieth not, and the fire that never shall be quenched" in which its course must close, are fully known, and estimated, in all their extent, by the God who has given us the Bible,-there is not, from the beginning to the end of that Bible, any interdiction of the things themselves from the existence and abuse of which the evils arise,-any injunction whatever to abstain from them; but promises of them as benefits, and liberty to use them, provided the abuse of them were avoided. For my own part, I recur to one of the points alluded to in last discourse. I take my stand on the example of my Master. That example every Christian admits to have been without spot or blemish. "He did no sin." "He fulfilled all righteousness." Every step of his life was on the very centre line of virtue, in undeviating harmony with that law which was "within his heart," and which was "holy, and just, and good." Yet this pattern of sinless excellence used wine. The condemnation of drunkenness,-the description of its effects,-the denunciations of Jehovah against it,-His warnings to flee from it,-and the judgments, in this world and the world to come, thundered forth as its inevitable reward;-these were all in the Old Testament Scriptures:-the very words of our text were there, and the other words quoted from a subsequent chapter. It was amongst the sins of Judah, which were preparing for them those heavy woes which drew from his eyes the tears of pity over their devoted city. Yet He does not set the example of abstinence:-He does not feel it incumbent upon him to mark his abhorrence of the abuse, by the entire abandonment of the use; or to induce others to have recourse to such abandonment as the only effectual means of putting an end to the sin of drunkenness. His example was that, not of abstinence, but of temperance. Now we are certain that the example He set was both positively and negatively perfect,-perfect in what he did, and perfect in what he did not do; that he neither did what he ought not to have done, nor failed to do what he ought to have done. Are the disciples, then, deserving of blame, for not doing what the Master did not do?-Here, I repeat, I take my stand; and I feel my footing firm. I do not plead for exemption from an act of self-denial. I should be ashamed to call it such, did either the command or the example of my Master lay it upon me;-and I feel that we are uncharitably

maligned when our principles and practice are imputed to an unwillingness to relinquish a sensual indulgence. But I plead for the sinlessness of my Saviour's example; for the sacredness from all impeachment, direct or implied, of my Saviour's character; for liberty to act, without subjecting myself to any charge of failure in duty, as my Saviour acted. I tremble, when I hear a charge heedlessly brought against the disciple, that rests on a principle such as must necessarily carry it back to the disciple's Lord. To any man who would lay sin to my charge for drinking wine, I say at once, "I am not careful to answer thee in this matter"-He who "did no sin" drank wine;-and, diffident as I might be of rectitude in myself, in this or in any thing else, had I not his example before me, I feel contented and at ease under an imputation in which I stand associated with the "wine-bibber" of Nazareth! When one hears the charge, that the temperate-they who use intoxicating liquors in moderation-are the causes of all the drunkenness in the country, the feeling that takes possession of the mind is one of mingled amazement and grief-amazement at the absurdity, grief at the uncharitableness of such a charge. True enough it is, that, were there no drinking at all, there would be no intemperance, just as, were there no eating at all, there would be neither epicurism nor gluttony,-and were there no credit at all, there would be no "accommodation bills," and none of the reckless and ruinous speculations which are encouraged and maintained by means of them,-and, as in many other analogous cases, were the thing itself not existing, the evils arising from its abuse would be at an end:-but that those who take the use of God's gifts which He has himself permitted, that they should be loaded with all the guilt and misery arising from the abuse of them by others,-that they who do what God allows should be charged with causing, by their example, the crimes and guilt and punishment of those who do what God forbids!-has something in it so utterly unreasonable, that the simple statement of it should be its refutation in every soundly and soberly thinking mind: but I am relieved at once from the necessity of all such reasonings, by the same example. The charge cannot be just; because, if it were, the example of the "holy, harmless, and undefiled"-"the man Christ Jesus"-would come in for its share of the blame, as a part of the cause of all the intemperance in the land of Judea! If such admonitions and commands are quoted to me as-"Touch not the unclean thing;" "Be not conformed to this world;" "Be filled with the Spirit;" "Be not partakers of other men's sins;" "Do all to the glory of God;" "Let not your good be evil spoken of;" "Abstain from all appearance of evil;" "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God;" and others of a similar character, (and there are those who do quote them, as if they really thought they had application,) I meet them all with the same answer-Did Jesus "touch the unclean thing?" Was Jesus "conformed to this world?" Did Jesus "grieve that Holy Spirit which was not given by measure unto him?" Was Jesus, whom "the world hated because he testified of it that its works were evil," "a partaker in other men's sins?" Did Jesus do anything otherwise than "to the glory of God?" Was it not His "good" that was "evil spoken of," when He was called "a wine-bibber?" Was there anything in Him that could justly be charged with even the "appearance of evil?" If all these questions must be answered in one way-then what becomes of the application of the texts to those who only imitate His example? It proceeds altogether on a principle, which that example, as well as the reason of the thing, has stamped with falsehood, that the use by one is rendered sinful by the abuse on the part of others. But assuredly, no fellow-Christian is entitled to require in another the relinquishment of what he has the sanction of his Master's example for doing. We are surely safe when we are doing as Christ did. And with deliberate seriousness I say it-They who separate from their brethren because they cannot feel it their duty to adopt abstinence principles, and who, consequently, require such abstinence as a term of communion, proceed

upon a principle, which, if consistently followed out, would lead them to pronounce a sentence of excommunication, from His own church, of that church's Saviour and Lord! And what else do they than require abstinence as a term of fellowship, who placard "the British churches" as "bulwarks of intemperance?"* Did they mean by this, that in so far as such churches fail in their discipline by retaining in their communion the drunkard and the tippler, they were the "bulwarks of intemperance,"-it would be a truth. But this is not the ground of their quarrel with the churches, nor of their separation from them. And in so far as they mean that the churches are "the bulwarks of intemperance," by retaining in their fellowship those who use God's gifts in moderation, and by not collectively adopting and acting upon the principles of total abstinence,-I am borne out by the example and by all the precepts of the Saviour in pronouncing the imputation wholesale slander.

* This refers to a large placard put up at the time throughout all the streets of Glasgow, in which the language quoted was used. By this remark I am naturally led to another-namely, that the collective as well as individual example of God's people ought to be one of the influential means of discountenancing and putting down this and all other vices in the world. "It is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation," that by the amalgamation to such an extent of the church with the world, and the admission and retention of so many, in the former, of persons chargeable with the abuse of God's gifts in intemperance and other sins, the power of this example has been so sadly weakened, and even turned in the opposite direction. Were the church purified of its corruption,-were "the wicked shaken out of it,"-were the line of demarcation more boldly defined, by the church's "coming out and being separate,"-were the world thus deprived of every ground for pointing with the finger of scorn at tippling saints and godly drunkards, and saying "What do ye more than others?"-were there, in the personal and collective character of the people of God, a constant, faithful, consistent testimony, like that of their Lord, borne to the world "that the deeds thereof are evil;"-this would be, so far as example goes, what the Lord requires of his people; and it would just be-conformity to his own. And I am strongly inclined to think-and demand credit from my total abstinence brethren for my sincerity in saying so, how much soever they may question the soundness of the sentiment,-that Christian example ought to be an example of the influence of Christian principle. The apostle says-" The grace of God which bringeth salvation teacheth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world," Titus 2:11-12. I mean, then, that the more distinctly manifest it is to the world that the sobriety of Christians is the result of their having received the grace of God,-of their faith of the doctrine of "grace reigning through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord,"-the result of pure principle, independently of all superadded and extraneous considerations, the greater is the glory to the truth and to its divine Author,-the more distinct and vivid is the "holding forth of the word of life"-the more unequivocal the impression made of "singleness of eye," or of the efficiency of the one simple-hearted principle of regard to the Lord's will, under the influence of the Lord's truth. Now, when Christians,-instead of, in their distinct capacity, as individuals and as churches, bearing to the world their practical testimony of the power of the gospel-of the gospel exclusively-in restraining from evil and rendering them, as God's "peculiar people," "zealous of good works,"-enter into combinations with men of the world, and unite with them in distinct social pledges of abstinence from particular evils,-is not the influence of their own peculiar principles by this means obscured?-is not its unequivocal character impaired ?-does not it become to the world a matter of some uncertainty, what proportion of the restraining influence belongs to the gospel, and what proportion to the pledge? Is this altogether desirable? Should not the great end of

Christian example be, to recommend, not merely the external imitation, or the joint practice, of a particular virtue, or the stipulated avoidance of a particular sin,-but those divine and saving truths from which the distinguishing character of the true believer arises? And is there no sacrifice made, of real benefit to men's souls, when this is in any measure compromised, and the truths that unite and purify the Church kept out of distinct and prominent view by the principles and engagements that are the bond of the abstinence association? In this same connexion, I am further led to ask, whether to Christians it should not be an object of especially solicitous desire and endeavour, that the means used for the reformation of the "world lying in the wicked one," should be such as, at the same time, to effect their salvation ?-that the reformation attempted should, as far as possible, be based on such principles?-that the grand aim should be, to bring the minds and hearts of men under the influence of these principles, that so "out of the good treasure of the heart they may bring forth that which is good?" Should not the great power of reformation which Christians apply be the power of divine truth? When this power is effectually applied, all ends are gained. By other means, the end of external reformation may be gained. And is there not a danger of this being counted enough? When the reformation is effected by means of truth and principle-I mean Christian truth and Christian principle,-two important results are attained. In the first place, self-deception is prevented. Christians are well aware that sobriety is not conversion. When we succeed in inducing a man to relinquish the outward practice of intemperance, or of any other evil, we have, without question, in one, or, it may be, in more than one sense, done him good: but we may have done him good in a way that leaves him still "without God;" and if the man is tempted to trust in his reformation, as all in all-which we believe multitudes do,-while we save him from one delusion, we leave him in another. We have saved him from being a jovial drunkard or a despicable tippler,-and have made him a sober, selfsatisfied, but unconverted sinner, still "far from God and far from righteousness," and "before whom the publicans and the harlots may enter into the kingdom of God."-I grant, at the same time, and delight in granting, that by the outward reformation access may be more readily obtained to his mind, for bringing before it the saving truths of the gospel. All I would say is, that every Christian institution will keep conversion and salvation in view, as well as reformation of manners and habits of life,-and will on no account stop short of bringing sinners to God-" saving souls from death and hiding the multitude of sins"-as its ultimate aim;-and, as far as possible, precluding and suppressing all false and delusive confidences, lest outward reform prove only "a lie in their right hand," with which they "go down to the grave."

Secondly, permanence is ensured. This too is a consideration of much importance. When we succeed in effecting a change of principle, we have a hold of a man, such as nothing merely external or conventional can ever give us. When there is nothing beyond a verbal pledge or a paper bond between man and man,-or even an engagement in God's name, that is not associated with the believing adoption of any enlightened principles, the security we have for permanence is very precarious indeed. I speak of course comparatively. There may be a kind of principle in the conviction of the moral turpitude and injurious effects of drunkenness; but, in very many instances, these will prove little more tenacious in holding the conscience and restraining the conduct, than did the ropes and the whips before the strength of the unshorn Samson. Nothing short of a genuine change of heart can give assurance of a steadfast and permanent change of character.

We conceive that considerations such as these ought to save us at least from the dogmatical and undiscriminating censure and condemnation of our abstinence friends, if we more than hesitate in associating with them in their plans. There is but one rational ground of which I am aware, on which Christians ought ever to think of basing any such plans. The principle to which I allude is that laid down by the Apostle in Romans 14:21,-the principle of SELF-DENIAL FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. I grant at once, that while there is liberty given in the Bible to drink wine, there is equal liberty to abstain from drinking it. There is no obligation to use it;-unless it be in cases where the constitution may require it as part of the means of maintaining the vigour and spirit necessary for the efficient discharge of incumbent duties;-in which case the use itself becomes an incumbent duty. Still, as a general truth, there is no obligation to take, any more than to abstain; and there being no such obligation, Christians may, without question, abstain, when they conceive such abstinence likely to be the means of effecting any special good. If our friends would keep to this ground, and follow their own convictions in acting upon it; and have becoming charity for those who have not the same convictions, and who, for such reasons as have been assigned, do not feel themselves either bound, or even at liberty, to co-operate with them-all would be well. Who hinders them? who would interfere with them? Let them only beware of either imputing bad motives, or at least the absence of good motives, to those who differ from them. For my own part, with regard to the principle laid down by the Apostle, I am not at all satisfied that the case in which the statement of it originated is, by any means, correctly parallel to the one to which it is applied, and I do not know any one point of greater delicacy and difficulty than to settle the extent to which the application of it ought to be carried,-how far we are called upon to relinquish what God has granted us, that others may abstain from what He has interdicted; and to do what God has not commanded, in order to induce others to abstain from what He has forbidden. The one case relates to the people of God; the other to the world:-but granting that the spirit of the principle might be extended alike to both, there is another difference. In the one case, there are opposite convictions of conscience. It is a case where the scruples of the weak rested on divine authority in their minds, although under a mistaken apprehension of the divine mind in the matter to which it related:-and when I see the apostle dealing tenderly with this scruple, fearing to "wound the weak conscience," I see in his behaviour and his counsels conformity to the example of Him who "did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax;" who bore condescendingly and kindly with the ignorance and weakness of his followers, teaching them "as they were able to bear," not "putting the new wine into old bottles," or making "the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom was with them." In the other case, there is nothing of the kind;-there is no difficulty about the sin or the duty, even to the weakest,-nor any room for conscientious scruple; nothing being plainer in the Bible than that all excess and intemperance are forbidden, while the moderate use has the permission and sanction of divine authority. In this case, therefore, opposite convictions of conscience there can be none. And when I look at the same Master; when, with the full assurance that the example He set was, in every point, what it ought to have been, and in no respect either defective or redundant, I find that example, on the point in question, one, not of abstinence, but of temperance-am I not bound to regard His practical testimony against the world's evil works to have been sufficient,-and to conclude that what was sufficient in Him must be sufficient in his followers? Notwithstanding all this, however, I would not be disposed to contend with the advocates of total abstinence against the use they make of the example on which they rest so much-the example of the Apostle; and would grant them, as far as they think it may

legitimately be carried, the fairness of their principle. But they must pardon me for more than hesitating about their manner of applying it. While, when I hear of good accruing from their exertions; of drunkards reformed, and drunkenness prevented, and habits of sobriety spreading, I hesitate to utter a word that might sound like indifference to the well-being of my fellow-men, and still more to put forth a hand to arrest or impede its progress;-yet I have many apprehensions, uncertainties and misgivings about the ultimate results. I feel myself on safe ground when I am imitating the example of my Lord; and I cannot even appear, in any way, to give countenance to the extravagant and erroneous principles of Bible interpretation by which the abstinence system seems to me to be upheld,-or the false principles of action and character which are adopted in so many of its publications, and the uncharitable principles on which it judges the conduct of others. But time commands me to have done. I conclude by simply reminding my hearers of two great Bible truths-both alike essential to be kept in mind-that "by grace we are saved"-the sole ground of a sinner’s acceptance before God being the "blood and righteousness" of the Redeemer, in which the medium of interest is "the belief of the truth:"-and that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;"-the faith of the truth, in every instance, "purifying the heart and working by love;"-the very "grace that bringeth salvation teaching all its subjects, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

59-Pro_23:29-35 (C)

Proverbs 23:29-35 (C)

LECTURE LIX.

(THIRD DISCOURSE.) {eS module note: see the two lectures on Proverbs 20:1 for the first two discourses....} Proverbs 23:29-35.

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shall be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."

It was my purpose to have reserved any enlarged illustration of the evils of intemperance, till I should arrive at this passage in the ordinary course of exposition. I have thought it preferable, however, to follow up my two former discourses with an immediate exposition of its contents. A more graphic and vivid description,-a more powerful and awakening appeal,-a more solemn, earnest, and alarming expostulation and warning, it is hardly possible to conceive.

Before entering on the illustration of it, I cannot avoid requesting attention to the clear and ample confirmation it affords of all that was formerly said about the intoxicating character of the wines of Palestine. I stated before, and repeat it, that no learning is necessary to make out the only point which it is of any consequence to establish. It is easy to speak of the weak and light wines of that country. But how can any one read such a passage as this-and it is very far from standing alone-without being satisfied, that, whatever varieties there might be in the wines in ordinary use,-just as, with ourselves, there are weaker and stronger, lighter and more heady wines, there were some of them, that were not only intoxicating, but intoxicating to the utmost conceivable degree. For assuredly, nothing can go beyond the stage of drunkenness depicted in the verses which I have just read. Why, then, all the learned discussion? Why the raising of subscriptions for the purpose of sending commissions to Palestine, "to examine into the history of ancient wines, their manufacture and use?" Can this be necessary, to ascertain, to any reader of the Bible, whether they were intoxicating, when he reads of " the drunkards of Ephraim," and finds so frequently meeting him, warnings against the sin of intoxication, and against not "strong drink" alone, but "wine," as its fatal cause. To any one, therefore, who says he cannot believe that the wines of Judea were at all of the same heady qualities with ours,-I should think it enough to say Read these verses. No matter whether they were the same, in their manufacture, and in their qualities generally, with ours or not,-one quality they evidently possessed,-the quality which is the only ground of controversy:-they were intoxicating.

It will ho impossible to avoid, in the illustration of this passage, repeating sentiments of a similar description to some of those advanced in last lecture. For this,-so far as it may be the case,-allowance will readily be made. Our subject, then, is the Sin Of Intemperance. Here, there is no great likelihood of difference of opinion. Should there be difference, it will be on the part of such as are themselves, in a greater or less degree, addicted to the vice, and fond to discover grounds of palliation and self-defence,-or who are just in the perilous predicament of contracting a fondness for it.

Intemperance is the use of any intoxicating liquor to excess. It matters not what the liquor be-whether wine or malt-liquor, or ardent spirits, or extract of opium, or anything else. The evil lies, not in the article used, but in the excessive use of it. Now I fancy I hear some one say-and smile with a kind of self-complacency in saying it, as if he had found a puzzle for the speaker and a convenient refuge for himself-Ah! but what is the excessive use of it?-Allow me to say to such persons, that I never hear this question put, without trembling for him who puts it. I state it as my pastoral experience, that among all the cases of discipline for the sin of intemperance that have come under the cognizance of the church, I have hardly known one in which the party concerned, when evidence was clear against him, has not been disposed to take refuge in such excuses as-"I grant that I have at times taken pretty freely-perhaps I may at a time have gone a little further than I should have gone; but I always knew what I was doing."

Now, first of all, this is far from being always true. A man frequently says and does things, when under the influence of liquor, of the strangeness of which he is not at the time sensible; and does even right things in a manner that plainly betrays his condition to others, when he is entirely, or in a great measure, unconscious of it himself. But this is not all. Even supposing what these persons say of themselves were true, what a ground is this for a professing Christian,-nay, what a ground for any man holding even the common principles of morality,-to take! What! is it consistent with Christian principle-with Christian prudence-with Christian self-knowledge-with Christian vigilance-to venture thus to the very confines of evil,-to sport upon the borders of sin-to tread, with heedless step, the verge of hell? I can have no hesitation in saying, that the man who goes thus far has exceeded. He may not have got drank; but he has tampered with temptation;-he has violated all the admonitions to self-jealousy; he has shown a conscience not impressed as it ought to be with "abhorrence of that which is evil," by the very fact of his venturing so near it; he has shown an inclination, that would go further, if he dared,-that has not boldness enough as yet to sin freely;-if he is not a drunkard in fact, he is one in will,-and he is in most imminent danger of very soon being one in fact too. There are some to be found who, constitutionally or by custom, can take more than their neighbours, without being, as they say, the worse for it. And such persons have been many a time known to boast of how much they can stand. But not only is this grovelling and disgustful,-it is deeply criminal. It is a waste of God’s bounties,--a perversion of them to purposes they were never meant to serve; it is a species of indulgence at once deleterious to the body, and hardening and brutalizing to the mind; the boasting is a lure to others to try their strength,-a lure which, when successful, brings to the account of him who presents it all the sin and guilt produced by the imitation. There cannot be greater curses to society than those who are thus "mighty to mingle strong drink," and whose boast is, how many they can, as the phrase is, "lay under the table," while they themselves keep sober! The Bible says-"Woe unto them!" and all who wish well to mankind will say Amen! to the woe. There are some, too, who, though they never

perhaps get themselves thoroughly drunk-are for ever at it-tasting-tasting-tasting-whenever they can find the opportunity. One does not like to make comparisons; because such is the deceitfulness of the heart, and such men’s proneness to palliate their own forms and modes of evil, that when you represent another form as worse than theirs, they are tempted to a latitude of inference, such as makes them feel at ease in their own indulgence, as if it were hardly an evil at all, as if the sin were extracted from it by comparison with the greater sin of the other:-yet, in some respects at least, the incessant tippler is a worse and more hopeless character, than the occasional drunkard. The habit gets stronger-the craving more imperious-and the danger greater of the character of a confirmed sot being the result. Even although the tippler should never fall into absolute intoxication, he is intemperate. He may not go to great excess in any one particular case; but his incessant use is excess. He may be more intemperate in this respect, than the man whose fits of intoxication-or whose rambles (to use a cant word, which will convey to many my meaning better than any other,) are the exceptions, more or less frequent, to their ordinary sobriety. But away with such comparisons. All the modes of the evil are bad,-all to be shunned,-all to be abandoned. Men addicted to the vice, in one or other of its modes, have drawn variously the line of demarcation between temperance and intemperance, according to their different tastes and propensities,-have drawn it sometimes seriously, and more frequently in jest-" fools making a mock at sin." I will not descend from the dignity of the place I occupy by meddling with any of these. They are not the results of sober-minded conviction; and to refute the jokes, either of the low tippler or of the jovial debauchee, would be as degrading as it is unnecessary. In the passage before us Solomon speaks of those that "tarry long at the wine, that go to seek mixed wine." They "tarry at the wine" from fondness of it, and reluctance to quit it-yet another, and another, and another cup:-and they "go to seek mixed wine"-that is, either they inquire with eagerness where the best, the most deliciously flavoured, the strongest, the most highly seasoned and thoroughly inspissated wines, are to be found,-that there they may hold their carousals; or, they seek still a stronger and a stronger stimulant;-having recourse, when simple unmixed wines have failed of their effect, to those more heady and intoxicating combinations of liquor, or those liquors that have been mingled with drugs and spices of highly stimulating virtue, by which the efficacy may be enhanced as well as the relish improved. But the terms are evidently applicable to the indulgence, in whatever way, and by whatever means, in the propensity to excess. They describe drinking to intoxication, whatever be the beverage, and whether in solitude or in company. The terms too, it may be remarked, are expressive of habit. They suppose the habit formed. But everything that tends to the formation of the habit, must of course be considered as included. The habit is the height and consummation of the evil; but all the successive acts by which the habit has been formed come in for their proportional shares of the guilt. Habitual intoxication is the worst state of the vice; but occasional intoxication is still the vice. It is out of the occasional that the habitual arises. Men may think lightly, and talk lightly, of going beyond due bounds at a time, so long as they keep from the habit. But they would do well to remember, that every individual instance of excess is an act of decided and flagrant sin; and that, while it is vicious in itself, it is additionally vicious, as conducing to the formation of the habit. The man who makes light of occasional intoxication, is in the high way to the character of a habitual drunkard. There is, on this subject (and the observation applies to swearing and other sins, as well as to intemperance,) a strange perversion of principle at times to be found, in the estimates which men form of evil, or perhaps rather in the manner in which they talk about it. I refer to the manner in which we frequently hear

men allege the strength of habit in palliation of their misdeeds. The swearer has got so habituated to the use of oaths, that he utters them, without being sensible of doing it. The drunkard has become so addicted to the use of stimulating and intoxicating liquors that he cannot do without them; he absolutely requires them; the craving has become such that it must be gratified. So they speak; and in speaking so, they are guilty of the extraordinary delusion of making the very worst form and most flagrant degree of a sin the apology for the commission of it;-the habit of profaneness the excuse for being profane!-the habit of intemperance the apology for its individual acts! forgetting that the habit itself involves in it the accumulated guilt of all the individual acts which have either contributed to its formation, or have arisen from it when formed! The sin, then, of which I now speak is intemperance, as including the immoderate use of intoxicating liquors, even although absolute intoxication should rarely if ever be the result; and especially intoxication itself, in all its degrees, and all its stages,-from the first unsettlement of sober reason, down to the lowest pitch of drunken insensibility. Our next inquiry must be-what are the effects of this sin? and our reply to this question will bring out more clearly the nature and the amount of its criminality. We shall take up the effects, as they are here, directly and indirectly, enumerated; there being few of the evils resulting from this prolific parent sin, which may not find a place, naturally enough, within the limits of this most graphic and vivid portraiture.

We begin with observing, that, on the very first and most superficial view of the case, there is apparent in it a very flagrant evil. God has given man reason, for the superintendence and direction of his conduct in all the situations and connexions of life in which His providence may be pleased to place him. How, then, is that man to answer to his Maker and Judge, who wilfully deprives himself of the presidency of reason over his mind, and heart, and conscience, and behaviour?-who, of his own accord, irrationalizes himself-reduces himself to a brute? When I use this comparison, I refer exclusively to the unseating of reason from the throne of its legitimate and divinely appointed rule, or the impairing, in whatever degree, of its capacity for duly maintaining it. There is a sense in which the man who acts this part sinks himself far lower than the brute. Yes:-it is a slander on the inferior tribes of the animal creation, to compare a drunken man to a brute. The brute follows the prevailing instincts of its constitution,-and acts according to the measure of understanding which the all-wise Creator has conferred upon it. But the drunkard voluntarily bereaves himself of understanding; voluntarily incapacitates himself for his required functions; voluntarily becomes a half-witted fool, a violent maniac, or a drivelling idiot. The first question in the passage cited is-"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow?" Many, alas! are the sources of "sorrow" and "woe" to the drunkard, especially so long as his conscience, and his relative affections, and his regard to reputation and self-interest, retain any portion of sensibility, and have not been reduced to absolute callousness by protracted indulgence in sin. First of all, there is the woe of conscious debasement and guilt. Impelled by the unnatural cravings of a disordered appetite, or by the love of company and of social mirth, all is, for the time, joviality and glee:-who on earth so happy as the drunkard, when under the immediate impulse of his exhilarating stimulus? But, to form a true judgment, you must look at him when the excitement is past, and he is left to sober recollection-to the awful collapse of his over-stimulated spirits. Then come-(I am supposing the case of one not yet seared in conscience)-then come his fits of penitence. He is stung with remorse. He is ashamed, and dissatisfied with himself, painfully, fretfully, indignantly dissatisfied. He thinks, it may be, of the good principles of piety and virtue in which he was educated; of the parental example by which these were recommended and enforced; and of the anguish and

heart-break which his conduct must occasion to fond parents. Or again, if he has a family,-if he is himself a husband or a father,-his heart is wrung with the agony of self-reproach, in looking on his wife and children, whom he has been depriving of his company, denying the endearments of domestic life, dishonouring, distressing, abridging of their comforts, impoverishing, famishing, and possibly, while in his cups and rallied by his jovial associates, he has spoken of with unkindness and contumely, and, when he has come home, has treated with the words and the acts of abuse and violence;-or in gazing on the bitterly reproaching look of his heart-broken partner, whom he has wantonly and cruelly alienated by his unnatural neglect and profligacy,-or on what (if any spark of nature's sensibility still lingers in his bosom) is still more full of anguish-the affectionate smile, through glistening tears, that would fain and fondly win him back to the joys of home, and to the ways of sobriety and virtue and happiness!-Then, again, there is the "woe" and "sorrow," when he thinks how he has forfeited his reputation-that "good name which is better than precious ointment;" how he has injured his credit, and shaken the confidence that was reposed in him; how he has neglected and left undone something of essential moment, or has said, or done, or consented to, something eminently detrimental to himself, to his business, to his family:-he is angry with himself , he sees the damage, and he sees it to be irretrievable; he chafes and frets in vain; and by this very feeling of restless irritation, he is perhaps driven to seek refuge from his self-inflicted wretchedness in new and still greater excesses!-These are but specimens of the woes and sorrows, of which the variety is without end, that spring from this fountain of bitterness. It follows-"Who hath contentions?" I need not surely say, how frequently these are the accompaniments and consequences of intemperance:-how teazingly and provokingly troublesome on the one hand, and how senselessly quarrelsome on the other, it often renders its poor unhappy victims. They become reckless of all reason and of all risks. They will fight; they must fight. They contend for contention's sake. To tell them there is no cause, is to speak to madmen. Broils and angry debates are fomented, over which reason has left passion to preside alone,-whence come blows and battles, such as not seldom terminate seriously and even fatally. How many feuds and animosities, that separate friends and families, and spread discord and strife through neighbourhoods, and sometimes end in blood, have had their rise over the bottle, when men continue at it till wine or strong drink inflame them!-How many of the murders that from time to time take place, and of which the scaffold is the just requital, may be traced to intemperance!-how large a proportion of the "blood that crieth unto God from the ground" may be justly laid to the charge of that sin! "Who hath babbling?"-All who have marked the effects of intoxication must have observed how different they are on different mental temperaments. Some who are naturally quiet, good-humoured, and gentle, it renders loquacious, irritable, and headstrong; while others, naturally perhaps far from being the most easily managed, are converted into personifications of good humour. Like a temporary insanity, (which in truth it is) it works various and strange transformations of character. But, while the frantic fury of the drunkard is frightful, the silly incoherent drivel, and the broken, drawling, inarticulate, babbling speech, of the drunkard, is, to the last degree, pitiable and disgusting. Surely could the poor man see and hear himself-that would work a reformation, if anything would! How often may the drunkard, in his cups, be heard maintaining, with pertinacious and unmoved obstinacy, the most foolish and impertinent absurdities;-reiterating the affirmation of them with a stoutness and a violence growing with contradiction;-giving utterance to the most wretched inanities, without meaning and without coherence;-stammering out vows of eternal attachment to persons whom he has hardly seen

before, or for whom he cares not a rush when sober:-and all this too, with looks, and tones, and gestures, of the most infantile imbecility! Drunkenness destroys all distinctions and varieties of mental capacity and energy. When reason is once dethroned, wisdom and folly are on a level; and the wisest and most intelligent man in the company sinks into the pre-eminence of the veriest fool,-all froth, and emptiness, and absurdity!

"Who hath wounds without cause!" These maybe the result of various causes:-sometimes of contentions, when he picks quarrels and gets into brawls with all he meets,-interrupting them, laying hold of them, teazing and insulting them, and receiving in return what from many might be expected:-sometimes of his stumbles and falls, by which he is covered with cuts and bruises:-sometimes even of self-mutilation and violence,-the temporary madness having, in some instances, been known to produce the infliction of severe contusions, and the cleaving off of fingers,-by which they have been confounded afterwards on being told that it was their own doing! These are "wounds without cause"-not merely wounds needlessly incurred, and which by sobriety might have been shunned,-but of which the drunkard himself cannot tell the cause, but, when he gets sober, marvels whence they have come!

"Who hath redness of eyes?"-The habits of the man come to be marked by their effects upon his looks. The inflamed and turgid eye, and the blotched, and fiery, and disfigured countenance, indicate, that the deleterious poison has gone through his frame, and has incorporated with, and tainted, and set on fire the entire mass of circulating blood. His very looks become the index of his character, and give warning to all who look at him to have nothing to do with him. To these melancholy evils, others still more melancholy are added:-"Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things." The two vices, of drunkenness and lewdness, are almost inseparable associates. The one proverbially inflames the other. Intoxication is many a time the first step in seduction to other evils. When unprincipled men are desirous of obtaining the instrumentality of others for any wicked purpose, how often have they been known first to disorder their understandings by tempting them to free indulgence at the bottle! Thousands of crimes have their origin here. The fable is no doubt familiar to many of you-but though a fable it involves an important truth, and an important warning,-of the man to whom the devil is said to have offered the alternative of a choice between three sins, one or other of which, as the means of averting some evil or obtaining some good, he was bound to commit. The three sins were, murder, incest, and drunkenness. The man made choice of the last, as, in his estimation, incomparably the least. This was the devil’s device; for, when he was under the influence of it, he was easily beguiled into both the other two!-It is needless to say, how insensible the drunkard becomes, when in his cups, to all the feelings and laws of delicacy and decorum,-committing unblushingly the most shameless indecencies, and glorying in his shame; and how readily in such a state, he becomes the prey-the wretched and dishonourable prey-of every vile seducer.

"And thy lips shall utter perverse things."-It was "babblings" before. But mere drivelling and folly is not all; it would be comparatively well if it were. But too often intoxication is the inlet to licentious and impure conversation; to profligate and obscene songs; to slander and abuse even of the best and most venerated characters; to the treacherous and injurious betraying of secrets (which it is sometimes, indeed, the means employed for detecting); to impious and heaven daring profanities and blasphemies, oaths and curses, and reckless jestings at sacred things. These form the frightful compound, amidst growing confusion, and riot, and violence, of the drunken revel! When a

man is in his cups, "perverse things" may find utterance, such as will cost him many an hour and many a day of bitter suffering; such as he would cheerfully give all that he is worth to be able to recall; but such as he regrets to no purpose, the utterance and the consequences being alike irretrievable. The 34th and 35th verses describe the lowest point in the descending scale of the detestable and loathsome vice-the state of drunken stupor and insensibility. The man reduced to this condition, when he begins to awake from it, wonders where he has been, and wonders no less to find himself where he is; and he shudders with horror to think of the imminent perils by which, when he knew it not, he has been surrounded. How strange must be the feelings of him who, while sunk in a profound sleep, has been launched alone on the deep, and on waking finds himself there, in this dangerous solitude; or who, while his senses have, in like manner, been locked up, has been laid, insensible, on the masthead, and opens his eyes to his unwonted and unaccountable position?-Thus it is with the drunkard. When he is informed, on his reason returning to him,-after he has slept away the fumes of his miserable debauch,-where he has been, and what he has said and done,-he startles in astonishment, incredulity, and self-reproach; but he recollects nothing of it. What a graphic delineation we have, in the last verse, of a drunkard beginning to recover!-When he has passed through the different stages, of violent excitation, and of subsequent unconscious impotence;-the vacant stare,-the stammering speech,-the double vision,-the falling jaw,-the reeling step;-when he has fallen, and, on attempting to rise, has fallen irrecoverably again;-has been carried senseless to bed, and has fallen into a profound and beastly sleep:-here he is before you-beginning to awake;-feeling his contusions and wounds, and wondering where and how he can have got them; stiff and sore; trying to raise or to stretch himself; scarcely believing that he is not still asleep; yawning and listless, in that state of intolerable languor which is said to succeed the fits of high and fevered excitement! A most wretched state of remorse, and regret, and bitter reflection, and anticipated and dreaded evils; and yet-accompanied with the unendurable craving and longing for the necessary stimulus,-a craving, which is, alas! so seldom effectually resisted and subdued-"I will seek it yet again." The language of the thirty-second verse-"At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder" may be applied to all the subsequent effects together of this sin;-all the misery of an awakened conscience,-of keen self-reproach,-of corporeal and mental suffering,-of domestic discomfort,-of the loss of reputation, credit, health, life, soul,-all may be comprehended in this emphatic similitude.-O my friends, let us not forget, especially, the last of this sad series of particulars! The drunkard destroys His Soul. The temporal evils that result from the course he pursues are many and deeply deplorable. But O! what is any, what are all of them, compared with this!-compared with the spiritual desolation which this sin spreads around it, and the irretrievable ruin of everlasting interests, in which it terminates! Think of the deathbed of the drunkard,-a deathbed to which, it may be, his criminal and infatuated indulgence has contributed prematurely to bring him! He has lived "without God," and he dies "without hope." He quits the world in the horrors of despair, or in the hardly less fearful insensibility of a seared conscience, an exhausted mind, and a heart drugged into apathy by "strong delusion." He leaves behind him a ruined character, a ruined fortune, and, it may be, (no thanks to him if it is otherwise,) a ruined family;-and his ruined self plunges into hell!

I use this strong language freely and boldly, because I have formerly shown you how decidedly I am borne out in the use of it, by the positive assurances and awful denunciations of God’s word. I have shown you, that by the express and irrevocable sentence of the Judge of all, intemperance is

one of the sins which indicate a heart unrenewed by divine grace, and which finally exclude from "the kingdom of heaven." O that I could impress the fearful truth, with practically dissuasive power, on the consciences and hearts of all! The renunciation of the vice, where it has been practised, is one of the essential evidences of conversion to God:-"Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Corinthians 6:11. It follows that no one belongs to the number of the "washed and sanctified and justified," who belongs to the class of drunkards. And from this it further follows, that none such should ever be admitted to the fellowship of the church below, seeing they stand excluded from the church above, but must be kept out and cast out. O! well might Solomon say, with all the emphasis of pointed and affectionate warning-"Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colo1u' in the cup, when it moveth itself aright." The look forbidden is the look that springs from and provokes desire. There is always danger in looking at a tempting object. It was when Eve looked on the tempting fruit that she fell. The man who looks on the wine with special pleasure, when it sparkles and mantles in the brimming cup, excites his longing after it, and is in imminent danger of being overcome. If he would conquer, and avoid being conquered, he would do well to turn his eyes away; for it is, in this and in other cases, by the eye that the temptation enters and prevails. The people of God themselves are expressly warned against the indulgence and the encroachments of this miserable vice: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit," Ephesians 5:18. On this remarkable passage I may be allowed to observe-that being "filled with the Spirit" is the best preventive, the most effectual safeguard, against this and all other sins: for "the Spirit lusteth against the flesh, that we may not do the things which we would." And further-what a contrast is between the utterance of the man who is thus "filled with the Spirit," and that of the man who is "drunk with wine." We have seen what the latter is:-we have the former in the verse immediately following the expression quoted-"Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves: in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Our Lord himself, in very solemn and awful terms, admonishes his people on this subject;*1 and the warnings of His apostles are no less impressive and powerful.*2 Yet does it not strike you as remarkable,-and is it not deserving of the notice of those of our brethren who are accustomed to speak of abstinence as the only true temperance,-that when our Lord himself,-"the great Teacher,"-whose instructions, as well as whose example, were perfect,-admonished his followers, in terms so solemn and alarming, against such excesses as were inconsistent with due vigilance, and might expose them to be taken by surprise at the coming of their Master,-he never should have thought of the "more excellent way" of preventing the evil against which he warns by an injunction of abstinence? Never, one should think, was there a more appropriate time for it. The very admonition shows that the sin was not a rare one, or their danger of falling into it a great unlikelihood. Yet we have nothing of the kind. The rise is not interdicted, as the surest means of avoiding the abuse. The warning is solely against excess. Was this an oversight-an omission and imperfection in the Saviour's teaching? It must not be said, there was not the same danger:-had there not been danger, there would not have been warning. Observe me-I find no fault with the man who, in attending to the Saviour's admonition, acts upon the principle that the best and surest means of avoiding excess is, abstaining from whatever might tempt to it. He may act upon this principle himself; he may advise others to act upon it. All that is pleaded for is-that he do not condemn those, as disobeying the Saviour's admonition, who, whether in eating or drinking, can partake of

God’s bounties without the excess, and who, in so partaking, are imitating that Saviour’s example.

*1 See Matthew 24:48; Luke 21:34. rr *2 See Romans 13:11-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-10.

I wished to have enlarged a little now on one or two topics that were touched upon in last discourse. But your time will by no means admit of my doing so. I then stated what I conceive to be the only reasonable basis on which the advocates of Abstinence Societies should ever attempt to found them;-namely, the principle contained in the Apostle’s words-"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak:"-that is, the principle of selfdenial for the good of others,-or, in other words, the expediency of having recourse to means, in some circumstances, which, in different circumstances, might be unnecessary and uncalled for. It would, in my apprehension, have been well for their cause, had the friends of abstinence confined themselves to this ground. Although by no means to all Christian minds satisfactory to the extent to which they carry the application of the principle, or unobjectionable on other accounts,-yet to a certain degree it was solid. But by attempting to extend their foundation, they have weakened it. By seeking to prove too much, they have lost, in many minds, the hold they might have had. They have adopted principles which trench upon Christian liberty, by imposing human authority for divine, and condemning as sin what God has nowhere forbidden; which thus lead to uncharitable and censorious estimates of character; which require for their maintenance the violation of the canons of sound criticism and legitimate biblical interpretation; which, introduced into the church, would exclude from its communion many whom "Christ has received;" and, above all, which throw an injurious and most revolting reflection (how undesignedly and unconsciously soever, and I need not say I regard it as altogether so,) on the character of the all-perfect pattern of every excellence-’’the man Christ Jesus." All this is to myself matter of sincere regret. The object they prosecute is one of unquestioned and primary excellence-the diminution and eradication of an evil of enormous magnitude, and the inlet to a deplorable variety and amount of other evils, both moral and physical, personal, domestic, and public. In so far as this object is prosecuted by scripturally legitimate means, we cannot but wish the prosecution of it God-speed. I avow my preference of means, as far as they can possibly be brought into operation, of a different description;-means that go more directly to the root of other evils as well as this,-that go immediately, that is, to the rectification of the principles of human conduct;-means, that leave less likelihood of the minds of those on whom they are brought to bear being absorbed in this one concern, deluded into the notion that the temperance reformation is all in all,-to make this reformation their righteousness, to put their sobriety in the place of godliness, their reformation for conversion; and, though cured of one great evil, and freed from the miserable effects arising from it, to live as really without God as before;-means, which, while they saved their objects from intemperance, would, at the same time, bring them to more than what the world call sobriety,-which would bring them to faith, to holiness, to God;-which would thus combine ends of which the combination is so desirable,-providing for "things that accompany salvation" as well as things that accompany outward virtue and this world’s well-being. Mistake me not. I do not mean that it is at all wrong to avail ourselves of motives and considerations of an inferior kind to those which relate to the high interests of the soul and eternity, in order to induce men to abandon an evil which so injuriously affects themselves, their families, and the community. I am far from saying or thinking so. The Holy Scriptures make frequent use of such motives:-but the Bible, at the same time, should be our pattern in combining both, and in placing the highest first. I have also, as I

formerly said, more confidence in the permanence of the results, when the means by which they are produced involve the infusion of principle. Is it so, as has been reported, that many of the Irish papists, who took the pledge from Father Matthew, are now, at the hands of other priests, get. ting absolution from their pledge for a shilling? So it is said. For my own part, I should rejoice to hear that it is not time:-but still, I should not be at all surprised if it is. It would only be an exemplification of what I stated last Lord's day-the slender hold we have on a man when such a pledge is unaccompanied with knowledge, and unfounded in just principle. In the case alluded to, the bond and the release are alike the fruit of ignorance. Ignorance takes it; ignorance is absolved from it;-the ignorance of a soul-deceiving superstition,-a superstition which would lead its victims to make a merit of the keeping of their pledge,-and yet to feel themselves not the less safe for giving it up when their release was obtained from priestly authority.

I do not vindicate either myself or others from culpability in not bringing more into active operation such means as those of which I have intimated my approbation. Be it so, that in this we have erred, and do err. That affects not the present question. I have formerly said, and say it again,-that I have been reluctant to utter a word that could by any be construed as if it were pointed against, and designed to hinder, the advance of a good cause,-of a great reformation. And yet, conscious as I am that my sole object is truth-the basing of Christian plans and Christian doings upon right principles;-why should I fear the result? Essential truth, in the principles on which we proceed, will be sure of producing ultimate good,-even should it, for a time, appear to interfere with it. And now, having laid before you what I believe to be the mind of God on the subject that has occupied the last three morning lectures-I trust I may say without the charge of presumption, what my conscience tells me I say, though with confidence, without elation,-" I take you to record this day," whether, either by what I have said or by what I have not said, I have justly incurred the heavy imputation of "casting the weight of my influence into the scale of intemperance;" whether, for the last three Sabbath mornings, I have been "employing myself in promoting the dreadful evil of intemperance!" I have been describing its nature; exposing its sinfulness; shutting out those who are guilty of it from the kingdom of God both on earth and in heaven; showing its dreadful consequences, in time and eternity, and denouncing it in the name of the Lord. And I have been pleading for temperance as a Bible virtue, commanded by God, and exemplified by Christ, and a fruit of his Spirit in all who believe his truth. But, because I cannot see temperance and abstinence to be the same thing,-or, in the face of my Bible kind of experience, assent to the position, that abstinence is the only and the incumbent means of promoting temperance, I must bear the weight of imputations, which, if true, would render the man who is justly chargeable with them unworthy ever to open a lip again as a minister of God's truth. My conscience acquits me of having ever, within my recollection, used a single passage of the word of God, during the whole course of my ministry, in a sense inconsistent with what I believed to be its meaning, or for a purpose aside from its design. On the present subject, my sole desire has been to ascertain the mind and will of the Lord; and whatever the Lord sayeth, that to speak: and I trust that, "through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ," I shall ever be enabled, faithfully and unflinchingly, mildly but firmly, without the "fear of man, which bringeth a snare,"-" fearing God, and knowing no other fear,"-to "declare unto you"-" shunning" no one part of it-" the whole counsel of God;"-"not walking in craftiness, not handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending myself to every man's conscience in His sight!"

60-Pro_20:2-9

Proverbs 20:2-9

LECTURE LX.

Proverbs 20:2-9.

"The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion; whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul. It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling. The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing. Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water: but a man of understanding will draw it out. Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? 'The just man walketh in his integrity; his children are blessed after him. A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes. Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" On the first of these verses it is unnecessary to dwell.* "The fear of a king," is evidently here put for that in a king, or in sovereign authority, which causes fear. Jacob is said to have sworn "by the fear of his father Isaac"-that is, by the object of his fear, and those attributes, considered as belonging to that object, from which reverence and dread arose. That in a king which subjects have reason to fear, is his power, and consequently his displeasure, when his laws are broken, or his will is thwarted,-when that power is clothed with judicial vengeance. Then, as "the roaring of a lion"-his roaring after his prey when famished with hunger,-agitates the bosom of the traveller with terror, so may the offender quake before the authority, the power, and the anger of royalty. In this our sinful world there is a necessity for government. It is the "ordinance of God;" and, like all His ordinances, for good.-The less of punitive threatening and coercion that can be made to answer the ends of salutary rule, so much the better; and the sounder the wisdom and the principle by which the system is constructed. But alas! in all communities there are ever to be found, "evil men,"-wicked, turbulent, unprincipled, rapacious characters, of whose hearts no hold can be got by measures of gentleness, who can be held in check only by fear, and by the strong arm of law. The terror of punishment requires to be held over them. I enter not into questions about its nature and degrees. I am persuaded that in no case but that of murder should death be resorted to; but we have at present nothing to do with such inquiries. All we have now to say is, that laws without punitive sanctions deserve not the name. A law that may be violated with impunity is no law.-By the "king," in such passages is to be understood the government, or supreme judicial and executive authority, whether vested in one or in more; whether it be a monarchy, an aristocracy, a democracy, or, as in our own favoured and happy country, (for favoured and happy it is, in comparison with most other nations of the earth, notwithstanding all its occasional and even heavy sufferings,) a mixture of the three. Under every government there must be /ear. Love is Jehovah's universal law; but when men have thrown off the bonds of love, and refused the subjection of their hearts and lives to it, they must be assailed by fear. And under the government of God himself, "his wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" and-" "Who knoweth the power of his anger?" Under every human

administration, the seditious and treasonable, the enemies of subordination, the selfish violators of the rights and privileges, the liberty and property of others, require to be sternly coerced. The public weal demands it. The man, therefore, who, by his conduct, brings upon himself the legal and judicial "wrath of the king"-that is, of the Government,-"sinneth against his soul;" or, rather, against his life. He may endanger and forfeit life itself-forfeit it to law, and to the general good.

* See Proverbs 16:14; Proverbs 19:12.

There is a sense, indeed, in which the word soul may be retained. The man who rebels against the government and salutary laws of his country, sins against God,--and in so doing he "sins against his soul,"-all sin, of every kind, bringing upon it guilt, and exposing it to the threatened consequences.*-If "the fear" of an earthly king is "like the roaring of a lion,"-how fearful must the fear be of the "King of kings, and Lord of lords!" One glance of the lightning of those "eyes which are as a flame of fire," will shake the soul of the conscious sinner with the very terrors of death.

* Sec Romans 13:1-5.

Verse Proverbs 20:3. "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling."-There may be some connexion between this verse and the preceding. If "the wrath of the king is like the roaring of a lion," then if a man’s strife is with the king, it is at least safety to cease from it; and it is also "an honour."-But the words must be taken more generally. Strife is best let alone altogether-"left off before it be meddled with." But suppose, in any case, strife begun:-is it an honour still to cease from it? Solomon says it is. This is not the world’s view of the matter;-not the view which human nature,-that nature, as it exists and operates, whether fully or in conflict with a better, in every one of us,-is disposed to like or to dictate. Quite the contrary. When we have started a controversy,-how trivial soever the matter in debate may be,-O how fond we naturally are to have the last word! To let our adversary have it is the keenest mortification. When it is affirmation against affirmation,-if he persists in repeating his, we persist in repeating ours. We feel as if the victory depended on who should say it last! We get impatient:-our voice rises; our face flushes; our eyes kindle; and our utterance is choked with passion:-or, on the contrary, knowing the temper of our opponent, we keep ourselves provokingly calm; and by our very calmness, cool and scornful, stir up, with secret delight, all his hasty passions,-all the fuel of his fiery spirit. If a man of the world’s honour has sent a challenge, he is bound to stand to the very last upon every punctilio which the law of that honour has fixed, and to fight it out, till the honour of the last shot is determined by the fall of his adversary or himself. The man of a litigious spirit, having once instituted his process, and begun his suit, feels himself bound in honour (not the honour of high principle towards another, but a jealous and proud determination to maintain his own) to prosecute to the utmost; to go from the lowest court up to the highest, never resting short of the last appeal. No matter what the value of the litigated object may be-though a mere trifle-he must risk all that he is worth, rather than give in,-be ruined, rather than yield; because to yield, is dishonour: so his pride and folly think. How different-how opposite, the principles and maxims of the Bible!" It is an honour to a man to cease from strife." This is just saying, what, after all, must find the assent of every sound and calmly-thinking judgment,-that it is "an honour" to a man to have the command of his own passions;-that it is "an honour" to a man not to tamper selfishly and recklessly with the passions of others;-that it is "an honour" to a man to keep his ear candidly open to reason, and, when convinced, to yield to truth; that it is "an honour" to a man, not only to shun quarrels, but

when,-in spite of the apostle’s warning, "if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, five peaceably with all men,"-he has unhappily been unable to avoid falling into one, to look at the cause of it with fairness, to admit the equity of every equitable claim, and the reasonableness of every reasonable explanation,-and, when an opponent discovers an indomitable spirit of stubbornness, passion, and pride with which there is obviously no dealing, and which there is no hope of bringing to anything like calm and fair settlement,-instead of persisting, quietly to leave him to himself, rather than, by imitating his spirit, to make matters worse; that it is "an honour" to a man never to go unjustly or even needlessly to law with others; and, when obliged to have recourse to it, never to persist further in a process than is necessary to ascertain with clearness what the law of the case is; never either to institute a plea, or to maintain and urge it on, for pleading’s sake, and in the spirit of reckless and resentful pride, but to be rather the last to begin, and the first to give up. In a word, the spirit of peace and love and concord is the Bible spirit of honour. And it is the spirit of wisdom too; for in the second clause of the verse it is added-"But every fool will be meddling." These are pithy words. They afford another exemplification of the identity of human nature in Solomon’s days and in our own. How many such fools there are still!

"Meddling" means meddling with other people and other people’s concerns-so as to provoke quarrel with himself,-and still further to excite and foment them between others. In the former case, they often "meddle" to their own hurt; picking quarrels, and suffering by them. Amaziah, the king of J in lull, was one of these meddling fools; and he "meddled to his hurt."*1 Abraham presents a fine example of the opposite spirit-the spirit of "meekness of wisdom."*2 How many prying and officious fools are there!-who are ever peering into matters with which they have nothing to do,-and obtruding their sage advice where it is not wanted, and provoking people to say-What business is it of yours? And then these same fools will put in their word or their finger in other people’s quarrels. Even when the adversaries might, if left to themselves, "cease from strife," the "meddling" of these fools will keep it up and foment it to greater violence. They say this to one, and that to the other,-by which they stimulate the passions of both, inflame their pride and resentment, and confirm their alienation. The whole matter might have been settled but for them. O how much have such intermeddling fools to answer for! They may call themselves friends; but they are the enemies of the parties, and the enemies of mankind, and their own enemies to boot.

*1 See 2 Chronicles 25:8-14. rr *2 Genesis 13:7-9.

Verse Proverbs 20:4. "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing." How very frequently has the character of the sluggard come before us! In the present occurrence of it, there are two particulars which may be noticed:-

1. How fertile sloth ever is in excuses! On all occasions it is so-proverbially so. It finds its excuses for inactivity in the very considerations that are fitted to produce exertion. Thus it is here. Cold, sharp, bracing weather is the very weather which, in seed-time, the husbandman looks for; and the very weather which renders labour the least exhausting. And yet this is the sluggard’s plea for inexertion:-"the sluggard will not plow try reason of the cold." The same indolence, which finds an apology in the cold of seed-time, will readily find an apology for doing nothing, equally good, in the heat of summer. It is never, indeed, at a loss. Silence one plea,-another is ready; and with each one of them, "the sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason."

2. The consequence of indolence thus indulged:-"Therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing." This is the consequence that might be anticipated from the nature of things. The man who, from indolence, will not plow, and will not, therefore, sow, cannot expect to reap. And it is, moreover, the just consequence. "He receives," I was going to say, "the due reward of his deeds." I should rather say of his no-deeds.

I am disposed to think that the two expressions "he shall beg in harvest, and have nothing" do not mean the same thing,-namely, that, as the result of his indolence, he shall then be in a state of destitution,-he shall "have nothing" signifying the same as he shall "beg"-be reduced to beggary. Observe, it is not said, He shall have nothing, and shall beg; but he shall beg, and have nothing. He shall beg of others, from his fields yielding him no subsistence; and, his claim to sympathy not being admitted,-there being no justice in it, and his own egregious folly shutting up the bowels of compassion towards him,-he shall "have nothing" even by his beggary. He shall be in the condition of the prodigal son, when "no man gave unto him."-Harvest is the time of reaping and ingathering. It is a joyous time. They who have held the plough, and scattered the seed, and covered it with the harrow, and cleaned their fields, and looked for "the early and the latter rain," then cut down the waving crops, and gather them into the barn;-they have a gladsome harvest-home. And while all this busy toil and festive mirth is going on around him, the wretched sluggard has nought whereon to look but his bare fields-from which "the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom." He may sigh at length over the sad result, and wish the seed-time back again; but the fault is his own, and wishes and regrets are alike vain. And no one pities him; or, if any do, it is a pity at once condemnatory and scornful. Again, then-and again, I say unto you-"NOTHING WITHOUT LABOUR."

Verse Proverbs 20:5. "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water: but a man of understanding will draw it out." We have the power of communication; but not the power of intuitive acquaintance with each other’s thoughts and purposes, or the views which our minds respectively take of particular subjects. But there are ways of getting at the minds of others:-just as there are ways of getting at water though the well is deep. In the latter case, we apply the windlass and the bucket; and from many a fathom down, where the spring bubbles in silence and darkness, we bring the water to the surface for our use.-The verse may be taken as referring to the man of deep, designing policy; who exercises a firm control over his bps; cherishes his plans and purposes in the inaccessible secret places of his own mind; keeps his counsel; never blabs; all depth and mystery:-or to the reserved man-the man of deep and shrewd sagacity, but of modest diffidence and of few words,-thinking much and well, but saying little.

Taken in reference to the former of these two characters,-the meaning will be, that the "man of understanding" will "draw it out," in order that he may be upon his guard, and put others upon theirs. His object is, the detection of hidden counsels,-of deeply concealed designs, that he may take precautions against them, so as to shun and evade the threatened evil. The sagacity, which marks symptoms and circumstances, and by the study of human nature and of peculiarities of character, forms its shrewd guesses, and then, by direct or indirect inquiries, put with a penetrating eye upon the countenance, converts these guesses into certainty, worming out from the mind of the man of policy, ere he is himself aware, his most secret intentions,-may, in many cases, be eminently advantageous. Exercised in prudence and in benevolence, not in mere curiosity, and far less in malice, it is a very valuable power. The skilful general, who has studied the tactics of his

opponent, is often able more than to guess what his movements, in any given circumstances, will be,-how solicitous soever he may be to keep them secret,-and will make his own precautionary arrangements, or plan his mode of attack accordingly; keeping quiet, advancing, retreating, changing position, or at once giving battle, as the case may be. And so may a sagacious statesman dive into the secret counsels of a political adversary; shrewdly surmising the course which, in certain circumstances, his principles or his views of political expediency will suggest. Thus, in ordinary life, in daily intercourse, may the man of sagacity, in many instances, more than guess the thoughts and purposes of others, in a way that may be of essential service to him, for the guidance of his own movements.-There is, at the same time, it should be observed, a per contra side of this view of the case. There may be times and circumstances, when it is particularly necessary for us that we keep our own counsel; that we reserve what is in our own minds; that we do not allow our secret purposes prematurely to discover themselves; when such discovery would bring the risk of frustration to plans on which much depends;-and when, therefore, we behoove to be on our guard against "the man of understanding" who would "draw out our counsels." There are the curious and the prying, as well as the self-interested, who, by side insinuations, and seemingly far off and incidental questionings, put with an assumed simplicity, are trying to worm out our secrets,-letting down buckets in the dark. It may be our duty to see to it, that their buckets come up empty. As to the other case, that of the reserved man,-there is great and valuable art in "drawing out" his mind. The counsel which it contains may be sound and precious; but, unless skilfully elicited, it will remain where it is, and be lost. The discovery of it is worth the pains. But all have not the art. It requires peculiar tact. Even of the reserved the characters vary; and there is need for accommodation to the particular turn of each, in order to success. What would a thirsty man do, who had nothing to draw with, and the well was deep? Necessity, if he was a man of understanding, would be the mother of invention. He would set his wits to work, to construct some mechanical means of reaching the water. And thus will the intelligent and discriminative man find his way into the mind of the backward and reserved, and draw out for use its secret counsels. But for such a power and skill, a great deal of valuable wisdom might be lost for any practical purpose in society:-and to the man who draws it out, and puts it upon record, or brings it into use, society is not a little indebted. And ere I pass to another verse, does not the observation force itself upon your notice,-if any such value attaches to "counsel in the heart of man," as to render it worth pains to "draw it out,"-O at what pains should we be to understand the counsel of God,-the counsel of the infinite Mind! That is counsel, which we cannot "draw out." It must come spontaneously; it must be graciously revealed; for who hath known the mind of the Lord? And it has been. It is in his word-made known to his "holy apostles and prophets, by his Spirit." * And by them it has been communicated to us. What is necessary to salvation is to all simple and easily accessible. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." This is not deep water, which it is difficult to reach. All may reach it; and all freely partake of it. But there is much in the Bible which does require investigation and pains;-water, and living water too, which must be brought from the deep well. "We should earnestly seek spiritual understanding, that we may be able, by diligent pains of study, to "draw it out."

* 1 Corinthians 2:9-12; 1 Corinthians 2:16.

Verse Proverbs 20:6. "Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?" The Apostle Paul, with much emphasis, delivers the following admonition:-"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." Human nature has been ever characterised by a tendency to over-estimate its own worth-and a propensity to let that worth be known. There are men, indeed, who "glory in their shame;" who proclaim their vices; their intemperance, their lewdness, their quarrels, their revenge; who, instead of making a secret of these, make them their open boast, and laugh to scorn the tameness of virtue. But, as Solomon here expresses it-"Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness." By some the word is taken here in its more restricted sense-a sense in which, without doubt, it is often used, as meaning kindness, benevolence, generosity. But there is nothing in the spirit or principle of the statement, that at all requires its restriction. "What is true respecting goodness in the restricted, is true respecting goodness in the general sense. But the manner in which men make known what they account their goodness, is very various. Some are open with it. They almost literally "proclaim" it, upon the housetops. To every individual, and in every company, they speak of it,-of what they are, of what they have said, of what they have done, of what they think, and of what they wish and intend to do. And O! if they had but the means! what would they not accomplish!

Some there are who are quite as vain, and as ambitious of commendation and praise, who, knowing that everything of the nature of ostentation is exceedingly unpopular, and lets a man down, and tempts others to pluck his feathers from him,-set about their object with greater art. They devise ways of getting their merits made known so as to avoid the flaw of ostentatious self-display. In company, they commend others for the qualities which they conceive themselves specially to possess, or for the doing of deeds which they themselves are sufficiently well known to have done; and they turn the conversation dexterously that way; or they find fault with others for the want of the good they are desirous to get praise for; or they lament over their own deficiencies and failures in the very points in which they conceive their excellence to lie-to give others the opportunity of contradicting them; or, if they have done anything they deem particularly generous and praise-worthy, they introduce some similar case, and bring in, as apparently accidental and unintentional a way as possible, the situation of the person or the family that has been the object of their bounty. In a thousand ways, as it may happen, they contrive to get in themselves and their goodness. As an exemplification of the anxiety to have what they do known and to get the credit of it-I might instance liberality or charity. Our Saviour enjoined unostentatious privacy:-"Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." * But what a rarity is this! And how exceedingly apt are we, even so far to impose upon our deceitful hearts, as to try to unite what, in principle, never can be united;-and to do the thing in such a way as to ensure its being known, while at the same time the charge of ostentation is avoided!-so as that we may get commendation both for the act and for the manner of it! This is the hypocrisy of selfproclamation, that keeps self out of view; for the very purpose of putting self forward. It is on the same principle that we can satisfy ourselves with giving less to a collection for any object,-where the individual is lost in the aggregate,-than we should put down for the same object, in a subscription paper,-where each appears singly and in favourable or unfavourable comparison. O! we do grudge so much doing anything that is really creditable without getting the credit for the doing of it! Let us cultivate more simplicity of principle-more singleness of eye; and let us not forget, that, according to our Saviour’s words, in proportion as we

admit into the motives by which we are actuated the "love of the praise of men," we in the same proportion deduct from the approbation and "praise of God,"-the God who "trieth the hearts." O that we had grace to set a greater value on Gods own judgment of us, and less on that of men; that so "our Father who seeth in secret may reward us openly!"

* Matthew 6:1-4.

"The Scriptures declare," says Dr. Lawson on this passage, "that a truly good man is rarely to be found; and yet, if men's own word could be taken, there is scarcely a bad man to be found." This is a true saying. Even those who boast of what others call their vices, are, at the same time, ever ready with an offset of redeeming virtues. They are no rarities who speak well of themselves, and defend themselves from the imputation of evil; which, when they can not entirely disown, they palliate, and balance with compensatory good.

"But a faithful man who can final?"-A faithful man seems here to mean, a man thoroughly and conscientiously faithful to principle-who in heart and in life is true to men, and true to God. He is one whom fellow-men can implicitly and fearlessly trust; who deals not in talk, in promise and protestation, the verbiage of goodness; but who considers and weighs his words, and says nothing, but what he verifies in action;-who carries resolutely out, in all things, the principle of the royal law; and of whom, therefore, all have the satisfactory assurance, that he will not be less regardful of the characters and interests of others, than he is of his own. He is one too who, in regard to himself, is jealous of the tendencies of which we have been speaking; keeps within the limits of sober truth, and keeps self in the back ground, except where duty to character, to usefulness, and to the cause to which he is devoted, requires self-vindication and self-eulogy. For such occasions there are. Paul felt this. He was falsely charged, and his apostolic authority questioned; his usefulness was thus injured; and the cause of the gospel, and of the church, and of his Master, was involved in danger; and it became indispensable for him to speak of himself, and to state and give prominence to facts which he had long kept secret; and which, but for the operation of these circumstances, might have died with him. We almost feel indebted to his adversaries, for having thus drawn from him, in terms of dignified eloquence, what we should not otherwise have known, and our ignorance of which would have deprived us of a valuable example. Paul, in all this, acted the part of a "faithful man," not to himself alone, but to the Lord whom he served. Which leads me to the higher point, that "a faithful man" is one who is always unswervingly true to God. To Him he has to give his account. He is aware of the principles of action which Ho approves; and, without regard to the fear or the favour, the smiles or the frowns of men, or the seeming temptations of present self-interest, he seeks grace to adhere to these principles,-the only principles, he knows, that will be looked to in the judgment; foregoing, it may be, present eclat and present advantage, satisfied that "the day will declare it," and that "his Father who seeth in secret will reward him openly !"-r-O well may we say-regarding the character in this high and holy light, "A faithful man who can find!" The first clause of the following verse-"The just man walketh in his integrity,"-has by some been rendered-" He that walketh in his integrity is a just or righteous man." And this will correspond precisely with New Testament statements.* There is no man who is in state just before God, who is not under the predominant and habitual influence of the principles of righteousness. "Walking in his integrity" means this:-means his maintaining a regular, steadfast, persevering course of obedience; abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good."

*...; John 3:7; Romans 8:1.

"His children are blessed after him,"-in the benefits derived from his instructions and example; not blessed it may be in an inheritance of worldly wealth, but in an inheritance of principles; and in the promise of God’s covenant realized in their happy experience, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." * * Comp. Psalms 103:17-18.

Verse Proverbs 20:8. "A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes."-The subject, under other forms of expression, and in other points of light, has been repeatedly before us.* * Proverbs 16:14-15; Proverbs 19:12; Proverbs 20:2. To "sit in the throne of judgment" must evidently be understood as meaning to occupy that seat in righteousness; and to dispense judgment from it according to right principles. On any other supposition, it would cease to be the throne of judgment, and become the throne of iniquity-"framing mischief by a law." Thus marked by righteousness was Solomon’s judicial administration, in the outset of his reign.* Our kings do not now occupy personally the judgment-seat. But the principle of the words is applicable to all judges. The seat they occupy is one of deep and solemn responsibility-one of lofty dignity-one of commanding authority. The sentiments, and feelings, and manner, with which it is occupied, ought to correspond with its character and the nature of its functions. There must be no levity,-no littleness of self-satisfaction,-no obliquity of principle,-no partialities, and predilections, and prejudices; but the calm majesty of truth and justice. In the very looks, there ought to be the condemnation of all evil and guilt, and the assurance of protection and favour to innocence. The judge’s glance should make offenders quail. He should thus "scatter away evil with his eyes"-putting it out of countenance,-covering it with shame,-frowning it away from him by merited severity, or subduing it to penitence by the searching eye of tenderness.

* See 1 Kings 3:28. The words may justly be applied, in the spirit of them, to the court of royal personages. There, their "eyes should scatter away evil." Everything indecent and indecorous should make the eye of majesty flash rebuke, and banish the offence. But the difficulties which surround even the most upright and best-intentioned princes, are not small, by reason of the universal corruption of our fallen nature; a corruption in which their subjects and themselves are alike involved. Those who are most aware of this,-of the imperfection common to rulers with all others,-and of the vast amount of varied materials of evil with which they have to do, will be most disposed,-as far as is consistent with fidelity to the public good,-to make charitable allowances for the errors and failures into which the very soundest and best disposed of rulers may at times fall. Possibly something of this kind may be the association of suggestion that connects the ninth verse with this:-"Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"-This question may be viewed in various lights.

We may apply it in regard to original sin-the hereditary taint of our apostate nature:-That there is such a taint-such an absence of the right and only principle of all true goodness,-such an innate tendency to defection from God, and to what is evil,-might, on philosophical principles, be demonstrated from the facts of the case,-from the absolute impossibility of accounting reasonably for the universality of sin in the whole species, and in every individual of every generation,-on any other hypothesis. And that such is the representation of Scripture, might be shown, from the pervading tenor of the whole Bible, and from many explicit passages.* This universal inherent sinfulness of nature was, I cannot doubt, in Solomon’s mind, when he wrote the words before us.

2. They proceed too on the universally Scriptural assumption, that all that is truly and spiritually good in the heart of man is the product of divine operation-of the renewing influence of God’s Spirit: "Who can say," that is, say with truth-" I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"If the position of the apostle be a true one, that " the carnal mind is enmity against God," there can hardly be a greater absurdity than is involved in the idea of spontaneously originating self-change-self-conversion; of enmity changing itself into love-choosing to love the object of its hatred!

* See Job 14:4; Job 15:14; Psalms 51:4; John 3:6; Romans 8:7.

3. The words more than imply,-under the form of a question they strongly affirm,-that the purification of the heart is in no man perfect here. There is a purity of heart ascribed to God’s people, and characteristic of them. God’s children are "renewed in the spirit of their mind." But still-" Who shall say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"-There have been some who have presumed to say it. But what is the truth? It is easy to say it; but it will not be easy to make it good, in direct contradiction of the explicit affirmations of Scripture.* We may be perfectly sure, that the idea of sinless perfection in any case is a delusion. Were it in any one case realized, it would cease to be true, that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." And to the question in the text-"Who can say, I am pure from my sin?"-it might, in that case, be answered-I am. It must, therefore, be either a melancholy proof of the power of self-deception,-or a shocking manifestation of the extravagance of hypocritical pretension. It is a characteristic of God’s children, that they see, as they advance heavenward, more and more reason for self-abasement;-not that they sin more; for they become holier-but their views, at the same time, of the purity of God become fuller and stronger. The glass in which they view themselves becomes clearer and more faithful. Little sins, to minds growing in holiness, become more loathsome. Yet "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

* Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 John 1:7-9.

61-Pro_20:10-14

Proverbs 20:10-14

LECTURE LXI.

Proverbs 20:10-14.

"Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord. Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right. The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them. Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty: open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread. It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth." In the original, as intimated on the margin of our English Bible, the terms of the verse before us are-"A stone and a stone," (or a weight and a weight) "an ephah and an ephah." The meaning is plain. A man, we shall suppose,-would that it were, in no case, more than supposition!-has one set of weights and measures to sell with, and another to buy with; one set for his customers, and another for the inspector; one set for customers that are ignorant and unwary, and another for those who know the trade, and are too shrewd to be easily imposed upon; one set for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the dependent, who cannot, or who dare not, seek redress, and another for persons of influence, with whom it is dangerous to trifle. But under this particular phraseology, are to be comprehended all fraudulent dealings whatsoever, in every department of business, or of mutual transaction between man and man. Nothing can be clearer than that a short yard is as bad as a light weight or a scanty measure:-and that there is the very same sin also, in having different articles at the same prices, or the same articles at different prices, for the purpose of imposing on the ignorant. It is a repetition of the great practical truth-that there ought to be nothing, in any of our transactions, but what is open, straightforward, upright, and impartial; no chicanery; no double-dealing; nothing one hairbreadth aside from the line of the most rigid rectitude;-all as in the sight of that God, whom not the most secret and skilful attempt at imposition can escape, and to whom, as is frequently and solemnly reiterated, everything of the kind is "an abomination." * * For farther illustration, see Proverbs 11:1; Proverbs 16:11. And if, in the dealings of the shop and the market, partiality and unrighteousness are thus severely reprobated, how much more when found in the "seat of judgment." Justice is usually, when personified, represented with bandaged eyes and an evenly poised balance in her hand: intimating that she must shut her eyes fast against every temptation, every bribe to unfairness; must use no false evidence, no false pleas, nor give any one atom of proof greater or less weight, on either side, than belongs to it; nor, in awarding punishment, employ "an ephah and an ephah,"-one measure of recompense for one delinquent, and another for another. Such conduct is worse on the judgment-seat than at the counter, as the sphere is of a higher order; and whether it be in the department of the civil magistracy, or in the administration of the discipline of the house of God, the evil is alike obnoxious to the divine displeasure.

Verse Proverbs 20:11. "Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right." Few of the verses of this book have been more variously understood and

rendered than this.

1. In the first place, we have our own received version just quoted. If here, the "doings" and the "work" mean the same thing, as they seem to do, it may be asked, Where lies the difficulty? The "doings" of the child are supposed to be seen and known, what difficulty can there be in discovering whether these very doings be pure and right? To this the only answer that gives any appropriate meaning to the sentence, must be,-that the expression "whether his work he, pure and whether it be right" has reference to the disposition, the state of mind and Mart, the motive, by which it is prompted. This gives, unquestionably, a true and important sense. A child's dispositions,-their purity and rectitude, or the contrary,-may be discovered from his "doings." In these there is no little diversity very early apparent. They are kind or cruel; they are open or full of trick and deceit; they are selfish or generous; they are rash or well-weighed and prudent. In "doings" of these various descriptions, dispositions and tempers, of corresponding variety, discover themselves; and by the discovery, parents and guardians should be regulated in their modes of dealing with the subjects of them. The same treatment would never do for all.

2. Another translation is-" Even a child, by his behaviour, will discover, (or make it known,) whether what he hath done be innocent and right." * It is curious, and in some cases amusing, to observe this. Symptoms of conscience begin to show themselves; but it is often in such a way, that the very means they use for concealment become the means of detection. There is, perhaps, when they know they have done something wrong, a want of their usual frankness and openness, a timidity and shrinking from observation, looks of apprehensive jealousy, and an interpretation of everything in the looks and words of others, as if it had a meaning that bore upon them, and upon what they have done; and at times,-where there is much of the artless simplicity of childhood, blending itself with that natural disregard of truth which manifests itself wherever self-interest or fear requires falsehood,-an over-eagerness to deny what, but for the denial, might never have been known; a lie thus bewraying the truth. A close observer of the behaviour of children may see a vast deal of this self-detecting behaviour on the one hand, where evil has been done; and of that open, undisguised artlessness on the other, by which innocence becomes its own witness.

* Hodgson.

3. Another considers the present indications as having reference to the future:-"Even a youth makes himself known by his doings, whether his work-that is, his future work, his course of life-will be pure, and whether it will be right."*

* Schulz. This is a very important meaning in regard to its practical utility. Moral depravity is the sad birthright of our fallen nature. But this betrays itself in a great variety of modes. Every one "goes astray;" but still, "each in his own way." According to peculiar circumstances and particularities of temperament, the common corruption assumes various aspects, and takes different directions. Here then is an important lesson for parents. They should feel the propriety and necessity of watching over specially strong tendencies to particular evils; of bending a peculiarly vigilant eye on the sin which, in early life, seems most easily to beset the childish mind; and, on the other hand, of cherishing, with an assiduous and constant care, every symptom of good which, by the blessing of God, presents itself. If it be right for parents to note the diversity in the natural and early apparent talents, turns of mind, and genius of their children, for the purpose of directing them in their choice of a business or a profession in life, surely their dispositions-their

moral tendencies, are much more to be watched, and guarded, and guided. It is well when mental superiority exists in union with moral worth. But Christian parents, I say anew, should hold and act upon the principle, that the slenderest intellect, with a heart on the side of God, is incomparably more desirable in any of their children, than powers of mind of even colossal greatness associated with a heart under the sway of the world and sin; that a weak saint is better than an accomplished devil.-And in dealing with the good and evil symptoms of future character that discover themselves in childhood, let parents beware of a species of partiality to which they are exceedingly prone,-the partiality which treats the evil symptoms as if they were only the indications of a childish ignorance and thoughtlessness which time will, as a matter of course, correct, and which need not therefore occasion much alarm, and need not the application of any very careful or solicitous restraint,-while every symptom of good that appears is trusted to, applauded, flattered, and everything expected from it; as if, in a world such as ours, there were not imminent danger every moment of its suffering deterioration and even extinction,-of its being nipped in the bud or the blossom; and therefore requiring the most vigilant and anxious care in its shelter and cultivation. O let not believing parents, who know from their Bibles what human nature is, act, in the education of their children, as if the evil were exotic and the good indigenous,-as if the evil had slight hold of the soil and were sure to wither, and the good firmly rooted and sure to thrive.

4. The senses I have mentioned, proceed on the assumption that the Hebrew word rendered "is known," or make* himself known, is derived from a particular root that has the signification of knowing, knowing again, or recognizing. By some eminent critics, however, this is more than doubted. The word is considered as belonging to another root, of which the signification is to make one’s self strange, to pretend to be other than one is, to dissemble. In support of this are quoted-Genesis 42:7; 1 Kings 14:5-6. In these passages we have the same word-rendered "made himself strange;" "feigned herself another." The verse has therefore been translated:-"Even a youth will, in his doings, act the dissembler,-that in truth his work is pure, that in truth it is right." * This not only seems to agree with the right meaning of the word; but harmonizes naturally with the connexion in which it occurs-following a verse that so directly relates to deceit.

* Parkhurst and Schultens. No one can have watched the tendencies of childhood, without observing how early and how strong, whenever there is the least tempting occasion for it, is the propensity to dissembling; to deny the wrong they have done, and to affirm the good they have not done; concealing, by artifice and falsehood, what they know will be condemned and subject them to punishment; and pretending the contrary, what they know will get them safety from punishment and the smile of approbation. This natural disposition grows by success. It becomes habitual. It is the commencement-the germ-of all the dishonesties, the lies, and the frauds of the subsequent life. The opposite disposition and practice,-openness and candour,-frankness and simplicity of confession, with the sinfulness and the danger of all dissimulation,-should be carefully and constantly impressed on the youthful spirit. And example ought ever to be in accordance with the instructions and admonitions given. Children are often a great deal more sharp-sighted than foolish parents give them credit for. If they ever hear their parents saying, though it may not be to themselves, what they know not to be strictly true, or if they see them do what they have sense enough to discern not to be strictly honest,-what can those parents reasonably expect?-to have their counsels attended to and obeyed? and their corrections taken in a spirit likely to render them of any service? The expectation were folly. Their corrections, in such circumstances, are unjust

and cruel. On themselves ought the chastisement to be inflicted. Their backs should bear the stripes. Parents, and servants entrusted with the care of children, should be exceedingly cautious in avoiding everything approaching to simulation in their treatment of them. I know nothing more pernicious. It should never be resorted to, even for a good purpose. Be assured that the detection of the dissimulation will do much more harm than that which is avoided by the dissimulation itself. There are many common practices, in the management of children, which it would be well for all who have the care of them to shun. How often are children, when they cry or are fractious, quieted,-or the attempt at least made to quiet them,-by telling them what is not true! This is done in different ways. What is told is something frightful, and is meant to alarm them; or it is something pleasing, that is meant to soothe them; but neither the one thing nor the other has any existence. Something is promised, which is not to be given,-which, it is known perhaps, cannot be given:-or something is threatened, which is not to be executed. The things themselves may be trifling; but there is nothing trifling to a child:-they may be the thoughtless figments of fancy, but the child has not learned to distinguish between fancy and. reality. It is all bad; initiating children in habits of light estimation of truth, and the harmlessness of dissembling for a present purpose. And allow me to say to nursery servants, who have so much in their power in regard to the early impressions on the minds of children,-that they ought to be specially on their guard against making children parties with themselves in any acts of dissembling with their parents. This is the most shocking of all lessons. O let no consideration of preventing their own detection in what is wrong, ever tempt them to put children, who have seen and known their fault, on the practice of concealment, prevarication, and falsehood, with their own father or mother. The thing is fearful. Let all be openness, sincerity, candour, truth, at every hazard:-no sporting with evil; no equivocation; no laughing at successful artifice; nothing but what the God of truth, who "desireth truth in the inward parts," will mark with approbation.

Verse Proverbs 20:12. "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them."-Our whole frame is of divine contrivance, and divine workmanship; and truly it is a structure of most complicated and exquisite mechanism; a little world of wonders; where, the longer and the more closely we examine, the more we are confounded, and lost in admiration. The man who can inspect it, and doubt of a God, is beyond the reach of argument. The Psalmist utters the language of sound reason, as well as of piety, when he says-"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." And of the human frame, there are no parts more wonderful, in their contrivance and execution, and the delicate and intricate nicety of their adaptation to their respective functions,-than "the seeing eye and the hearing ear."-The eye, by its admirable combination of coats, and humours, and lenses, produces on the retina, or expansion of nerve at the back of the socket or boney cavity in which it is so securely lodged, a distinct picture of the minutest or largest object; so that, on a space that is less than an inch in diameter, a landscape of miles in extent, with all its variety of scenery, is depicted with perfect exactness of relative proportion in all its parts! And how complex and delicate is "the hearing ear!"-by no means less wonderful than the eye, though less exposed to human observation, lying deep, except its outer part, in the bones of the head. What the eye is to light, the ear is to sound. And how divinely perfect its construction! so strong, as not to be painfully affected by the burst and roll of the loudest thunder; and yet so delicately sensitive as to receive impressions of sound from those undulations of the air that are produced by the very softest whisper! But "the hearing ear and the seeing eye" include something more than this-and still more

wonderful. What I have mentioned, is but the mechanism. We can, by attending to the laws of vision and sound, produce something that, in structure and in mechanical or physical effect, bears some analogy to them. But this is not sight; this is not hearing. These imply perception. And to perception there are requisite an auditory and an optic nerve, that convey the sensations of sound and vision to the brain; and a perceiving mind,-an immaterial, spiritual, thinking substance, essence, element-or what else shall we call it? that thus receives its perceptions of things heard and things seen!-O! this is the highest and deepest wonder of all! The mechanical structure we can trace out and demonstrate. We can show how, by the laws of transmission and refraction, the picture is made on the retina of the eye; and how, by the laws of sound, the yielding, tremulous, undulating air affects the tympanum, or drum, of the ear. But we can get no farther. How it is that the mind receives its perceptions,-how it is that it is affected,-what is the nature of nervous influence, or of the process by which, through the medium of the nerves and the brain, thought is produced in the mind.-of all this we are profoundly ignorant. But although the mention of "the hearing ear and the seeing eye" has naturally led to such remarks,-it is not, certainly, for the purpose of setting forth the skill of the Maker, that Solomon, in tins place, introduces them. The verso seems to bear a very intelligible connexion with the two preceding, though to some it may not be apparent. Dishonesty and dissimulation, whether practice by old or young, might escape the detection of men, but not of God. He who made both "the hearing ear and the seeing eye"-shall He not hear and see 1 Remember, then, all, this deeply solemn fact: God sees you, God hears you.-Further, let those who possess, in healthy soundness, the "hearing ear and the seeing eye," be thankful to God for the blessing. There are "ears which hear not, and eyes which see not." Ponder well the question, intended to engender at once humility and gratitude,-" Who maketh thee to differ?"-and let this consideration impress all, the young especially, with the criminality of either mocking, or taking advantage of, the deaf or the blind. The Lord will avenge them.* Be ye, as far as lieth in you, "ears to the deaf, and eyes to the blind!"-Further, strive to make a right use of these precious organs of hearing and of sight, remembering that to the divine Maker of them you are answerable for the use to which you turn them.-Lastly, the hearing ear and the seeing eye, in a far more important meaning of the terms, are from God. Spiritual hearing and spiritual sight are His gift. "The hearing ear" is the obedient ear-the disposition to do God’s will:-the seeing eye is the understanding-the spiritually understanding mind. Both come from "the God of all grace." There are, in Scripture phrase, "the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears,"-who "having eyes see not, and having ears hear not." This is their guilt. It is the depravity of the heart that is the only obstructing film on the eye of the understanding in regard to the things of God. It is this that disposes the sinner, like "the deaf adder," to shut his ear to the "voice of the charmer."

* See Leviticus 19:14. In the next verse we have the recurrence again of an oft repeated maxim, that sloth brings ruin; diligence prosperity:-"Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread."

Verse Proverbs 20:14. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth." The word rendered "the buyer" has also the signification, very naturally, of the possessor. Hence two views have been taken of the meaning of the verse.-One critic of eminence * renders thus:-"Worthless! worthless! says the possessor: but when the thing is gone from him (is lost) then he praises it!" According to this view, the sentiment expressed is, the comparatively light

value we attach to what is actually in our possession; whereas, when we can no longer command the possession, we immediately perceive, feel, or fancy its preciousness. Good in possession appears less in value; good in expectation, greater-like objects seen at a distance, through a particular medium. We praise the absent, we depreciate the present good.-Then there is the more ordinary sense; which appears also to be the true one. The reference is to the acts of the "buyer" to procure a good bargain; and the disposition to boast of his success. In this sense, the case, as it appears to have been common in the days of Solomon, is certainly no less so now. It occurs every day, and every hour, in all the departments of business,-in every market. "Bad-bad-very bad! You never surely can think of asking, far less of getting, such a price for this! It is far from being an article worth anything like the money." Thus the buyer goes on, running down what he wants to purchase; yet, all the while, he is perfectly satisfied that the article is one of the best of its kind, and the price put upon it exceedingly reasonable. Now, what, I ask, is this but lying?-plain downright lying? It is saying what I've do not think: and wherein does that differ from lying?-In thus cheapening and underrating the value of what we are about to purchase, we tell a lie, or a tissue of lies, to get a bargain! And all that we may afterwards have a good story to tell of our skill and success in gaining our end:-"When he is gone his way, then he boasteth!" But of what does he "boast?" Does he not glory in his shame?-glory in what it were easy for any man even of the meanest modicum of intellect to do, if he could only satisfy his conscience so far as to say what he did not think; or could muster up hardihood enough to put upon the falsehood a face of sincerity?

* Schultens. And the principle of the verse has the very same force of application on the side of the seller; when he seeks to make a good bargain for himself by over-praising and over-valuing his article,-representing it as possessing qualities that do not belong to it, or real qualities in a greater degree than truth warrants;-and demanding for it, as its bond fide value, a higher price than he knows it to be really worth. It is evident, that in these two cases, the evil is the very same. It is the evil of violating truth for self interest, or for the credit of skill in bargain-making. The "boasting" is, in every case, "glorying in our shame." I apprehend that the same evil is committed, though less directly, by the common practice of concealing the known defects and faults of the article we sell. What is the great difference between the seller concealing faults which do exist, and the buyer alleging faults which do not exist? It will not do, in the estimate of strict integrity, to say-"He saw his article; he had full opportunity to inspect and examine it; he need not have taken it unless he chose." All true: but the plain and palpable fact still stands-you have taken a price for your article which you knew it was not worth, and which the purchaser, with your knowledge, would not have given. Is this honesty? Is this practical truth? Is this the spirit, or is it capable of being at all reconciled to the spirit of the golden rule? No, my brethren:-the divine principles of Christianity must not be made to bend to the customs of a market,-or to the loose and conventional morality which the buyers and sellers of this world may, in any case, choose to impose upon themselves. All must be daylight-nothing in the dark-nothing even in the dimness and twilight of dubious principle. The conscience must be kept clear without misgiving. How would you relish the thought, while you were chuckling over your success in getting so good a price for your article,-that the buyer on whom you had succeeded in imposing, should curse you for a swindler, and load your religion with revilings, and blaspheme the blessed name by which you are called?-or, if you have succeeded, as a buyer, in getting from the seller an article far below what you knew to be its real value,-by taking advantage, for example, of his exigency at the time for ready money compelling him to part with it,-that he should post you as a hard iron-hearted extortioner, that took advantage

of a man’s necessities to drive an iniquitous bargain?

O for more, amongst Christians, of sterling practical consistency! There may be a great deal of talk about sanctification, where, alas! there is sadly little of truly sanctified conduct. Some men seem as if they thought religion consisted in being able to talk well about the gospel mystery of sanctification; and they will go far deeper into it, and make much more mystery of it, than the Bible itself; for there, there is no mystery in the subject. But the great matter is-.practical sanctity of life:-and that, consisting, not in any regular routine of religious exercises, private or public, or even the unwonted multiplication of these; but in "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God." It will not do for a man to have prayers morning and evening in his family, while he makes little scruple of dishonesty and dirty trickery in his business through the day. Away with the miserable inconsistency! Better, far better, no prayers, than prayers of Which the devotion is belied by the conduct. An avowed infidel is a far less mischievous character than such a professor. Let every professing Christian be the same in the market that he is upon his knees; the same in his dealings with men, that he seems to be in his intercourse with God.

62-Pro_20:15-21

Proverbs 20:15-21

LECTURE LXII.

Proverbs 20:15-21.

"There is gold, and a multitude of rubies: but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel. Take his garment that is surety for a stranger; and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel. Every purpose is established by counsel; and with good advice make war. He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets; therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips. Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness. An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed."

It is evident that, in the first of these verses, it is intended to bring the two things mentioned into comparison. And the comparison may be considered as designed, first, in regard to abundance and scarcity. The idea is conveyed, of the one article being in plenty, and the other being a rarity. "There is gold and a multitude of rubies"-that is, there is no lack of these. "But the lips of knowledge,"-which, of course, presuppose and include the mind enlightened and the heart influenced by the knowledge which the lips impart,-are "a precious jewel." Some jewels are more common, some more rare; the rarest being the most precious and costly. Now such a jewel-a diamond of the purest water,-"a pearl of great price,"-are "the lips of knowledge," lips diffusing knowledge from a wise and understanding heart. The comparison is also designed in regard to the real intrinsic worth of the things mentioned,-their sterling value. "Knowledge" is an attribute of mind; and even in this view possesses a nature more excellent than mere external property,-of which the veriest fool, who has little if any mind at all, may chance at times to have the largest share. As mind ranks above matter, "knowledge" ranks above wealth; and as of all the descriptions of knowledge which mind can possess, that which has God for its object is, beyond comparison, the most valuable, the lips that communicate it are inestimably precious. They are precious in all seasons, under all circumstances, and in all the relationships of life. And there is a time (as some who now hear me are delightfully and soothingly feeling) when, above all others, "the lips of knowledge" are thus precious-when life itself is closing. The deathbed sayings of dying saints-O what "precious jewels" these are! It is not, indeed, on deathbed sayings that our hopes rest of the everlasting wellbeing of those we love. The nature and circumstances of their departure may be such as not to admit of them; and we look to the surer evidence of the previous consistent life,-the manifestations in it of the sincerity and the power of faith. But still, we desire and delight to have them. What could "gold and the multitude of rubies" do, to soothe the agitated and agonized spirit, in the season of bereavement and sorrow, when "the desire of our eyes has been taken away by God’s stroke?" But how full of comfort-true, rich, sterling comfort-when the afflicted heart can have recourse to the fondly-retentive memory, where, as in a cabinet, these gems of inestimable value are laid up, and take them down, and examine them over and over again, and

still with new and growing satisfaction!-Yes, the dying utterances of the "lips of knowledge" are jewels-on which survivors know not how to set a value! And, while peculiarly precious to relatives and friends, they are precious to all, as delightful proofs of the reality of religion,-of the divinity of the gospel,-affording a confirmation to our faith, and a cheering animation to our hope, in anticipating the time of our own final adieu to the present world, with all that endears it to our affections!

Verse Proverbs 20:16. "Take his garment that is surety for a stranger; and take a pledge of him for a strange woman."-The subject of suretiship has already been more than once before us.*1 The case here supposed is in the first place one of grievous imprudence. It is becoming surety for "a stranger;" a person of whom the man who "strikes hands" knows little or nothing, either as to his property or his character-whether he has the means of relieving the suretyship, or whether he has the honest intention;-any new acquaintance, who has accidentally fallen in his way, who chances to please him, and for whose company and conversation and manners he takes a sudden fancy. Any dealings with the man who acts thus involve the greatest risk. This is expressed in the language-" Take his garment that is surety for a stranger." The meaning is, lend such a man nothing without good security-the utmost that can be got, to his very garment. The strong terms are probably intended to convey the advice to have nothing whatever to do with a man of this description-to decline all dealings with him. This is the more likely, that the garment was the very last thing that, under the Jewish law, was allowed to be taken in pledge; and it was not permitted to be kept beyond the passing day.*2 *1 Proverbs 6:1-2; Proverbs 11:15; Proverbs 17:18. rr *2 See Exodus 22:26-27.

It is a case also of infatuated profligacy: "And take a pledge of him for a strange woman." Two reasons might be assigned for this,-a more general, and a more special:-first, because he is a profligate character; giving his time and his strength to vicious indulgence, and not, therefore, very likely to be steadily attentive to business, or very mindful of principle in the management of it;-exposed to temptation, to spend on his vices what ought to be reserved for payment of his debts, and not, consequently, safe to be trusted. The less you have to do with him the better. Then, secondly, because when a man has become the slave of this particular description of passions,-when he has fallen into the snare of the harlot,-when he has surrendered himself to the fascinations of female blandishment, there is hardly anything so foolish, and hardly anything so base, which the woman in whose toils he has been taken may not prevail upon him to do. To this, alas! experience, in all ages, and in all nations, bears most ample testimony.

Verse Proverbs 20:17. "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel." This is a very lively and pithy figure to express a very important sentiment. The sentiment is this:-"Property obtained by unjust means, how gratifying soever at the time the acquisition of it may be, will ultimately yield anything but satisfaction." Whence may this be supposed to arise? First, from conscience. Success in fraudulent schemes may for the time blind the man’s mind who is practising them, from being sufficiently sensible of the evil he is doing. It may infatuate him. It may lay his conscience asleep, and keep it slumbering. Thus for a while he may rejoice in his newly acquired possessions. But the hurry and eagerness of the pursuit subside; the novelty of acquisition wears off; the man has leisure for reflection. Then conscience begins its work of reproof. It arraigns him secretly, within the privacy of his own bosom, at its bar. It passes sentence on the means by which he has got what is giving him his pleasure; puts a sting

into the recollection of them. Thus his present enjoyment is embittered by memory. Memory is for ever summoning him anew before the tribunal of conscience, and reading new articles of indictment against him. Thus all the sweetness is extracted from his enjoyment. His bread is "eaten with bitter herbs;" or, to keep by the figure before us,-"his mouth is filled with gravel." Nothing could be more emphatically expressive of hitter disappointment, than the idea of a hungry man putting into his mouth, with an eager appetite, the bread that should relieve and satisfy his craving, and finding it turn to sand and gravel stones! A further cause is the absence of the blessing of God. God is righteous. He can regard with no complacency possessions which have been thus obtained. He curses them. And the variety is endless, of the ways in which He can make his hidden curse to be felt. He can, as we have been mentioning, make the inward monitor do its duty, and become the unrighteous man's secret tormentor. He can bring his frauds to light by means that are beyond the culprit's control, and which no efforts of his can possibly counteract; and thus cover him with infamy, and even deprive him of his ill-gotten gains, and bring him to poverty, by taking confidence and credit away from him. Or He can make his successful frauds and his ill-gotten gains the means of tempting him to further speculations, by which all comes to be lost that he had acquired. Or He can render him, to his ruin, the miserable mortified dupe of artifices still deeper than his own. In these and a hundred other ways, He can verify the proverb, and convert the "bread of deceit" into mouthfuls of gravel.* We shall take in connexion with the sentiment of this verse that in the twenty-first, "An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed."-As to this verse, it must be evident, that in the word "hastily" more is implied than is expressed. A man may get an estate, and a large one too, with all the abundance attendant upon it, by succession;-may thus come to it at once, yet with perfect integrity on his part. Nay, by sudden events, affecting the state of markets, a man may make a fortune with startling rapidity, and be chargeable with nothing inconsistent with the most conscientious principle. Or the sudden acquisition may be the consequence of some speculation of a perfectly honest and even prudent and altogether justifiable character, with which no one has any fair ground to find fault. But "hastily," here, is evidently meant to imply that some improper and unjustifiable means have been employed to expedite possession. A man, for instance, may, by violence, remove from the inheritance its present occupant, and thus make way, before the time, for himself; or, by some unrighteous means, he may supplant the immediate successor,-the one who comes between himself and the present occupant. Or, in the prosecution of business, there may be an over-eager "hasting to be rich,"-by oppressing and grinding the poor,-by defrauding the public revenue,-by raising false reports and employing other unfair means to affect the money-market,-the rate of exchange, or the value of particular descriptions of goods and property. "But in the end, it shall not be blessed." The possessor may appear happy; but there are no cases in which it would be more foolish for us to judge according to appearances. There may, many a time, be a great amount of secret misery, that is not visible to the eye of man. So much so, that it is very difficult for us to say, when a man is really happy in earthly things, and when he is not. There is often much of the semblance of happiness assumed in the intercourse of general society that covers a sad reality both of personal and domestic misery. The smile may be upon the lips, when the worm of secret remorse is gnawing at the heart. The face that is all glee in the public assemblies of fashion and gaiety, may be all gloom and fretfulness at the fireside; and the brow that is serene and unclouded in the parlour, may be depressed with melancholy or knitted with agony in the solitary chamber or the lonely walk.

* Comp. Jeremiah 17:11. And above all, there is a sense of the words-"in the end it shall not be blessed," that should make the heart of every unrighteous and selfish "hasten to be rich," "meditate terror." At the last-in the dying hour, and in that day when "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing,"-instead of blessing, it will bring the distress of remorseful anticipation, and the shame and curse and "everlasting contempt" in which all must end that is contrary to the will of the Just One. It is a simple but affecting statement-" "When he dieth he shall carry nothing away." He may even die in possession; but nothing can he carry one step beyond the confines of life,-nothing save remorse and despair; and these, when all else fails him, shall abide with him for ever. Present gain shall be future and eternal loss. In the former part of the next verse we have a general maxim of practical importance, and in the latter the application of it to a special case:-

1. The general maxim:-"Every purpose is established by counsel." It is a truth, both with regard to good counsel and to evil: for by good counsel evil purposes may be overturned, and by evil counsel purposes that are good. How often do wicked men consult together for establishing their evil devices, and the more effectually accomplishing their purposes and plans of mischief! So ought we to do, in regard to purposes and plans for good. The first inquiry should be, to ascertain fully that it is indeed good we are proposing to seek 3 and then, the better it is, the more solicitous should we be to adopt right and promising means for its attainment. This is the proper order, both for consideration in our own minds, and consultation with others:-first, the goodness of the end; then the goodness of the means:-and our anxiety for sound and wholesome counsel should be in proportion to the probable nat1u’e and magnitude of consequences from any projected plan of procedure. 2. We have a special application of the general maxim:-"With good advice make war." It must be obvious to you, that this is quite the opposite of an encouragement to a warlike spirit. It assumes, indeed, that war may be made; and even that there are cases in which it cannot be avoided. But the evident meaning is, that in no case should it be made rashly and inconsiderately;-but that, on the contrary, the utmost deliberation and the soundest advice are necessary ere it be resorted to. I shall make no attempt to paint war’s unnumbered horrors. It has written Aceldama and Golgotha on many a fair and flourishing region of our globe. I will not describe either the battle scene itself, or the battlefield when the battle itself is over,-the phrenzy of the one, or the woe of the other;-the frantic thirst for blood, the eagerness of effort to cleave heads and pierce hearts, and in every way wound and maim and kill, that rages during the conflict;-nor, when the conflict is done, the ghastly and frightful wounds, the maimed and mutilated bodies, the pains and groans and shrieks of the dying, and all the untold horrors of the field of carnage and blood. Such a field I can well believe to be a scene, of which none but those who have actually beheld it can form a conception equal to the truth. Nor will I pass from that scene to remind you of what some of us can look back upon with a sigh-of the multitudes of bereaved and weeping fathers and mothers, wives and children, brothers and sisters, and relatives of all degrees, which are the necessary consequence of every battle, whether by land or by sea. And when I have mentioned the expenditure of human life, I should be ashamed to notice after it, as unworthy of being brought into comparison, the expenditure of the national treasures, and the consequent burdening of the nation’s property, and income, and articles of consumption. War should be a word, needing only to be named, to fill every heart with indignant abhorrence; it is environed with so many of the very worst realities of misery. Alas! on this very account, that it should, at the same time, be surrounded with so many false glories-so many enticing honours! It requires to be so, to

induce any to engage in it. They are dazzled by its honours to tempt them to face its dangers.

I am by no means prepared to go so far as some have gone, by whom war, in every case, and under every form of it, whether defensive or offensive, is held unjustifiable. I would say, however-

1. None but wars that are strictly defensive can, on any principle of humanity or of justice, be vindicated; nor ought they even to be palliated. All wars that are undertaken for conquest,-for the extension of territory,-for the gratification of either kingly or national ambition,-or for any similar purposes, I can regard in no other light than as schemes of wholesale injustice, cruelty, oppression, and murder. All the blood that is shed in them is the blood of murder. It is on the nation's hands, and cries from the ground for vengeance. And those who undertake and prosecute such wars, instead of being complimented with the epithets of greatness, bedizzened with marks of honour, and their names handed down to posterity with the halo of glory around them, should be pilloried to the execrations of all succeeding ages. Such have all the men of mere conquest and ambition been-from Nimrod to Napoleon.

2. Even with regard to defensive wars,-wars which we may consider justifiable in their abstract principle,-it should be well ascertained, that they really are defensive. In my mind, the full extent of justifiable war is this-that when an attack is made, we be prepared to repel it. I am more than jealous of all wars that are undertaken on the surmise and suspicion of existing intentions,-of problematical possibilities or probabilities of what another nation is projecting and intending against us. This is hazardous ground for creatures to take, who "know not what a day may bring forth." We may thus, on the ground of mere apprehension, of what may have no existence save in our own minds, attack and wrong an unoffending nation, and waste both their lives and those of our own countrymen on the mere peradventure, the mere mayhap of our own too jealous sensitiveness. And then, when it really does bear the proper character of defensive war,-has everything possible been done, on our part, to shun it?-every practicable expedient tried, and tried in earnest, for preventing matters coming to the extremity? Have all such explanations and concessions been made as by possibility can be made? Has every becoming anxiety been shown to maintain or restore a good understanding, and avoid an evil, or rather an accumulation of evils, so dreadful? As I could not justify an individual who should take the life of another, so long as there existed the remotest possibility of effecting his own safety and escape otherwise; so neither could I undertake to vindicate even wars of defence, if proper means, every means at all accessible, had not been used to prevent their necessity; and their necessity, as measured-I am afraid to say by the nation's honour, for that is so very often nothing more than the nation's touchy and sensitive pride,-but by the nation's safety. Assuredly, in nineteen cases out of twenty, the best advice would be, not to make war at all:-and a truly wise and good Government will ever incline to this counsel and to this course. But alas! princes and governments have most generally been of another mind. They have too often stood upon every punctilio, and rather sought and. fomented occasions of quarrel, than done what they could to avoid and to remove them. They have looked for all concession from the one side; and have too frequently excited the very cause that has produced the hostile position, and then converted it into their apology! Would it could be said of our own country, that in these respects, either in times more recent or more remote, she was free of blame! Like Moab, alas! we have been "exceeding proud." And, while this has been a national sin, it has too often also been the sin of our princes. Warlike kings have had, as a matter of course, warlike courtiers. Whenever a monarch has said, "Shall I go up to Ramoth-Gilead to battle? or shall I

forbear?"-there have always been enow of Zedekiahs, with their lips of flattery and their symbolical horns of iron, to say, "Go and prosper!" and but few Micaiahs, men of honest and independent principle,-"faithful among the faithless"-to lift the voice of dissuasion. It ought to be "good advice" indeed, well-weighed, and seriously, deliberately taken, when peace or war is the alternative. The spirit of the verse is of course applicable to all private personal and domestic differences and quarrels. O be men of peace; and be peacemakers. This is the character befitting the followers of the "Prince of peace." All such should deprecate war, and should do all that lies in their power to diffuse and cherish the spirit of peace. In a nation like ours, where public opinion and feeling have such an amount of imperative influence, this is of special importance. For true indeed is the language of a Christian poet of our own- "War is a game, which, were their subjects wise, Kings should not play at." The taste for war is the most dreadful taste for the wellbeing of the world that can possibly prevail.

Verse Proverbs 20:19. "He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets; therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips." It seems to be the malignant talebearer that is, at least especially, meant in this verse. The first object is-to get secrets. This is the end of the flattery in the second clause of the verse. He "flattereth with his lips" to insinuate himself into the good graces of individuals and families, and to draw out their secrets from them, by working himself into intimate familiarity. And, to further his end, he, directly or indirectly, by sly insinuations or open abuse; as best suits particular cases, gratifies their feeling of dislike to their enemies. Then-having wormed out the wished-for secrets,-to those very enemies he is immediately off, to tell them all, and to pour into their ears flattery of themselves, and abuse of those he had just been flattering. He "goeth about" from one to another,-from family to family; retails his stories; makes his comments; and leaves his wounds to rankle and inflame in successive bosoms.

Mark the warning-"Meddle not with him." When you find a man disposed to flatter yourselves, and to ridicule and vilify the absent-suspect him; beware of him; make no confidential communications to him. He is aiming at some end of his own. The less you have to say to him, or to do with him, the better. The probability is, that in the very next place to which he goes, you yourself may be the subject of his ill-natured sarcasms, and the very persons he has to you been reviling, the subjects of his flattery.

Verse Proverbs 20:20. "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness."*1 To curse is to imprecate evil on any one. How monstrous the thought!-" cursing father or mother!" the authors of your being! the preservers and nourishers of your infancy and childhood!-the proper guardians of your boyhood and youth! Surely on the lip that utters a curse against his father must come the curse of the Father of all! By the law of Moses the offence was death;*2 and although the provisions of the criminal law of the Jews are not, in all their peculiarities, binding on other peoples,-yet, as given by God, they show us His mind as to the evil to which the punishment was annexed. The divine displeasure is here expressed by a remarkably significant figure:-"his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness." The figure of a "lamp" is sometimes used for a son-who preserves a man’s name or memory in the world, keeping it up to successive generations.*3 If we take the figure in this view of it, the meaning here will be, that the name and memory of such a son as is described shall be extinguished and forgotten,-as unworthy to be remembered. The punishment would thus correspond with the offence. The figure is also used in connexion with outward prosperity.*4 The meaning, in that case, will be-he shall not

prosper; the curse of God shall rest on him and on his substance, blasting his schemes, frustrating his hopes, and covering him with shame. Perhaps, as death was the punishment of the sin by the law,-the "lamp" may signify the lamp of life itself. God has doomed him to die: and if he repent not, not only shall the lamp of temporal life be quenched, but the lamp of life eternal shall be quenched in the blackness of darkness for ever!

*1 Proverbs 19:26. rr *2 Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9. rr *3 See 1 Kings 11:36; 1 Kings 15:4; Psalms 132:17. rr *4 Proverbs 13:9; Job 8:5-6. rr

63-Pro_20:22-30

Proverbs 20:22-30

LECTURE LXIII.

Proverbs 20:22-30.

"Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the Lord, and he shall save thee. Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good. Man’s goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way? It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry. A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them. The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly. Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upholden by mercy. The glory of young men is their strength;’ and the beauty of old men is the grey head. The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil; so do stripes the inward part of the belly." The first of these verses is one of those in which there has been imagined a difference,-and indeed one of the chief differences,-between the teaching of the Old Testament and that of the New. You will find very few persons who have not the idea in their minds that, under the ancient economy, the law of retaliation was allowed to be acted upon, to some extent, while, under the present, it is expressly repealed, in its principle and in its practice. It is only necessary to compare a few passages in the Old Testament and in the New, to show that this is an entire misapprehension. Look, for example, to Exodus 23:4-5; Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 17:13; Proverbs 24:29; and Romans 12:17-21. It is remarkable, that in this last passage the Apostle both quotes an Old Testament injunction, and enforces it by an Old Testament sentiment or divine assurance.*1 Surely this should be enough to satisfy us, that our Lord’s language on this subject*2 was not the laying down of a new law, but only the right interpretation of the old, in opposition to the corrupt glosses of those false teachers among the Jews who perverted the law, as false teachers among professing Christians have perverted the gospel. You must be satisfied, from the passages cited, that "Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy," never was the law of Moses. And with regard to the "eye for an eye and the tooth for a tooth," it formed a part of the judicial or criminal law of the land, of which the administration was committed to the magistrate; but it had been perverted into a toleration of private and personal resentment and retaliation. This interpretation, or misinterpretation, our Lord disowns; and even the strong terms He employs in doing so are to be understood, I apprehend, as expressing no more than what had always been the spirit and proper sense of the divine precepts. The extent to which his words should be interpreted according to the letter, is a point into which it is impossible for us to enter. Their absolutely literal acceptation is, in my opinion, demonstrably inadmissible. It is enough, to show this, to attend to one only of the commands. The injunction "give to every man that asketh of thee" if taken absolutely without restriction, forbids the exercise of all discretion on your part, and leaves you entirely at the discretion of such as may choose to present their demand. Whatever it be, you must grant it,-even to the half or to the whole of your property. If you say, "That is making the thing ridiculous," I grant it;-but it is the literal interpretation,

and no more: so that, in saying so, you say no more than that that interpretation is ridiculous: for whenever you introduce any qualification or restriction, you give up the principle of literality. You would bind yourselves, by its adoption, not only to incessant acts of indiscretion, but to many of injustice.

*1 For the former see Proverbs 25:21-22, and for the latter, Deuteronomy 32:35. rr *2 Matthew 5:32-45. But I am forgetting the verse before us. It is very true that retaliation is natural-that, in the terms of the poet, "revenge is sweet." And there are philosophers who, because they find it a principle in our nature, vindicate it, and affirm it right. But "they do err, not knowing the Scriptures," and not admitting the character there given of our nature as fallen and depraved. It cannot prove a thing to be right that it is natural, when the nature to which it is natural is a corrupt nature. It is true that when one man wrongs another he deserves punishment. But there is divine wisdom in not leaving the right of punishment in the hands of the party injured. There is more than-danger, there is next to a certainty, of its being inflicted in excess-no man being an impartial judge in his own cause. Excess is, in its turn, injury done. And thus the way is laid open to unceasing retaliation and interminable hostilities.

We are very readily tempted to think, that if we take injuries without retaliation, it will only encourage our enemy himself, or others, to repeat the wrong, and to use us the worse. And it is not to be denied that malignity has, at times, taken this advantage of unresenting meekness. If, in our experience, it were in any case to turn out so, we should suffer in the very best company,-in company with our Lord and Master himself. But, generally speaking, it is otherwise. A peaceful spirit is the safest spirit, and the spirit which is most likely to meet with a peaceful return,-disarming hostility, and softening resentment. The terms before quoted show this.*1 They are founded on the very principle of this tendency. At all events, our sole inquiry in all cases ought simply to be, "What saith the Scripture?"-What is God’s will? That it is our duty to do, leaving the result with Him. Such is the spirit of the verse under review. And it is in harmony with other parts of the divine word.*2 All suffering is for "righteousness’ sake," that is produced by our conscientious adherence to the rightly interpreted injunctions of divine authority.

*1 Romans 12:21. rr *2 Psalms 37:5-8; Psalms 37:34; 1 Peter 4:19; 1 Peter 3:13-14.

We have had the subject of next verse frequently before us, and dwell not upon it: only let it be kept steadily in view, and exert its intended influence:-"Divers weights are an abomination unto the Lord; and a false balance is not good."

Verse Proverbs 20:24. "Man’s goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" It is a truth, that God prescribes the path of duty; and a truth, connected with this, and arising out of it, that in order to our "understanding the way" in which we ought to go, we should consult God: consult Him in conscience, and in His word-the former being the natural intimation of His will,-the second the revealed; and consult Him also under the sought guidance of the Holy Spirit, as through the corruption of the heart, we are in danger of perverting the lessons both of nature and of revelation, and need the accompanying influences of that Spirit, to deliver us from all prejudice and prepossession, from every blinding and perverting passion and tendency. But true as this is, it does not appear to be the truth intended here. The reference is, apparently, not to the moral will of God, but to his superintending providence. The idea in the former clause of the verse is, that in a man’s course through life, every step is under divine control; everything ordered by a

supreme will,-a will to which all things in existence, every power and influence in creation,-are entirely subordinate and subservient*-the will of the Infinite.

* Daniel 4:35. And hence the import of the question, "How can a man understand his own way'?" seems to be-how can he form and carry forward his plans, with any assurance of success, or of things turning out in accordance with his wishes and designs? He cannot. Shortsighted and ever dependent, he is incapable of laying out his route through life with any degree whatever of confidence, so numberless and diversified are the circumstances by the operation of which his course may be intercepted, and the necessity of a change imposed. Who has not experienced this? Before we have advanced a few steps in the direction and for the destination we have fixed for ourselves, something or other occurs that arrests us, and obliges us to desist entirely from our purpose, or to alter and modify it, however reluctantly, to something widely different! We discover that " our goings are of the Lord," and that we can' not "understand our own way." And if not our own, how much less His! O how often are we made to feel the truth of the words-" My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts!" Isaiah 55:8-9. The latter part of this assurance He will, in the end, make apparent, to the admiring astonishment of His believing people. Yet, brethren, with the full conviction of this in our judgments, O how very hard is it to bring our hearts to any thing like cheerful acquiescence in some of the divine appointments by which our will has been thwarted! If we can get even so far as to say, "Thy will be done!" it is still with the sigh of a heavily-burdened spirit, and with the tear lingering in our eye. We "walk in darkness and have no light." We wonder why the Lord thus hedges up our own way, and appoints us another of His,-not at all to our mind. And when there is this difference between our way and God's, and a difficulty in seeing what is wrong in ours,-it is a strong trial of faith. But faith must have the victory. Wait but for a short while, and all will be plain. Had we the eyes of God, we should, in every case without exception, and without the hesitation of a moment, choose God's way. The "ways" of the wicked are abomination to the Lord; yet they too are under control. They retain all their freedom, and all their guilt; but in ten thousand modes, their baffled plans are made to forward His. Their every word and act He can render subservient to His honour , and often turns their shame to glory, while they are turning His glory to shame.

Verse Proverbs 20:25. "It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make inquiry." Under the Mosaic dispensation, there were various articles which, by the prescriptions of the law, were consecrated to God, or holy.

Such were the tithes, the first-fruits, the firstlings of the herd and of the flock. There was thus always a temptation to selfishness to appropriate a part of these to its own use. There were, at the same time, things voluntarily devoted-set apart to Jehovah as free-will offerings. It is to these more especially, in all probability, that Solomon here refers. To "devour that which was holy" was to make a meal for themselves of that which they had vowed to God,-vowed as an offering for His worship:-and the phrase clearly, in the principle and spirit of it, applies to the appropriation to themselves, in any way, of aught whatever that had thus been consecrated.* What, then, is meant by "after vows malting inquiry?" Evidently, making inquiry how. a vow may be eluded;-how, with anything like a clear conscience, the fulfilment of it may be shunned, and the consecrated thing withdrawn from God, and appropriated to self. A man, for example, might make a vow when in trouble and straits. He might then devote something of his substance solemnly to God on condition

of his recovery. He does recover. But with the cessation of his trouble, his religious impressions, which were the result only of temporary fear, cease too. He calls to mind his vow. He frets at himself for having made it; and he sets himself to find or to frame pretexts for not regarding it as obligatory,-for shaking himself free of it. That this is the kind of inquiry that is intended in the verse, is sufficiently evident from the parallelism of the one part of it with the other. It is clear, that the "snare" in the former part of the verse means the temptation, in order to "devouring that which is holy," to "make inquiry" after pretexts for getting rid of the vow by which it was made holy.

* Comp. Malachi 3:8-10. The words have frequently been most strangely and mischievously perverted. They have been made to mean, that, when a man had once vowed, whether the vow was right or wrong, or whatever might be his subsequent conscientious convictions concerning it, he must abide by it;-that in every case of vow, it was wrong even to think of "making inquiry" as to the rectitude of what had been vowed. For example, it used to be applied (happily, in the progress of free and enlightened thought, such application will not often be found now,) to what were termed ordination vows. By taking these, a man was understood as binding himself to maintain the same sentiments to the end of his life; and if he ever gave expression to any views inconsistent with those he had vowed solemnly to maintain and defend, he was charged with the sin of "after vows making inquiry!"-This, you will admit, was indeed "a snare,"-a snare to the conscience,-a snare to the soul. To take any such vow would be to bind one’s self to one or other of two things, of which it is not easy to say, they are both so bad, which is the worse;-either, first, to the cessation of all further inquiry after truth on the point which has been the subject of the vow,-which is neither more nor less than asserting, on that point, the claim to infallibility; or secondly, to hypocrisy and simulation, by the continued profession of the same thing, whatever change might actually have taken place in one’s opinions and belief. Such an understanding of the words is in opposition to the duty, incumbent on every man, of constant investigation, and of constant openness to conviction, freedom from prejudice, and readiness to relinquish error when shown to be error, and embrace truth when shown to be truth. Many a conscience has been snared, and snared long, in this way. It is well, when the snare is broken, and the conscience escapes. Vows are solemn promises or engagements, come under to God, generally accompanied with an oath or imprecation, formally expressed or tacitly understood, of some service to be performed, or some sacrifice to be offered, or some portion of worldly goods to be devoted to God, for religious purposes. Such vows it was duty to fulfil. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed," Ecclesiastes 5:4. The vow of a fool (like the sacrifice of the fool in the first verse) was a vow made without the heart-without intention and resolution to pay it. God "has no pleasure in such fools"-fools who think to impose upon Him by false promises, and insult Him with hypocritical mockery. What is vowed must be paid:-"Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay," (Ecclesiastes 5:5.) The reason of this is plain. The vow was not required: it was spontaneous: so that there was no sin in not making it; but there was sin in making and not paying it. The phrase, then, "after vows to make inquiry," is condemnatory of two evils. It condemns vowing rashly, without due previous consideration or inquiry. To make inquiry after a vow is not to make inquiry before it. It is clear that the proper place for inquiry is before the taking of the vow. It should precede, not follow. A man should examine his ground; think what he is doing; act with due deliberation. It further condemns what has already been mentioned-inquiring, after the vow has been made, how it may be evaded; and that, not from any conviction of the evil of the thing vowed,

but merely from a selfish unwillingness to fulfil it.-It is obvious, at the same time, that no vow, how solemnly soever taken, can ever render that morally right which is morally wrong;-can ever, that is, set aside the obligation of the divine law. That is an authority which must ever stand above the obligation of any vow. The first inquiry should have reference to this. If a man finds that he has vowed to do what the law of God forbids,-his guilt has lain in taking such a vow; but it never can be his duty to keep it. His promise to do wrong, can never cancel his previous obligation not to do it.

It is questionable, whether vows, properly so called, are consistent with the genius of the New Testament dispensation. At any rate, of such vows as were common under the Old, we have no recorded examples under the New. Resolutions to serve God we may, nay we must make; there is no getting on in the divine life and in the zealous promotion of the divine glory, without them. But the binding of the soul by particular bonds and oaths, whether verbal or written,-obligations superinduced upon those of the divine law,-have been "a snare" to many. Weak minds have often felt the obligation of their vow more stringent than that of the divine authority. We do, it is true, find Paul vowing; but his vow belonged not to the Christian dispensation, but to the Jewish, which had not finally " vanished away," and to which he continued for the time to conform. All the vows of celibacy, of pilgrimages, of pious gifts; all the vows supposed to be taken at baptism and the Lord’s supper according to the superstitious notions attached by many to these ordinances; all vows of personal, and national, and ecclesiastical covenanting; and all vows at ministerial ordination, (and it may be worth the while of some of our total-abstainers to consider, whether vows of abstinence, when taken under any pledge or form of a religious character, may not also be included,) appear to be alike destitute of New Testament warrant. But still, we have here the great general lesson of Fidelity To God.

Verse Proverbs 20:26. "A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them." There is here an allusion to the different modes of separating the grain from the husk or hull; by one or more of which the straw was at the same time cut.* The different methods were-the flail, the drag, the wain, the treading of oxen. It is to the third, that the allusion is here made. The wheel was armed with teeth.’ by means of which the cutting of the straw was effected at the same time with the separation of the grain. The idea intended by the figure seems to be that of severity of punishment,-and the separation of the wicked from society. Not, by any means, that excessive and indiscriminate severity of punishment is the most effective system for the prevention and suppression of crime. A wise king, acting on the principles of human nature, and the lessons of experience, will rather adopt the system of a well-adjusted graduation in the scale of punishments; according to which they are, on the principle of comparative lenity, proportioned to the nature and aggravations of various crimes, and regularly executed,-in preference to that which professes to hold the terrors of death over many crimes, but without the intention of uniform execution. The former system has been found the most effectual; and it is evidently the most accordant with all right principle and right feeling. There has happily been, of late years, a great and salutary mitigation in the sanguinary character of the criminal law of our own country. The consequence of that sanguinary character naturally was, that from unwillingness to prosecute, the unwillingness of witnesses to give unfavourable evidence, the unwillingness of juries to find a verdict of guilty, and the unwillingness of judges to condemn, and of the prince to allow the law to take its course, multitudes never came to trial; and of those who were tried many escaped conviction; and of such as were sentenced to die not one in twenty came to execution. All this encouraged rather than

repressed crime, by inspiring the hope of impunity, the expectations of most men being naturally sanguine and flattering in their own case.-The subject, however, is too extensive for general discussion.

* See Isaiah 28:28.

Let us only remember, that the duty of the king implies a corresponding duty on our part to give the government of the country all the countenance and support in our power in effecting the suppression of "wickedness," by all legal and constitutional means;-and still more, by all religious and moral means so to diffuse the influence of right principles as to lessen the task of government in the application of penal statutes;-to prevent the punishment of wickedness by preventing the practice of it.

Verse Proverbs 20:27. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly."-When God at first "made man of the dust of the earth," what would his corporeal structure have been, how admirably soever framed together, in all its beautiful proportions and intricate complexity, had not the breath of life been breathed into it, and had it not been associated with the dominion of mind! When man "became a living soul," there was more imparted to him than mere animal life,-even a rational thinking Spirit, conscious of its own existence, and exerting powers which made its existence apparent to others. "The spirit of man," means his understanding, reason, conscience; and is here designated "the candle of the Lord "-the lamp of Jehovah. God has lighted it in the human breast. It is His gift. He it is who, in this respect, has made us to differ from the animals of the inferior creation that are placed under our subjection. He hath made us "wiser than the beasts of the field, and hath given us more understanding than the fowls of the air." Of this lamp the use is here said to be-to "search all the inward parts of the belly."

We have formerly had occasion to notice that "the belly " is used to signify the invisible interior of man, and thus comprehends his whole mental constitution. We are so accustomed to the use of other parts of the animal frame for particular departments of the operations of mind, that we use the language often with hardly a thought of what is material. Thus we speak of the heart, when we mean the affections; of the bowels, when we mean the emotions of compassion or tenderness; of the spleen, when we mean capricious ill-nature. It is on a similar principle that, in a more general way, the Hebrews used "the belly" for all within:-and "searching the inward parts of the belly" means simply searching the Whole inner man. It examines narrowly all our inward principles, desires, and affections,-the motives by which we are influenced, our reflections on the past, our purposes and resolutions for the future. In the original constitution of our nature-in its "first estate,"-in the purity in which it came from the Creator’s forming hand, there was nothing to be discovered by all this "searching" but good. All was rectitude, loveliness, beauty, moral symmetry and perfection. Now alas! it is far otherwise. It is only when "the lamp" is not used, or used with unfaithful and superficial carelessness, that evil remains undetected. The more closely we carry the light into the hidden chambers of the heart, the greater will be the variety and amount we shall discover of what ought not to be there. It is an extraordinary conception which some persons have had of self-examination, when they have looked upon it with jealousy and dread, and been apprehensive of its exercise in themselves, and of urging it upon others, as only calculated to encourage self-righteousness. One cannot but suspect that they who think thus must themselves be the subjects of no small portion of the spirit of self-righteousness, when they fancy, that by too

closely scrutinizing their hearts and lives, they would find only what was fitted to cherish it! Surely every converted man must be sensible, that the more faithfully he uses the "lamp of the Lord" in "searching his inward parts," the deeper will become his self-abasement. The more he will know of himself:-and if the more he knows of himself, the more he thinks of himself-that is, if his self-examination puff him up with selfrighteous pride, we may be sure the process has been conducted on a wrong principle. With every genuine child of God the exercise will only serve to-Paul, we should "exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."

"Lay him low, and keep him there."

It is too true, that the dictates of conscience, like the operations of all the other powers and faculties of the mind, have become perverted by sin. Its decisions are influenced by corrupt inclinations and passions. It is thus too often a bribed witness, giving false testimony; a corrupted judge, pronouncing partial and erroneous decisions and verdicts. Yet, in such cases, the decisions are frequently not those of conscience at all. There is many a time, at the very moment when they are given, a secret consciousness of their being wrong:-so that as regards the real dictates of the inward monitor there is probably a more general harmony among the various tribes and classes of mankind, than at first glance might appear.

It is of immense consequence, that we keep this "lamp " of reason and conscience duly trimmed, and burning clearly;-and that we be duly faithful in the use of it; for what is the worth of a light if it be not applied to use, for the ends it is designed to answer? We should be ever using it; carrying it into the most secret recesses of our souls, detecting and rectifying all that is wrong,-cleaning out every corner of defilement,-keeping all in due order. It is thus that, like Paul, we should "exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." The ungodly follow the very opposite course. They do all in their power to dim the lamp. Trimming and supplying it with oil, is one of the last things they ever think of. If it will burn, they try to "put it under a bushel." They do not like to be disturbed by it. What says our Lord?-he who "knew what was in man?"-"Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." And this holds true with regard to every light,-with regard to "whatsoever doth make manifest" which is the apostle’s definition of light. It is equally true of the light of conscience, and of the light of revelation.

Verse Proverbs 20:28. "Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upholden by mercy." This of course is to be understood as expressing what ought to be. It is the character of the good prince. Well had it been for the world, had the description been true of all rulers.-how different had been the character of the history of nations!-The union of mercy and truth is perfect in the government of God;-and in the mediatorial government of the Lord Jesus Christ.* The union of both is necessary. Mercy without truth, or faithful principle, would be undiscriminating lenity-a pernicious facility of disposition; and truth without mercy,-the stern and rigid exercise of justice untempered by clemency,-would be unlovely and repulsive, and as injurious in the one extreme as the former in the other. It has been said, "A God all mercy, is a God unjust." The same is, in its measure, true, of all inferior rulers. "A king all mercy, is a king unjust."

* Psalms 85:10. The verse before us may be compared with Proverbs 16:12. "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness." The sentiment of

each is alike true. No throne can stand firmly that is not based alike on "righteousness" and "mercy." The mercy must be righteous mercy; the righteousness, merciful righteousness:-justice must be attempered by clemency; clemency must be restrained by justice. Every prince who desires to have the character of a Father of his people, must be merciful. What would a father be without mercy? But, at the same time, a father requires to be firm and impartial. Parental authority, that yields to every impulse of feeling, and is incapable of steadfast and determined discipline, is as injurious as the other. The throne of a tyrant may be maintained in temporary stability by the force of terror, by the dread of civil or military execution. He may surround his throne with the myrmidons of his power. He may prolong his reign by fear. But after all, his is power that hangs upon a breath. All tremble to give expression to the feeling which yet universally prevails-the feeling of discontent-of alienation-of rebellion:-but a word once uttered is responded to from every corner of the land; the spell is broken; every eye flashes the long-suppressed resentment; every lip quivers in giving vent to the pent-up murmurings; man, woman, and child, are on the alert; hands are joined; conspiracies are formed; weapons are brandished; the tyrant is hurled from his throne. O! how different when the throne has its foundation in the affections of its happy subjects! That is its best and surest establishment. When the prince is true to his word; redeeming his pledges; fulfilling his engagements; and "doing nothing by partiality;"-when, instead of regarding and treating with lightness and neglect the sufferings of his subjects, when evil times come over them, he discovers the spirit of sympathy, and does what lies in his power for their help; promoting such measures as have a tendency to relieve them, and to restore them to independence and comfort, to peace, and plenty.

Verse Proverbs 20:29. "The glory of young men is their strength; and the beauty of old men is the grey head." Each of the clauses of this verse requires to be taken with a qualification. On either side, "the glory may be turned into shame." The vigour of youth may be prostituted; it may be expended in oppression, intimidation, and violence, in vice and licentiousness, in cruelty, and crime. O! it is sad indeed when the energies of body and mind are thus perverted and abused, instead of being consecrated to God and to virtue! And, if possible, sadder is the melancholy spectacle still, of old age, with its crown of grey hairs, cleaving fast to the world, and spending the feeble remnants of its declining strength in the service of sinful pleasure.-Ah! then, there is neither glory in the vigour of youth, nor beauty in the hoary head. All depends on association. Young men may glory in their strength;-they may emulate each other in feats of physical power, and exult in the prize of successful competition:-but when moral and spiritual glory is wanting, of what worth is mere muscle-mere brute force? If that strength is given to vice, it becomes, not the youth’s honour, but his disgrace, in the eyes of all the truly wise. And old men may glory in their age. When they come to surpass by many years those who set out with them in the journey of life; when "by reason of" constitutional "strength," they have reached the "fourscore years," or gone considerably beyond even this ultimate limit,-they are apt to be vain of it; to repeat it often; to dwell upon it as their distinction: but here too, the glory is no glory, unless there be corresponding character,-unless there be growing meetness for that eternal world to the verge of which the old man has come. Instead of attractive beauty and loveliness, there are few things more affectingly and distressingly repulsive than dissolute and irreligious old age. We do naturally admire the comeliness, and the manly port, and the muscular energy, and the well-proportioned symmetry, of the youthful form; and we do naturally look with affectionate veneration on the whitening locks of reverend age. But our sentiments and feelings entirely change, and experience a painful revulsion,

when we learn that the youth whose external appearance has charmed our eye, is unnatural to his parents and licentiously dissolute,-and that the old man whose grey hairs drew our reverential love has only ceased to be practically dissolute from the cessation of power-that his heart is as estranged as ever from all that is good, that the hoary head is not in the way of righteousness, and that he is dying as he lived, in infidel unsubmissiveness to God.

Let us see to it, my friends, that we consecrate to Him the peculiar glories of our frame in the successive periods of life;-that we inscribe "holiness unto the Lord" on the strength of youth, and on the experience and the influence of age. It is indeed lovely to see the full energies of youth early consecrated to God, and put forth in His service; that service faithfully maintained through a long life; and then that life, when venerable in the hoariness of years, closing with the words of the old and devout Simeon-" Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;"-while that Lord pronounces the approving welcome-"Well done, good and faithful servant!" and bestows the final and full reward. O my beloved young friends, seek ye, with your whole hearts, this glory of youth, this beauty and reverence of age.

Verse Proverbs 20:30. "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil; so do stripes the inward parts of the belly." It is not easy to attach a definite meaning to these words. Suppose, with some, the blueness of a wound to be a symptom of its healing-what comparison can there be between a mere symptom or indication of healing and the severity of chastisement or discipline? Suppose, with others, the blueness or lividness of the wound to be the effect or mark of its severity; then, properly speaking, there can hardly be a comparison between the effects, whatever they are conceived to be, of severe wounds and severe stripes, they are so nearly one and the same thing. I know not indeed how the original word came to be rendered "blueness." The one word as well as the other is given in lexicons as signifying, among other meanings, a wound. But "the wounds of a wound" would of course be inadmissible. The following translation has been given by one critic of eminence-"The bruises, or contusions, of a blow are a cleanser to the wicked man; and stripes cleanse the inward parts of the belly." But this is liable to the same objection with the last mentioned view; namely, that the two things in the comparison are too nearly the same:-for what difference is there between the contusions of a blow cleansing the wicked, and "stripes cleansing the inward parts of the belly?" The idea in either case is almost if not altogether identical. It is not often that I propose alterations on our own translation. I am far from approving of the freedom and frequency with which some alter renderings;-oftener for the worse than for the better.* In the present instance, however, I venture to suggest the following, as probably giving the true spirit of the comparison:-" Surely the compressions of a wound cleanse away evil; and so do stripes the inward parts of the belly." This is in harmony with the radical meaning of the term; being, etymologically, from the verb which denotes to join or couple together; and at the same time it yields an appropriate sense. The compressions of a wound are necessary for cleansing out of it the purulent and peccant humour, which would prevent its healing;-they are, at the same time, in many cases, exceedingly painful, and would only be endured or inflicted from necessity. And as they thus clean the wound, and promote its healing, so in a moral sense, does the severity of discipline affect with salutary and cleansing influence, the condition of the inner man. This is the very design of the rod,-the parental rod: "Polly is bound up in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." And it is the gracious design of all God’s corrections. He never uses the rod,-never inflicts any stroke of discipline,-not a single stripe,-save for the kind

purpose of benefiting the soul,-of repressing evil and confirming and augmenting good. The design of all His afflictive visitations is "TO TAKE AWAY SIN."

* Stuart renders, "Wounding stripes are the remedy of the base, and stripes of the inner part of the body;" and explains-"The bad man’s remedial applications are stripes over the whole person, so severe that they penetrate deep into the body." Here any thing like antithesis is gone, and the two clauses of the verse are counterparts of each other.

64-Pro_21:1-8

Proverbs 21:1-8

LECTURE LXIV.

Proverbs 21:1-8.

"The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin. The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want. The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death. The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment. The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right." In the first of these verses some suppose there is an allusion to a gardener, directing the rills of water through the different parts of his grounds; and that a comparison is intended between the ease with which the gardener does this, and the ease and certainty with which God superintends human volitions and purposes, so as to make all subservient to the attainment of His own ends. But the comparison appears, in both its parts, to relate directly to God. The king’s heart is represented as "in the hand"-that is, in the power, and under the control-of Jehovah, as completely as are "the rivers of water."* And so are all "hearts"-all the purposes and determinations of men. This, I repeat, is one of those truths to which we are, a priori, constrained to assent. "Whatever may be the difficulties with which, in some respects, the subject is environed, we perceive, with a kind of intuition, and admit without an instant’s hesitation, that it must be so. The certainty of the divine counsels requires it. The regular administration of the government of the world requires it. Every view we can take of the divine glory requires it. Never can it be that the will of man should frustrate the will of God-the thoughts of the creature cross and interfere with those of the Creator. Human counsels may thwart human counsels; but it is the divine prerogative, amidst all the incessantly changing and conflicting volitions and actions of the millions of the world’s population, to say-"My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

* Comp. Proverbs 16:1; Proverbs 16:9; Proverbs 20:24. And while of this we affirm that it must be so, there is another thing of which, with equal confidence, we affirm the same,-namely, that men, in their volitions and actions, must be free, and, as free, must be accountable; the freedom being necessary to the accountableness. That men are invariably influenced by motives, no more affects the reality of their freedom, than God’s having reasons for every step of His procedure affects His. Every man is conscious of willing and acting freely. Both the portions must be alike true, whether we be able clearly to explain the principle of harmony between them, or not. Yet the principle, to a certain extent, is sufficiently intelligible. A man of uncommon penetration,-supposing him to know the peculiarities of any character, the circumstances in which its possessor is placed, and the manner in which the circumstances are calculated to affect his characteristic peculiarities,-would be able to say, with a proportional degree of confidence, how he would act, what course he would

pursue, when under the influence of the given circumstances. Yet his knowledge and penetration would not, in the remotest degree, affect the freedom of him whose conduct he predicted. We have only to imagine this acquaintance with circumstances, with characters, and with the influence of the one upon the other, extended to infinitude and infallibility, and we have some notion of the way in which, by the control of circumstances, God can control volitions; and that, without at all interfering with liberty and accountableness. This, however, is still, and can never cease to be, one of "the deep things of God." "The Lord reigneth," says the Psalmist, "let the earth rejoice!" We have cause for joy in the assurance here given ns, that those members of our race, who, from their eminence and power, exert the greatest amount of influence over the condition of the world, are, as completely as the meanest, under the superintendence and control of the Supreme; so that even "kings," be the extent of their dominion and the absoluteness of their power what it may, can never go beyond His permission. Let the conviction of this great truth, in all its comprehensiveness, preserve our minds from the agitating fears and apprehensions which might arise from the plans and avowed purposes of the monarchs of the earth,-as affecting the interests of our country, of the church, and of the world. All will be overruled for ends in harmony with divine wisdom and mercy. "HAVE FAITH IN GOD."

Verse Proverbs 21:2. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord pondereth the hearts." There may be a connexion between this and the former verse. It is not by the actual results of human actions,-results which God, by his overruling providence, may be pleased to bring out of them,-but by their principles and motives in the doing of them, that the agents will be tried. This will be the test; and it will ever be a most satisfactory, though deeply mysterious exemplification of the truth, that it was by an act the most heinous in the entire annals of mankind, that the redemption of the world was effected. The design of the proverb is,-that men, remembering this, may be jealous of themselves, and not take the rectitude of their way too easily for granted,-but examine their hearts,-search their motives, as in God’s sight and in prospect of that day when "He will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing." A man’s WAY is right in the eye of God just in proportion as his HEART is right.

Verse Proverbs 21:3. "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." This is a most important sentiment, and one frequently to be found in the Old Testament. Look at a few examples:-1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:11-15; Isaiah 66:3-4; Jeremiah 7:21-23; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8. Such passages are in full harmony with the sentiment so distinctly sanctioned by the approbation of Christ, "There is one God, and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices," Mark 12:33. It would be an obvious misunderstanding and abuse of such expressions, were they to be interpreted as setting aside sacrifice under the former dispensation, or even making light of it, as a thing about which Jehovah was indifferent, and which He could allow to be neglected with impunity. The sacrifices were of divine institution. The cases were specified in which they were required to be offered; and all their varieties were prescribed. It was duty, therefore, scrupulously to adhere to divine injunction. The language is comparative. There was a danger among the Jewish people of being satisfied with a strict and punctilious performance of every part of the outward ceremonial of worship, and of making a kind of compromise in this way for the neglect of moral duties, or the practice of what was morally wrong. This propensity, which existed all along, evinced itself in its full strength in our

blessed Lord’s time; and He sets the principle of the thing in its obviously correct position, in reprimanding those by whom it was most culpably exemplified,-"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone," Matthew 23:23. "Judgment, mercy, and fidelity" were the "weightier matters of the law." They were, therefore, to be first regarded. If nothing could set them aside; nothing be a compensation for their omission. Might the others, then, be disregarded? By no means:-not even the smallest of them,-the tithing of garden herbs. Are Christ’s words words of contempt and ridicule at their attending to matters of such indifference,-things that might be done or not done at their pleasure? No verily. These things, though not first, had yet their own place; and no one could be too rigidly scrupulous in attending to them, however minute, as parts of the divine will. The fault of those reproved lay, not in their doing these, but in their neglecting to do the more important and necessary:-"These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." My brethren, the danger is not at an end. There might be a larger amount of it under an economy which was so characteristically one of external and typical rites; and less under a dispensation of which the leading character, contrasting it with the former, is its spirituality. But still there are outward observances in religion,-all the externalities of divine institutions and worship. Let us, then, be upon our guard. Let us not forget the primary necessity, if we would maintain a course well-pleasing to God, of the moral virtues, All that is said of their superiority in His sight to "sacrifice," is equally true of whatever is external. To the heart and the life He still looks:-and the professing Christian who trusts in his baptism,-in his punctual presence in the house of God,-in his regular attendance on the table of the Lord,-is as far wrong in principle, as the Jew was, who trusted in his burnt-offerings and sacrifices, his ceremonial cleansings, his tithes and fastings,-while the paramount obligations of practical godliness were neglected by the one and are neglected by the other. They are in the same condemnation. "Sacrifices" of old were instituted for special purposes. They were arbitrary, ceremonial, typical, temporary; but "justice and judgment" belonged to the eternal rule of right. They had their origin and prototype in the moral nature of God. They were immutable in their obligation, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." "Sacrifices" were instituted for a single people; "justice and judgment" belong to mankind, and are alike obligatory on the whole race, in every nation under heaven. "Sacrifices" derived all their value from that which they prefigured, and from the worshipper’s state of heart in presenting them,-from. what they signified in themselves and what they indicated in the offerer;-"justice and judgment" have, in their own nature, an intrinsic excellence, and, forming part of the image of God, are the objects of His direct complacency and delight. The law of "sacrifice" was set aside when the system to which it belonged, "decayed, waxed old, and vanished away;" but the law of "justice and judgment" is not by the gospel "made void but established." The very end of Christ’s mediatorial work was to vindicate eternal righteousness-the righteousness of the divine character-in the extension of mercy to man; and at the same time to give glory and stability to that law which is "holy, and just, and good," and furnish new and mightily constraining motives of obedience to all its precepts.

There is One Sacrifice, my hearers, on which the God of the Bible teaches, invites, encourages, commands you to rest your hopes of pardon and acceptance with Him,-THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST;-the all-atoning blood of the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." In this is your only security; and it is an equal security for All. God’s first commandment to you, as

sinners, is to renounce self, and to trust there,-in that One Offering from their reference to which all previous offerings derived their wisdom and their worth;-and then, your "doing justice and judgment" must be the proof of your interest in that one offering, and of your heart having been turned to God by the faith of it.*

* Romans 8:1.

Verse Proverbs 21:4. "An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin."-The first of these is the natural expression or indication of the second; the "high look," or, as on the margin and in the Hebrew, "haughtiness of eyes," the effect and expression of the "proud heart." With regard to these there is no difficulty. That pride, and all the expressions and indications of pride, are hateful to God, is a sentiment often repeated.* But how comes in "the plowing of the wicked" in this connexion?-I would answer, that even retaining the translation, it is not incapable of an appropriate sense. The ordinary occupations of the wicked are gone about and pursued with "a high look and a proud heart;" not with the lowly spirit of dependence and prayer, but with the spirit of independent self-sufficiency and prayerless haughtiness. The things done, how good and useful soever in themselves, may be vitiated by the spirit in which they are done. Right in themselves, they may be wrong in their principle. And this view of the case might be connected with the previous verse. "The wicked" may bring his "sacrifice;" but if he brings it with "a high look and a proud heart,"-nothing can be more unacceptable in the eyes of that God to whom he offers it. Thus both his religious and his ordinary acts are marred by his state of mind. There is "sin" in them all. The sentiment has an apt illustration in the case of Cain. He was "a tiller of the ground." He brought his offering to God: but it was not the offering of a sinner; it was not the type of atonement. The absence of this arose from his not being humbled before God as a sinner should be. And what he did bring, he brought with a "high look and a proud heart." Thus "the plowing" of this first "tiller of the ground" was "sin," and his offering too. So, on the same account, is that of every wicked man.

* See Proverbs 6:16-17, &c.

You will observe, however, that the rendering on the margin is-"the light of the wicked." Now the marginal renderings have precisely the same authority with those in the text: and they are, not unfrequently, much to be preferred. I am satisfied this is the case in the present instance. The word for a light or lamp, and the word for a plough and ploughing, are, in the original, like each other; but I am not aware of any instance in which the word, when it signifies ploughing, occurs in precisely the same form as here. Moreover, in the Septuagint Greek, the Latin Vulgate, and the Genevese French, * it is, in this occurrence, rendered as in our English margin; and the rendering has the sanction of most eminent critics and commentators. A light, or lamp, is often put as the symbol of prosperity. The verse is remarkably laconic-" Loftiness of eyes, pride of heart, the light of the wicked, sin." The meaning seems to be, that in the prosperity of the wicked,-his light, his joy,-" there is sin." There is sin in it, because there is self in it-no humble recognition of God. He has himself kindled his own " lamp 3" has himself supplied the oil to it; has himself trimmed it; has himself sheltered it; has himself kept it burning. All is self. He walks in its light, and exults in it, with "a high look and a proud heart." The higher he rises in prosperity, the more are " his eyelids lifted up." The clearer the light of his "lamp," ' the more self-sufficient is his vanity, and the more entirely forgetful is he of God. Thus there is "sin" pervading and characterizing all, and rendering all

unacceptable in the sight of Him who PONDERETH THE HEART.

* Also in the German of Luther.

Verse Proverbs 21:5. "The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want." How is the "hasty" man distinguished from the "diligent" man? Is not promptitude in action a necessary associate of diligence? The answer is, that the "hasty" man does not mean the prompt and ready man, but the rash and fickle man-the inconsiderate and changeable man,-the man who acts without forethought, and stops without afterthought. Observe, then-

1. Diligence, while it is opposed to laziness, is opposed also to rashness-to premature and inconsiderate haste. The diligent man first plans, and then acts. He proceeds thoughtfully and systematically. Diligence can effect little, unless accompanied with careful forethought; nothing worth while, and nothing permanent. The "hasty," who act without consideration, who engage in rash projects, who are eager and sanguine in catching at every new thing, and in anticipating great results from little exertion,-can never thrive. Their hastily-conceived and ill-matured projects, are only the preludes to successive failures, disappointments, and ruin. And then

2. Diligence means steady perseverance in execution. What avails any plan, how well and how maturely soever concerted, if it be not prosecuted with steadfast resolution? Neither "plenteousness," nor any truly good and valuable result, can reasonably be expected without this. The projects of the "hasty," who, while they begin in rashness, are easily disconcerted and prone to change, are never worked out to their perfection. But those of the attentive, plodding, persevering man, who begins in earnest, and goes on to the end in earnest, prepared for difficulties and impressed with the truth that nothing is to be attained without labour,-are the projects that promise to produce, and generally do produce, a favourable result.

Verse Proverbs 21:6. "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death." Diligence is a right road to "plenteousness:" here is a wrong-the "lying tongue;" on which rests the curse of God. And forget not what the " lying tongue " includes-that he is chargeable with the evil who pretends, in any way, to be what he is not, to have what he has not, not to have what he has, to have said what he has not said, or to have done what he has not done, or not to have said and done what he has said and done; who tries to gain an end by any word, or act, or look, or even by silence and concealment designed to convey a false impression-by any means whatever not in harmony with honest truth,-with "simplicity and godly sincerity." This, says Solomon, "is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death." It is a "vanity;" inasmuch as it involves both folly and sin:-the folly being made evident in ultimate detection, exposure, shame, and loss,-loss of character, loss of confidence, and many a time loss of even what the falsehood had acquired. It is "tossed to and fro." Men learn it from one another. The man who has been imposed upon retaliates; he has no satisfaction until he has succeeded in duping him by whom he has himself been taken in,-in practising on him an equal or a better trick. It is practised with little thought,-with the vanity of a light and inconsiderate mind, and laughed at, in many instances, when it proves successful, instead of engendering remorse. Success produces a hundred imitators: and the cheats and the dupes are successively reversed,-the dupe becoming in his turn the cheat, and the cheat the dupe. And what is the final issue? They who follow such courses may try to make light of the evil; but they are "seeking death;"-acting as if bent on their own ruin-a ruin which shall

inevitably come.*

* Stuart renders the verse-though "not confidently, for the passage is obscure"-"By a lying tongue is there a winning of treasures; a fleeting breath are they who seek death;" meaning-"they who use a lying tongue in order to acquire riches are such as seek their own death, for they shall be as a fleeting breath." This is certainly not so expressive as the rendering of our English version. Luther gives a still different rendering.

Verse Proverbs 21:7. "The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them; because they refuse to do judgment." This verse is obviously and closely connected, not in position merely but in sentiment, with the sixth. The sixth relates to the "getting of treasures" by deceit, this to "the getting of treasures" by violence. The one speaks of lies, the other of robbery.

"The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them." It does so, when detected by men, and brought under legal cognizance. They lose what they have got, and are punished besides. And then-" what shall they do when God riseth up?" The just Judge will convict and cast them out. They shall be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." Why?-"because they refuse to do judgment." This is what in the third verse is represented as "acceptable to the Lord." But they "refuse." This supposes them commanded and warned. They are, both by the dictates of conscience, and by the authority of God’s word,-and in many cases too, by His providence. They resist every admonition; and thus bring their blood upon their own heads.* * See Proverbs 1:18-19; Proverbs 1:24-31.

Verse Proverbs 21:8. "The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right." Between this verse and the two preceding there is an equally manifest connexion. The contrast appears somewhat singular-between "the way of man" and the "work of the pure" Yet the language is framed on the same principle with that of the apostle, when he says, "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" 1 Corinthians 3:3. The phrase "walk as men" is on the margin, "walk according to man." The reference, in both cases, is to the natural and generic character of man as distinguished from that of the regenerate. "The way of man" is the way which he is naturally disposed to choose and to follow. It is "strange "-the way of an alien, of one estranged from God, and from holiness. It is "froward "-the way of self-will and rebellious insubordination.

Who, then, are "the pure?" The answer is-those who have been "renewed in the spirit of their minds;" in whom the divine promise has been verified. "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." All real purity in man is the effect of the word and Spirit of God. It is by this he is " washed and sanctified." So it has been from the beginning; so it must be to the end.*

* John 3:3-10. And what is the proof of inward purification?-"His work is right." Here is the test. Where there is purity in the fountain, there will be purity in the streams; and from the streams we judge of the fountain.-" His work is right." This relates to a standard. That standard is the character and the law of God. All is right there; and nothing is right in man that does not harmonize, in principle and act, with the revealed will of God. RECTITUDE IS CONFORMITY TO THAT WILL.

65-Pro_21:9-13

Proverbs 21:9-13

LECTURE LXV.

Proverbs 21:9-13.

"It is better to dwell in a comer of the house-top, than with a brawling woman in a wide house. The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes. When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise; and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge. The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness. Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard."

God said, when he had created Adam-"It is not good that the man should be alone." In the first of these verses, Solomon affirms that there are cases in which it is good for the man to be alone. These are cases in which the gracious design of a kind and benevolent God is counteracted by the evil passions which, through sin, became the heritage of our fallen nature. In eastern countries, as you are aware, the roofs of the houses were flat; and when solitude and quiet were specially courted,-as for meditation and prayer, for example,-the "house-top " was not seldom the resort. To "dwell," however, on the "house-top," and in "a corner of the house-top," could be no very comfortable residence, especially at particular seasons of variable weather. But the spirit of the verse is-anything rather than the evil complained of; any place, rather than within the range of fretfulness, contention, and clamour. The wife that answers to the description before us, violates at once the precepts of God’s law and the spirit of His gospel, is a plague, where she ought to be a pleasure; a curse, where she ought to be a blessing;-embittering the fountains of enjoyment, where she ought to sweeten the springs of Woe; converting into a scene of unceasing vexation and misery, what ought to be a concentration of the richest delights of earth; throwing venomous and hissing snakes into the circle of love and peace and concord, of fond hearts, and kind lips, and beaming eyes, and making her wretched husband long to find a speedy escape from that which ought to be the repose of his toils, the solace of his cares, the balm of his sorrows, the refreshment, the strength, and the joy of his heart! Such as know by experience the wretchedness described, will sympathise, through bitter fellow-feeling, with others who endure it; and they, on the contrary, who know the exquisite sweets of that domestic intercourse over which love presides, will pity from the bottom of their hearts the hapless victims of this most fearful scourge of social life. But let us deal fairly. Solomon, I have formerly had occasion to remark, made a most unjust estimate of the female character. The experience from which, doubtless, he here speaks, was an experience greatly the result of his own folly and sin. His crowded seraglio was not’ the place for either finding, cherishing, or enjoying the real excellencies of woman. I am fully persuaded, that both the average of general character, and of connubial affection and faithfulness, are greatly on the female side.-A vast deal has been said, and not a little sung, about the miseries of the matrimonial alliance. But of nine-tenths of it what is the origin? Is it not lightness and perverseness

in the choice of a partner,-in the formation of the union? Is it not, in innumerable instances, the case, that the most intimate, sacred, indissoluble of all connexions is formed with a levity and infatuation, that have hardly a parallel in any other human negotiations! Do we not see men many a time bestowing far more consideration on the qualities of a horse or a cow before they will venture to purchase, than on the qualities of a woman before they will venture to marry?-the qualities of an inseparable companion for life? How, in such cases, is happiness to be looked for?-when men, ay and women too, act as if they not only said in jest but held in earnest, that the whole matter was no better than a lottery?-The man, moreover, who, regardless of the qualities of mind and heart, marries for mere personal appearance,-and still more and still worse, the man who looks only to the purse, and who thus prostitutes the finest and tenderest feelings of our nature, and vulgarizes the first and most endearing of all relations to a low, pitiful, sordid computation of pounds, shillings, and pence,-is not to be pitied, if in his fair or his wealthy spouse he find a termagant, and by bitter experience be taught the meaning and the truth of the verse before us; fleeing to the "house-top," and there sighing out his wishes that he could resign beauty and wealth and all, to be free of the scourge of the tongue!

Verse Proverbs 21:10. "The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes." "Desireth evil!" What an amount of malignity do these words express! For the meaning does not seem to be that the wicked man desires the sin to which his corruption is prone. The latter clause of the verse leads us to interpret "evil" as meaning evil to his neighbour: the desire of which may spring from any of the various passions predominating in the bosom of " the wicked"-(all concentrated and summed up in selfishness)-avarice, ambition, lust, revenge. When any one of these predominates, or a combination of them sways the despotism of his heart,-"his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes." Whenever "his neighbour" stands at all in the way of his own gratification,-of the acquisition of any object on which he has set his heart,-no consideration of his interest will be allowed for a moment to interpose an obstacle to its prosecution and attainment. Self is his idol; Selfishness his grand principle and impulse. He views "his neighbour" in no other light than as, on the one hand, the means of thwarting, or, on the other, the instrument of promoting his own ends. Can he gain any thing by him? he will flatter and cajole him, and do everything to win his favour, and secure his services. Does his "neighbour's" interest, reputation, personal and family comforts, connexions, or even life itself, stand in the way of the attainment of his wishes?-he is ready to sacrifice all to his idol. He will tempt and seduce him. He will defraud, rob, oppress, slander, or even kill him. A history of the operation of such passions as were before enumerated, given by the inspiration of Him who "knoweth what is in man," would form a most appalling commentary on this verse.

There are excellent commentators, however, who interpret the "desiring evil" of the love of sin in general; and who consider the love of sin as engendering the selfishness which sets at nought the claims of neighbour and friend. This may be the meaning; and, in effect, it comes to much the same thing.

Let us, my brethren, hate sin, and strive against the selfishness which the love of sin engenders, and which is one of the characteristics of "the wicked." There is, remember, an important distinction between disposition or inclination, and conscience. They are often at variance. It is by the former, not by the latter, that character is formed and distinguished. The most wicked of men may in his conscience disapprove what, following the bent of his inclination, he does. Even when

he "works all uncleanness with greediness,"-even when he pursues the gratification of his avarice or his ambition at the expense of every principle of equity and benevolence, and regard to the interests of others, he may be very far from having conscience on his side. But the main difference between him and the good man is, that while he compels conscience to yield to inclination, the other brings inclination into conformity with conscience-" crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts;" and, instead of selfishly setting aside the claims and rights and necessities of others for his own gratification, seeks his own pleasure in promoting the well-being of all around him. All his neighbours find favour in his eyes.

Verse Proverbs 21:11. ""When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise; and when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge." * The "scorner," as we have frequently had occasion to remark, is the man who laughs at all principle and restraint; who "makes a mock at sin," and sets at defiance all authority. As "the simple "-he who is inexperienced, inconsiderate, thoughtless,-when he "sees the prosperity" of such an one, is in danger of giving way to the rising emotions of envy, and,-stumbled by the mystery which his very simplicity makes him at a loss to explain,-of seeking to imitate;-so when such an one is punished,-when the scorner's high-minded contempt of God and goodness is thus visited and rebuked,-when the true and proper tendency of the course he follows is thus made manifest,-the simple is struck; consideration is forced upon him; he is led to look to the end of such courses; he " foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself;" he betakes himself to a wiser and a better way,-repenting and turning unto God; he is made wise, by learning to "fear God, and depart from evil."

* Comp. Proverbs 19:25. In the latter part of the verse, what is the antecedent to the pronoun he? Is it "the wise?" It maybe; and the statement holds true. "The wise" improves under "instruction." "He receiveth knowledge." Instruction is not lost upon him. But I am inclined to regard "the simple" as the real antecedent; the meaning being, that from the "instruction of the wise," as well as from "the punishment of the scorner," "the simple" is enlightened and profited. The docility of "the wise "-the humble and earnest manner in which he is seen to receive the lessons of divine teaching,-tends, as does the view of the sad results of the scorner's hardihood, to impress the mind of "the simple " with a sense of the folly of his own inconsiderate thoughtlessness.

Let us learn the lesson of imitating in the latter case, and being on our guard in the other. If we see "the wise receiving knowledge," and see the effects of that knowledge in the propriety, consistency, and dignity of their conduct, in the influence, respect, and real substantial good of which it is productive;-and when, on the contrary, we see the unprincipled "scorner" reaping even here the bitter fruits of his madness, and look forward to the end, when these fruits will be reaped in their full amount of righteous infliction,-let us "stand in awe and sin not;" let us leave to himself "the seat of the scorner," "the way of the sinner," and "the counsel of the ungodly."

Verse Proverbs 21:12. "The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked: but God overthroweth the wicked for their wickedness." The supplement in this verse is evidently a very violent one. It is not easy to conceive the writer omitting to express the words that are here inserted,-if he really intended them to be understood. I refer to the words "but God." I cannot imagine a more unlikely ellipsis. Some critics regard the verse as having undergone some little corruption in the original, and they venture to alter accordingly. But conjectural criticism is hazardous; and it must be a case of very hard necessity indeed that can justify having recourse to

it. And at the same time the insertion of supplementary words requires hardly less caution and reserve. Observe, then:-First, the word rendered here "wisely considereth," is the same verb which, in the preceding verse, is translated "is instructed;" and to instruct, to give instruction, is its most common acceptation. Farther, the verb translated "overthroweth," means also "to turn aside"-generally in the sense of perverting, or turning from good, but not necessarily. On such grounds, the verse has been translated by Dr. Boothroyd (and, although not in every point satisfied, I acquiesce in the rendering as the best,) "The righteous man teacheth, or gives instruction to, the house of the wicked, to turn away the wicked from evil." A forced and unnatural supplement is thus avoided; and the difficulties, in a simply critical view, are at least greatly lessened. In the Vulgate Latin version, the same turn is given to the second part of the verse;-" The just man thinks maturely concerning the house of the wicked, that he may draw away the wicked from evil." And the practical sentiment thus brought out is one of the greatest importance. In the phrase "the house, or family of the wicked," the word wicked is in the singular number,-" the house of the wicked man:"-in the latter part of the verse, "that he may turn away the wicked from evil," wicked is plural, and may be considered as referring to the members of his household along with himself. The righteous man is deeply sensible that the family of the wicked are in danger of "perishing for lack of knowledge." Who is to instruct them! He looks upon such families with melting compassion; and his compassion, like that of God, and like that of Christ, is practical. He seeks opportunities of communicating instruction; and the nature of the instruction appears from the.nature of the design-"that he may turn away the wicked from evil."*

* Stuart renders the verse-"The Righteous One taketh cognizance of the house of the wicked; he will cast the wicked headlong into evil." Of the verb in the second clause he says-"A very strong word, to precipitate, to cast down headlong." Thus our translators have "Overthrow;" and such would certainly seem to be the usual sense of the term. Luther’s rendering of the former part of the verse is much the same as that of the English version; the latter he renders, "but the wicked think only to do mischief"-on what authority it is hard to say.

Verse Proverbs 21:13. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." In illustration of these striking and alarming words, observe-First: we may always expect, both in general society and in the church of God, "the rich and the poor to meet together." "The poor shall never cease out of the land," said God to Moses. "The poor ye have always with you," said Jesus to his disciples. The distinction has existed from the beginning hitherto. Wherever there has been property, it has been in various portions; and were there an equal partition of property to-day, there would be a difference to-morrow-a difference arising from diversity of character, as well as from the incessant influence of changing events. On the very day of equalization ten thousand incidents, over which men themselves could exert no control, even independently of the operation of avarice, and prodigality, and fancy, and whim, and caprice, would produce ten thousand changes.-There are varieties of poverty; for poverty is a relative and comparative term. And among the indigent and dependent poor there are also varieties:-the industrious and the indolent; the sober and the intemperate; the virtuous and the vicious; the deserving and the undeserving. Hence, secondly, nothing can be of greater consequence than marking this distinction, and regulating our charity accordingly. The verse cannot mean, that by an indiscriminate distribution of alms,’ we should hold out an encouragement to laziness, or a bounty to thriftless and unprincipled profligacy-the beggary of the idle and the wicked. There is a "stopping

of the ears" that is at times a virtue,-requiring an effort of self-denying principle, in opposition to the mere emotion and impulse of present pity. There are some who are worthless vagrants; there are others who are not really needy, but impostors on public benevolence. If we have the slightest ground to suspect either, it is but right to "stop the ear" till we know the case. Charity must be exercised judiciously. If it is not, we may greatly aggravate the evil it is our design to alleviate: and faithfulness to the stewardship with which God invests every man on whom he bestows the means of doing good, requires of him the use of discretion-the application of judgment, as well as the indulgence of feeling.-Thirdly, the sin here reproved is an unmerciful disposition; unfeeling hardness of heart; pitiless, avaricious, griping selfishness. Now, in many ways this selfishness may be exemplified. For instance, in the unreasonable beating down of the wages of the poor labourer and artisan; for true as it is that wages must be regulated by the state of supply and demand, yet there is, at times, to be seen a readiness to take advantage of circumstances beyond what they justly warrant, and, for the sake of a little extra profit, to grind the faces of the poor by screwing down the remuneration of their labour to the very starving point;-and, when they naturally and earnestly lift the voice of complaint and remonstrance, "stopping the ear at their cry." There is, again, the denial of protection to the poor, when it is pleaded for against oppression, and when we have it at all in our power to afford it. There is, still further, the selfish, ruthless disregard of the applications of the poor in their times of want and suffering,-the heartless refusal to hear them,-to be troubled with their representations and complainings,-some excuse being ever found or devised for declining to listen to or relieve them. This is a fearful violation of the great law of righteousness and love. Once more, there is a public "stopping of the ear at the cry of the poor," in times of prevailing destitution and distress, which, we cannot but feel, must awaken divine indignation against the Government and the country in which it prevails. It is the duty of every Government to deal equally with all classes of the community; and it becomes the duty of all the subjects of that Government to do what lies constitutionally in their power, to obtain the adoption of such measures as are fitted, without doing injustice to others, to provide most effectually, extensively, and permanently, for the wants of the unemployed and the destitute. The saying of the verse is often verified amongst men. The avaricious and unmerciful, when they are themselves brought low and into straits, meet with little commiseration. As they meted, it is meted to them. If any thing is given them, it is with a grudge and stintedly. Heart and hand are closed against them; and the ear of generous kindness is turned away from their complainings. And in divine retribution, the saying is invariably and infallibly true. The poor were the objects of the special compassion and care of the merciful Saviour. His churches should resemble Him in this. It will fare ill with churches, as well as individuals, if they "stop their ear at the cry of the poor." It is one of the marks of a church’s spiritual prosperity, and augurs the favour and blessing of their Lord, when the poor are kindly and liberally cared for.* * See 2 Corinthians 9:6-11.

66-Pro_21:14-20

Proverbs 21:14-20

LECTURE LXVI.

Proverbs 21:14-20.

"A gift in secret pacifieth anger; and a reward in the bosom strong wrath. It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead. He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich. The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright. It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman. There is treasure to be desired, and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up." In the first of these verses, we have a subject which, under various aspects, has been repeatedly before us.*-The offer on one side, and the reception on the other, of any "gift" that wears the form of a bribe, be it for the perversion of judgment-the tempting of a judge or an arbitrator to give a decision contrary to conscientious conviction,-or for the securing of an office, whether the office be of the lowest or of the highest description,-a place at a municipal Board, or a seat in the British Parliament,-deserves unqualified reprobation. It is well when corruption of this kind is sifted, detected, exposed, and publicly disgraced and put down. There are cases, however, in which "gifts" may be bestowed in perfect good faith, and for the most desirable ends,-when they may bo lawful, proper, and even necessary. The case supposed in this verse, seems to be that in which we have been guilty of something provoking, by which the anger of our neighbour has been stirred;-in which the offence taken has been well-founded; although the anger may not, in its degree at least, be justifiable. In such a case, submission, confession, apology, are manifestly due from us: and "a gift" may be an accompanying token of our sincerity in making it, and of our respect for the party offended.

* Proverbs 17:8; Proverbs 18:16; Proverbs 19:6.

When, however, such a "gift" is bestowed, it must, in order to its answering its end, be bestowed discreetly-not in any such way as is calculated to produce the impression of selfishness, or vanity, or a mercenary spirit, on the part of him who receives it. It must, therefore, be "a gift in secret;" not ostentatious; not such as to bring credit to ourselves, and attach meanness to the other party,-credit to us for generosity,-meanness to him for selfish cupidity. There may be cases, indeed, in which the offence has been public, and in which the gift may be a public acknowledgment and public reparation. In such cases, publicity may be called for. But there must nothing be done that either implies on our part, or seems to impute on the other, aught that is hypocritical or dishonourable. All must be open and ingenuous,-all in "simplicity and godly sincerity."

"Have gifts," says a judicious writer, "such a powerful influence to disarm resentment? Then let no man plead, in apology for the fury of his passions, that he is not able to conquer them. If money

can conquer them, shall reason, and the fear of God, and the command of Christ, be too weak to bridle them? Surely the commandments of God our Saviour have too little authority with us, if they have less influence upon our spirits than gold and jewels have upon the spirits of almost all men."

Verse Proverbs 21:15. "It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity." You will perceive, that, without the supplement, the antithesis in this verse is by no means direct and pointed. Other renderings accordingly have been given. As the following:-

1. "The doing of what is right is joy to the just; but destruction (is joy) to the workers of iniquity:"-the righteous, that is, delight in doing good, but the wicked in working mischief and ruin. The one resembles God, "who loveth righteousness and judgment, and of whose goodness the earth is full;" and Christ, who "with righteousness judges the poor, and reproves with equity for the meek of the earth;" who "went about doing good." The other resembles Satan, who "was a murderer from the beginning;" whose work of delight is to tempt and to destroy; "who hath his name Apollyon."

2. "It is joy to the just to do right; but vexation" (distress, trouble) "to the workers of iniquity." Such is Boothroyd's rendering; and it agrees with the French. The righteous find their happiness in the ways of God,-in doing the thing that is right. So far from true religion-practical godliness-being a source to them of irksome melancholy, it is their "joy." But to the wicked it is irksome. The principle of goodness or of godliness being absent from the heart, all conformity to precept is against the grain with them. They may do what is right from compulsion, from considerations of interest, or from the constraint of conscience and fear; but pleasure in it they have none-no "joy." And hence it is that amongst ungodly, worldly men, the impression and saying are so prevalent, that religion is melancholy. "While the heart continues at enmity with God, all outward conformity to the will and worship of God can be nothing better than vexation,-harassing and fretting to the spirit, and drawing forth the exclamation, What a weariness is it! The joy of religious and virtuous practice can only be felt, where there is the inward power of religious and virtuous principle. It is a joy that can only be known by the experience of the new heart; and by the new heart it is felt to be the only joy worthy of the name. But the heart that is still a stranger to the love must be still a stranger to the joy; and the whole life of the good man must appear a life of bondage. The man who has no ear for music would regard the ecstasies of a Handel as ridiculous; but such ecstasies are not on that account the less real.

3. There is still a third sense, of which the words, without supplement, are susceptible,-a sense I have not seen given, but which appears to me to have as fair a claim to be the true one as either of those mentioned:-"The doing, or executing of judgment is joy to the just, but destruction to the workers of iniquity." The just, when, judgment is done, have no cause to fear:-it comes not upon them: "only with their eyes they behold, and see the reward of the wicked;" and they experience "joy," when it is just judgment that is executed, inasmuch as it promotes the safety and the happiness of society. And the "doing of judgment" by the Judge of all, which is ever according to perfect rectitude, is "joy to the just," as it brings glory to His name, and clears the moral universe of temptation and misery. But to "the workers of iniquity," the execution of judgment is anything but "joy." It is destruction; and the thought and anticipation of it, whether from man or from God, can engender only distress and fear. And the day of final judgment, while it shall be a day of "joy" to the just, will be the day of complete and irremediable "destruction" to the wicked.* * Luther renders-"It is to the righteous a joy to do what is right; but to the wicked a terror."

Verse Proverbs 21:16. "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead."-While the preceding verse has reference to the "workers of iniquity" generally, and represents the execution of judgment as their "destruction;" this verse relates apparently to apostates from the right way-"the Way of understanding;" those who for a time have walked in that way, under a profession of religion, and have abandoned it. Such there have been in every age; and of such it is here said, "they shall remain in the congregation of the dead." The word so rendered happens to be in some other places of the Old Testament translated giants-with doubtful propriety, for in the first of its occurrences (Genesis 14:5.) it is the name of a people, the "Rephaim." It is the same word that is translated giants in Deuteronomy 2:11; Deuteronomy 2:20; Joshua 12:4; Joshua 13:2; Joshua 17:15;-but it is disputed whether it should not in these instances retain its appellative signification. Supposing this-still the people were a gigantic race; and from this, apparently, has arisen the confounding of the word used in our text with that rendered giants in the fourth verse of the sixth chapter of Genesis. But the words are not at all the same:-and the word in the last-cited passage has been the subject of a large amount of critical discussion and variety of conjecture. But from the obvious fact of the Nephilim (called giants in the account of the antediluvian world) being men of signally desperate wickedness as well as of vast stature and power, it has been concluded that the abode of the giants came to bo a designation for the place of future punishment, or some region of it;-and it has been imagined that this is what is meant here by "the congregation of the giants." There is, however, in all this more of conjecture and fancy than of certainty. The same word is rendered "dead"*1 in several other places. I shall not trouble you with the etymologies of the original word, from which the sense of "dead" is made out. It will be enough to remark, that here, as in the other passages referred to, it must be understood as meaning the wicked dead. This is clear from the very nature of the thing; and it is confirmed by the connexion of the 18th verse in the second chapter with the verse which follows. The "congregation of the dead," then, means the assembly of those who were spiritually dead here, and who, having departed out of this world, are suffering, in the world to come, that "second death" which is "the wages of sin." In all such connexions there is included under the idea of death that of destruction in general.*2 *1 See for example, Proverbs 2:18; Proverbs 9:18. rr *2 Comp. Proverbs 8:34-36.

I have said that "the man who wanders out of the way of understanding" has special reference to apostasy from a religious profession and course. The verse may bo interpreted as expressing the increasing hardness, the consequent comparative hopelessness, and the final and irremediable misery, of such characters. This is no strange doctrine in the word of God. It is taught and impressed everywhere.* Let professors, then, beware of backsliding. Having entered on "the way of understanding," let them beware of the infatuation of "wandering out of it." O let nothing entice, nothing intimidate you! Keep the way which conscience and experience tell you is the right way. Keep it to the end. Set your faces as a flint. "Press toward the mark, for the prize of your high calling." Let neither the world, the devil, nor the flesh, prevail. "Be faithful unto death, and your Lord will give you the crown of life."

* Comp. Hebrews 10:26-31; 2 Peter 2:20-21.

Verse Proverbs 21:17. "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." The sentiment here is similar to that in various preceding passages of the Book. In the nature of things, and as evinced by experience, the tendency of extravagance in living is to poverty and its accompanying miseries. How should it be otherwise? Money is squandered, debt

is incurred, credit is lost, the divine blessing is forfeited-that blessing which can alone secure prosperity. The man who follows such a course "shall not be rich"-neither rich for time nor for eternity.-It is not necessary to interpret "pleasure" here as signifying directly vicious pleasure, or criminal indulgence. On the margin it is rendered "sport:" and when connected with the latter member of the verse, the whole may be considered as including the pleasures of the table, luxurious refinements, costly establishments, foolish pastimes, and all the modes of what the men of the world call "enjoying life" even apart from the profligacy of voluptuousness.

Verse Proverbs 21:18. "The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright." This is evidently intended to express the regard of Jehovah to his people; a sentiment which pervades His word, and is to them full of consolation and delight, while it is a lesson of solemn alarm to the ungodly.*1 The words may be interpreted in two senses, which, however, are closely connected:-First, when the wicked form purposes of evil against the righteous, God frequently makes these evil purposes return upon themselves, and involve themselves in the very mischief they meant for his people.-Secondly, when the wicked stand in the way of the best interests of the righteous, and their general well-being,-that is, of what God sees to be truly best for them,-He will sacrifice the one to the other. The words of God by the prophet, may throw light on the phraseology of the verse before us:-"For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee; therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life," Isaiah 43:3-4. How was Egypt "a ransom?"-not in the strict and proper sense of the word: but when Israel was to be delivered, and Egypt, the oppressor, stood in the way, the deliverance was effected at the cost of Egypt,-by plagues on her people and land, and the destruction of her armies. Thus, in aftertimes was the army of Sennacherib sacrificed for the deliverance of good king Hezekiah and his people, when, in the time of their perplexity and peril, they cried unto the Lord. Thus did the plots of the wicked Haman for the destruction of Mordecai and the Jews come back upon himself. In the end, all "the wicked" that have opposed "the righteous," and done what they could to frustrate their salvation, shall become, for their sakes, the victims of the divine displeasure.*2 *1 Comp. Psa. 11; Psalms 34:6-7; Psalms 34:15-16; Psalms 37:12-18. rr *2 See Matthew 25:41-45.

Verse Proverbs 21:19. "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman." We had the sentiment before us in last Lecture; and I only now observe, that it is still more strongly expressed here than even there. There the unfortunate victim of female passion and fretfulness and clamour, retires to the house-top. But here, even the house-top is too near. He is off to "the wilderness"-as far away as possible. The roof of the house is not a sufficient separation. He still hears the din. He is still too much within reach of the scourge of the tongue; he flees the house altogether. "The wilderness," with all its discomforts and all its dangers, is better. The yelling of its savage beasts is not so frightful as that from which he escapes. But let me repeat that the cases that call for pity are far from being all on one side. Are there no unreasonable, passionate, discontented, fretful, savage, brutal husbands? Alas, how many! I do believe the number of suffering wives is greater than that of suffering husbands. "A contentious woman," says an authority from whom I have this morning quoted already*-"is not worse than a tyrannizing husband. A man may more easily make his escape from the presence of a scold, than a woman from the face of a brutal tyrant; and the delicacy of her mind makes her more susceptible of

melancholy impressions from bad usage, than persons of the other sex ordinarily are." This witness is true. Ah! how many gentle and affectionate spirits-how many women who are only prevented from being the very best of wives by the treatment they receive, by the felt impossibility of pleasing an unreasonable, conciliating a proud and passionate, or reclaiming an intemperate and faithless husband,-have pined out their days in wretchedness, and sunk, broken-hearted, into the grave! O! when husband and wife dwell together in love and peace,-amid the calm yet exquisite joys of domestic life,-how grateful they should be! They possess the best of earthly boons that heaven bestows. They drink of the purest and sweetest spring of pleasure opened to men in passing on to the world of eternity. Let them drink with humble and thankful cheerfulness, feeling their dependence, owning their obligations, even while they never forget the uncertainty and necessary shortness of all that pertains to time,-never forget that every connubial union must, sooner or later, be dissolved; and holding themselves in readiness for parting even while they arc in the full enjoyment of their earthly happiness. That happiness is crowned and perfected, when on the tie of nature there is superinduced the bond of grace; and there is thus an everlasting as well as a temporary union. Let this be the aim-and may this be the happiness-of every wedded pair in this assembly!

* Dr. Lawson.

Verse Proverbs 21:20. "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up." There is an evident correspondence between this verse and verse seventeenth. They may be regarded either as contrasts or as counterparts to each other. "The wise" and the righteous are in this book the same,-wisdom consisting specially in "the fear of the Lord;" and on the same principle, "the foolish" and the wicked are the same. The verse has clearly a reference to temporal things. The "treasure" is earthly treasure; the "oil," that of worldly prosperity and abundance. When the treasure is called "treasure to be desired," it seems to be designed to mark the difference between the treasure that is gotten by industry, prudence, frugality, and justice; and that which is gotten by unrighteousness, fraud, and oppression;-between the treasure in the house of "the wise" and the treasure in the house of "the foolish." The former alone is "treasure to be desired," as being obtained rightly and used rightly; and as being obtained by the divine blessing and enjoyed with it. The "treasure" and the "oil" may in themselves be the same. But of everything earthly there is an adventitious as well as an intrinsic value. The "treasure" which is obtained and enjoyed otherwise than we have described, is not "to be desired." A man is better with nothing than with "treasure" gotten wickedly-gotten by a lying tongue-gotten by theft or robbery-gotten by oppressive grinding of the faces of the poor-gotten as a bribe for evil-gotten in any way that sets conscience and God against its owner;-and better far with nothing than with "treasure" in the use of which God and the claims of benevolence are forgotten; in the use of which, a man seeks as his solo end to gratify self, and is thus "treasuring up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

"But a foolish man spendeth it up." This may either mean that the foolish man spendeth up his own treasure; so that whatever he acquires is speedily, through his own mismanagement, or extravagance, or abuse, consumed and gone;-or that the wise man has a fool for his successor-to whom his treasures go, and by whom they are soon exhausted:-"Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour

wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity."-Ecclesiastes 2:18-19.

How true the closing words of this passage-"This is also vanity!" "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!"-is the text of the book; and this is only one of its many illustrations and proofs. In "the dwelling of the wise" there are treasures infinitely more precious than any this world can furnish;-treasures of spiritual blessing,-unsearchable riches-riches that "perish not in the using." He is rich in possession, and rich in hope, rich in time and rich for eternity. "The Wise" and "The Foolish" shall divide mankind at last. To which of the two assemblies would you belong? You may to either. It depends upon your own choice. God says-"Ye fools, when will ye be wise?" He shuts up none to final privation and suffering, but those who voluntarily and pertinaciously shut themselves up to folly. The gospel is the wisdom of God for our salvation; and it is our wisdom to receive it.

67-Pro_21:21-31

Proverbs 21:21-31

LECTURE LXVII.

Proverbs 21:21-31.

"He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour. A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof. Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles. Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath. The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not. The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind? A false witness shall perish; but the man that heareth speaketh constantly. A wicked man hardeneth his face: but as for the upright, he directeth his way. There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord. The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord."

"RIGHTEOUSNESS AND MERCY" are the two great divisions of moral duty between man and man. In the Bible, as might be expected, they stand associated with a third-Godliness; that which forms the principle of the duties which man owes to his Maker and moral Governor.*1 There is nothing to which men are more prone than to put these asunder; and while, to a certain extent, practising towards their fellow-men what justice and humanity require, to leave out of their estimate of their characters altogether the affections and the conduct that arise from, and are required by, that primary obligation, that takes precedence of, and indeed is inclusive of, all others,-the obligation of every intelligent creature to God. The overlooking of this is the most affecting proof of human depravity, and the most prolific cause of human delusion. But, apart from the union, in Scripture, of these three branches of character, it may be noticed, that the word "righteousness" is frequently taken in a more comprehensive sense,-as a term for human duty at large, as it is also a term for all the moral excellence of Deity.*2 And when we recollect that "righteousness" consists in giving every one his due, why should it not include the first of all dues, that which is due to God? If it is unrighteous to withhold that which is due, the ungodly man is, in the highest sense, the unrighteous man. He fails to pay the first and most imperative of his debts. If there can be no claim equal to God’s, there can be no iniquity equal to the violation of it.-Benevolence is one of the primary elements of the divine character. And it is the law of the moral universe. Love is the fulfilling of that law. God has made love due from creature to creature, as well as from the creature to Himself. And he can neither imitate God, nor obey Him, who does not follow after "mercy" as well as "righteousness."

*1 Comp. Titus 2:11-12; Micah 6:8. rr *2 See 1 John 3:7; 1 John 2:29.

He who "followeth after"-who habitually and perseveringly practises these virtues, "findeth life." He has a truly happy life. He has God’s presence and blessing; and these are life,-life’s true zest and

joy.* He also " findeth righteousness." The man of high principle, who is noted for his strict uprightness, will generally meet with a return in kind. Few, comparatively, will attempt to cheat the thoroughly honest dealer. Knaves themselves will be awed into honesty by the knowledge of his character. And he "finds honour;"-when in any case "righteousness and mercy" are eminently united; when a man not only adheres strictly to the imperative demands of justice, but lays himself out for the benefit of others-at a cost of toil and trouble, and self-denial and sacrifice,-"honour" will be his due; and honour he will obtain. It will attend upon him while he lives, and it will be attached to his name when he is gone hence. There may be a hind of greatness arising from mere vastness of intellect and mightiness of power, working wonders in the earth, and affecting now and for ages to come, the destinies of nations. But where there has been no principle; where there has been neither "righteousness" nor "mercy," but the flagrant violation of both, the very page of history, which records the greatness, records with it the dishonour; associating with the magnitude of the events, and the magnitude of mental and physical resources by which they were brought about, the brand of moral reprobation. The only true, living, lasting "honour" is that which is gained by the operation of great moral principles, for all real greatness lies in moral worth. Even in life, the man of self-denying generosity will be so valued, and so honoured, that others will be ready to risk and sacrifice life itself for his preservation. "For a good man some would even dare to die."

* Comp. Php 4:8-9. But higher and better blessings may be meant. These, indeed, are not, in God’s word, associated, in the way of merit on the creature’s part, or of reward on His, with the practice of "righteousness and mercy;"-but "life, righteousness, and honour" are ever connected with the character. * * Romans 6:20-22; Psalms 24:3-5; Romans 2:6-11.

Verse Proverbs 21:22. "A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof." The proverb has had, at times, a literal fulfilment. Look at ancient Babylon. With its insurmountable walls and bulwarks, it seemed secure; and its monarch could smile in proud defiance at the power of the mightiest assailants. But Cyrus had something besides military force. He had wisdom; and the turning of the course of the Euphrates, and entering by its channel, accomplished what force could not in any way effect; and in an unexpected moment,-a moment of careless and fearless mirth and revelry, and glorying in the impregnable security of its lofty and massive muniments,-was "the strength of the confidence" of Babylon "cast down." The language refers, however, under a particular illustration, to the conquering of great difficulties in general-affirming that, for this end, wisdom is much more effectual than mere physical force. Force, without wisdom, very frequently, instead of gaining its objects, impedes and frustrates them. The "wise man " proceeds with cautious and considerate prudence,-with appropriate adjustment of means and methods to the circumstances and the characters with which he has to deal. And, in the case of the godly, the wisdom that consists in the fear of the Lord, will, in every season of perplexity and difficulty, look upward for divine direction, and guide itself by the light of the divine word.* It is thus that the good man encounters and overcomes spiritual opposition lying in the way of his course heavenward. In the strength of divinely promised aid, he "casts down the strength of the confidence" of his spiritual adversaries, and is made "more than conqueror."

* See Proverbs 3:5-6.

Verse Proverbs 21:23. "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles." Here we have still another characteristic and another advantage of wisdom. It enables its

possessor to "keep the mouth and the tongue"-to know the "time to be silent, and the time to speak," and in the time to speak, what to say. We have had repeated occasion to notice the incalculable amount and variety of mischief of which the tongue is the occasion; how its openly uttered or secretly whispered words may break hearts, may ruin characters, may sever friends, may bring individuals and families to beggary and disgrace, may spread alienation and discord through extensive circles of intimacy and affection, may "pierce through with many sorrows" spirits that were enjoying peace and love, may be even as barbed daggers that take away life; how too they recoil in mischief to ourselves; how a word of slander brought out in a moment of irritation or thoughtlessness, may cost a man the humiliation of submissive apology, or the annoyance and expense of litigation, and the reparation of heavy damages; how the recollection of a hasty expression, along with the effects which have arisen from it to those to whom at the time no harm was meant, may inflict severe and long-continued self-reproach, with all its accompaniments of mental disquietude and distress; how the foolish utterances of an unguarded hour may go far to shake the credit of years of discretion-the recollection of that hour of folly ever returning upon the mind of previous admirers, and, if not absolutely obliterating their former estimate of a man’s sound sense and dignity, operating at least as a serious drawback on their respect for his character; how too it leads to inward deep remorse, arising from a consciousness of having spoken inconsistently with our Christian profession and principles, and the thought of having given an unfavourable impression of our religion, and failed of an opportunity of honouring God-a thought than which to a Christian heart there is none more galling, spirit-sinking, and severe:-associated as it is with proportionate diminution of interest in Christ, and of the validity of our confidence towards God.-It is indeed emphatically true that "whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles."

Verse Proverbs 21:24. "Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath." To "deal in proud wrath,"-on the margin, "in the wrath of pride,"-evidently means to act with the overbearing violence of a haughty spirit. All the conduct of such a man is insolently self-sufficient, and, when resisted, furious. The proud man is puffed up. He thinks all should at once yield to his will and wishes, and can bear with patience no opposition. This of course is a character that can never be liked. It stirs up the pride and passion of others. It becomes the object of universal indignation and disgust. Hence the man gets himself a name of reproach: he shall be called "proud and haughty scorner:" and in his name he finds his punishment: for true it is, that the proudest of men does not like being called proud; as the man who deals most in lies may like least to be called a liar. A "proud scorner" is one of the most unpopular and odious of characters. From him whom men thus designate, all will keep aloof. And in a world where all are necessarily so much dependent upon one another, in despite of a man’s self-concentrated pride and contempt of his fellows, it is not every one that. can afford to adopt and live upon the maxim of the tyrant-"Let them hate me, so they but fear me!" Thus he who, by his unbearable temper, "sets himself alone in the earth," may be forced to feel the inconveniences of being without the good-will even of those whom he professes to scorn.

Verses Proverbs 21:25-26. "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth, and spareth not." The word of God is characterised by its variety. Even on the same subject, how frequently soever introduced, there may generally be found some diversity in the position it occupies,-the light in which it is presented;

some new phase in its source, its nature, or its results. The evil effects of sloth have been before us oftener than most points on which the wise man touches. Here it is again. We dwell only on the new aspect under which it appears. It is presented to us first, as a species of self-murder:-"The desire of the slothful killeth him:" and why?-"for his hands refuse to labour." He will not work, and he cannot want. He "desires" certain acquisitions and indulgences; but his hands refuse to second his wishes. He cannot bring them to the necessary exertion; and so his unsatisfied desire gnaws, torments, wastes, irritates, destroys him. There is nothing more irksome than the longing, yawning, fretting yearnings of the indolent wretch who will not help himself. They are miserable; and they are suicidal; they "kill him." Mere "desiring" that the ground were tilled will not till it. Mere wishing for money and food will not create either the one or the other. So that if he only "desires" life, but will do nothing to sustain it, he must die.* Another aspect of the same evil is that it engenders and maintains the spirit of a grasping grudging covetousness: "He coveteth greedily all the day long." He sees others in the possession and enjoyment of what he wants. He longs after the same, but he will do nothing to obtain it. He sets his heart on all he sees, and pines away in that "envy which is the rottenness of the bones." In the Paris French translation the words stand thus-"All the day long he does nothing but wish." How very expressive at once of the unconquerable indolence and the fretful, envious, pining unhappiness of the sluggard! And in his wishing, he may at times, by the power of a sanguine imagination, work himself into hope; and then, disappointment only embitters the cup of his own mingling,-aggravates the misery, which he is painfully conscious is self-inflicted.-Further: he appears before us a stranger to all the positive and exquisite pleasures of charity and beneficence; but "the righteous giveth and spareth not." It is not said, you will observe-"the diligent giveth and spareth not;" because there are not a few who are sufficiently exemplary in diligence, to whom the Bible would not give the designation of "the righteous,"-and who are far from being distinguished for benevolence. But the antithesis, as it stands here, implies these three things: First, that diligence is one of the features in the character of the righteous:-Secondly, that the natural tendency, and ordinary result of this is, through the divine blessing, abundance to spare:-Thirdly, that another distinguishing feature of the character of the righteous man, readiness to part with what his industry acquires-"giving, and not sparing;" that is, giving cheerfully, and giving liberally; not assenting merely to the truth of the maxim, as being the word of the Lord, but feeling the truth of it in their own heart’s experience-"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

* Comp. Ecclesiastes 4:5.

Verse Proverbs 21:27. "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?" The sentiment of the former part of the verse we have already illustrated,* showing by an appeal to many explicit passages in the Old Testament, that, unless the character of the worshipper was in correspondence with the worship offered by him, that worship, instead of being acceptable to the "Holy One of Israel," to the pure, truth-loving, and heart’s searching God, was held by him in abhorrence, and indignantly rejected.

* Proverbs 15:8.

What, then, is the addition to this truth, in the latter part of this verse?-"How much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?" The meaning seems to be-when not only is the worshipper’s general character at variance with the religious service, but when the particular act of devotion

itself is performed with an evil design-as a cloak or cover to some wicked purpose:-when a man comes before the God of truth for a purpose of falsehood,-a purpose suggested by the father of lies; concealing by a profession made to God some work of the devil. We have an instance in the history of Jezebel.*1 There was a fast-a religious service to Jehovah-proclaimed, with the express object of covering the perpetration of one of the most nefarious deeds of treachery and murder recorded in the Bible history. The case of Balaam is another. He ordered the building at successive places, of his seven altars, and offered his bullock and his ram on every altar. But all the while he was "loving the wages of unrighteousness;" and, for the sake of these wages, trying to bribe the Almighty into a permission to him to curse Israel. Look also at our Lord's representation of the character of the hypocritical Pharisees; in which He seems plainly to point at something more than general dissimulation-the studied covering of the very act of robbery-the robbery of the widow and the fatherless-by some accompanying act of extraordinary devotion.*2 There are degrees in sin. There are aggravating circumstances in the same kinds of sin. There is wickedness in all hypocrisy-in all religious dissimulation,-there being no one thing in which "simplicity and godly sincerity" are more imperatively required than the services of religion; but of all religious dissimulation that must be the most heinous, in which an act of worship is performed expressly to cover and facilitate the execution of an act of villany; when a worshipper bows before the God of mercy and truth, with the assassin's dagger under his garment; or confesses and prays to "the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness" to preclude suspicion,-to inspire confidence in his holy character, that he may the more-easily succeed in pillaging the poor!-Let all remember, that the same kind of guilt, though in various degrees, is contracted, when a man assumes, in the public worship of God, any airs of ultra devotion,-any sanctimonious ostentation and grimace, for the purpose of getting a character for religion, and so enabling him, under the cloak of such a reputation, to obtain credit and confidence, while he is, in his business, carrying forward a system of dishonourable and swindling speculation or embezzlement. O! of what is not human nature, under the dominance of unprincipled selfishness, capable!

*1 See 1 Kings 21:9-10, &c. rr *2 Matthew 23:14; Luke 20:47.

Verse Proverbs 21:28. "A false witness shall perish; but the man that heareth speaketh constantly." Here too we have former truth, with some addition to it. "A false witness" is, on the margin, "a witness of lies." It probably means here a witness who gives in evidence inventions of his own, that he knows to have no foundation in fact. It stands in antithesis to-"the man that heareth." This some critics understand in a sense which the occasional use of the verb to hear certainly justifies,-" the man that obeyeth." But, in the present instance, this seems rather forced. "The man that heareth," or who hath heard, is the witness who has personal knowledge of the case-who has been present on the spot and has listened to what passed. The former "shall perish:" he shall fail in his cause, entangling himself in the meshes of his own inventions,-falsehood being seldom in all points consistent,-and so bring ruin upon himself in this life, and be visited with perdition in the end. Not so in regard to the latter: "the man that heareth speaketh constantly." If we abide by this translation, the meaning is-that he who has heard persists uniformly in the same statements.* Truth is always consistent. No cross-questioning can elicit any incoherence. It needs nothing to help it out; nor is it ever in hesitation or at a loss. It is free, open, ready; delivering its testimony without apprehension, knowing that all is in harmony. But the original more properly signifies "unto victory." One French version has it-"shall speak so as

to gain the cause;" another-"shall speak, and shall have the victory." This too is the sense given by the Latin Vulgate. The idea seems to be that the consistency of truth shall triumph over the artifice and chicanery of falsehood and deceit. The perjurer may for a time seem to have the better of the cause; but ultimately the witness of lies shall be exposed, and the witness of truth shall be triumphant.

* Stuart considers the meaning to be, "that the sincere listener to the divine commands will ever be at liberty to speak," and "find confidence put in what he says." My brethren, we are all hastening to a tribunal where accuser, and witness, and judge, shall all be One. God is now the inspector of all our actions, and the hearer of all our words; and at the great day, He will not need that any should testify to him of man. There will be no need for calling witnesses, on whose testimony to found the verdicts of that day. "He that sitteth upon the throne" shall have a perfect intuitive knowledge of every individual of the countless myriads that shall then appear at His bar,-an unerringly distinct remembrance of every particular in the conduct and history of each, and of the motives by which, on every occasion, he was actuated. Conscience, however successfully bribed to a partial testimony now, will then respond to the truth of every charge. And when to those whom He places on his left hand, the Judge shall say, "Depart from me, ye cursed!" there will be no plea possible in arrest of the sentence. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." And the same omniscient and unerring Judge shall "justify the righteous." Placing them on his right hand, he will welcome them to blessedness; and all their adversaries shall be ashamed; not a lip daring to open against them, or in impeachment of their sentence.* * Romans 8:31; Romans 8:33-39.

Verse Proverbs 21:29. "A wicked man hardeneth his face: but as for the upright, he directeth his way."-The "wicked man" has good cause to be ashamed. His actions are such as give him plentiful reason to blush; but he blushes not. He "hardens his face." He assumes the air of impudent effrontery; braves the searching gaze of others; bids them the defiance of an unmoved countenance. He thus seeks to command an impression of his innocence. He has learned the lesson of concealing the secrets of conscience. His desire and his study are, to attain the power of sinning without blushing; and it is wonderful what an amount of this command of countenance some have reached. There is no discerning from their looks the slightest symptom of conscious guilt; while the innocent may blush crimson at the very thought of being so much as charged with the evil, and exposing themselves to suspicion that has no ground.-"Hardening the face," signifies also determined self-will, that is unmoved by expostulation, and proof against warning,-equally scornful of entreaty and of threatening-of love and of fear. Such was the character of God’s ancient people, in their times of rebellion against Him.* It required divinely imparted courage and self-command to be able to face them.

* Jeremiah 5:2-3; Jeremiah 8:12; Ezekiel 3:7-9.

Mark the other side of the antithesis:-"but the upright directeth," or, as on the margin, "considereth his way."-This may include two things:-1. His great desire and aim are, by a due consideration of his way, so to direct and order it, that he may have no cause for shame, and no need for command of countenance to conceal conscious guilt. While a blush may at times suffuse the cheek of conscious innocence at the very imputation of evil, it will soon pass away, and the naturalness of modest truth will inspire confidence in all who witness it. He would not "quench the blushes of ingenuous shame;" but he endeavours so to speak, and so to act, as that he shall have no reason

to hide his head or cover his face,-far less to "harden" it. 2. The upright man is influenced by such a self-diffident consciousness of his liability to say and to do what is wrong, that when anything of the kind is imputed to him, or surmised against him, he humbly "considers his way." He is led to self-examination,-to ascertain whether, through want of due watchfulness, he may not have erred. So far from "hardening his face" like a man who had such conceit of himself as to imagine that he could not do aught amiss, and that his only feeling under any imputation should be that of indignant scorn,-he is rather induced, in humility of spirit, to the more sincere and fervent adoption of the psalmist's prayer:-"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," Psalms 139:23-24.

O let the second of these characters be yours! A hardened heart and a hardened face,-a face that has learned to brave accusation and to look innocent under conscious guilt, are the most undesirable of all attainments. The confusion of innocence, when evil is imputed, is far preferable. Better far to be innocent and thought guilty, than to be guilty and thought innocent. Better far to have the sentence of acquittal in our own bosoms, though condemned by men, than to succeed in getting acquittal from men, and carry within us the sentence of guilt. How painful soever the former, we can still look up to God, and forward to His tribunal, as that of unerring rectitude,-where He will "bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day." O! there will be no "hardening of the face" then. Conscience will do its duty. The eyes which are as a flame of fire will search the inmost soul. Every eye will quail, and every countenance, even the most hardened, sink, before the look of Him that sitteth upon the throne. He will then at once "wipe off the reproach of his people," and "bring to light the hidden things of darkness." And then they who, under the influence of faith, and fear, and love, have "considered their way," shall lift up their faces without dread, and meet the smiles of their gracious Judge!

We may, perhaps, consider the wise man as pointing out three modes of covering and effecting evil purposes:-in the twenty-seventh verse, the mask of religion; in the twenty-eighth, false testimony; in the twenty-ninth, the assumed boldness and look of innocence. But (verse Proverbs 21:30) "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord." There may be against men. In one, or other, or all of these ways they may be deceived. There may, in many cases, be "wisdom and understanding and counsel," more than sufficient to impose upon and outwit them. But God knows all. His eye cannot be eluded; His designs cannot be thwarted; neither His promises nor His threatenings can be falsified, by any artifice, or policy, or might of the children of men,-no, nor of any created being.

And, as there is "no wisdom, understanding, or counsel" against the Lord, so neither is there power:-verse Proverbs 21:31. "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord." Sometimes, in the history of His ancient people, the Lord adopted means in themselves utterly inadequate,-absolutely trivial and powerless,-and granted the most signal success, for the purpose of conveying and impressing the lesson, that even when the best-equipped and most powerful armaments were employed, it was on Him they were still to depend,-and neither previously to confide, nor subsequently to glory, in their own resources, and might, and skill. Thus it was in the case of the reduction of their vast army to the "three hundred," by whom the immense hosts of Midian were overthrown. And, in a similar manner, and at a most appropriate time, was the great lesson inculcated,-just when they were setting out on the conquest of the land of promise. By what means was the first city overthrown? By means which, but for the rumours that

had come to their ears, the inhabitants might well have "laughed to scorn"-by successive processions round it, and the repeated blast of trumpets. This was manifestly designed to show them at the very outset to whom they were to owe the subjugation and possession of the land. It was an important and salutary lesson; and it is the very sentiment to which, in their hymns of acknowledgment and praise, the ancient church gave utterance.* * Psalms 44:1-8.

Let us, as we are taught to do, generalize the sentiment:-"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."*

* Psalms 127:1.

"Fond mortals but themselves beguile, When on themselves they rest:

Blind is their wisdom, weak their toil, By thee, O Lord, mildest!"

Safe and happy is the man, and he alone, who "trusteth in Jehovah," for "in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." And let me remind all, that the principle is applicable to means of safety from other and greater than temporal evils or created enemies. "Safety-salvation is of the Lord." He has made known His way of security from the wrath to come. Men may devise and follow schemes of their own: but none but His can be safe. "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel," in this matter, "against the Lord." His counsel shall stand. Ah! sinners, what plans soever of your own you may embrace, you will find the truth of this in the end. Christ is the only refuge. "There is no salvation in any other." When Israel were penitent, they owned the worthless insufficiency of all the means of protection in which they had previously trusted, and cast themselves on the power and mercy of their own Jehovah.* Thus must it be with every penitent sinner. The very first thing he does is to renounce all his previous confidences, and betake himself to that one which Jehovah has provided and revealed.-And then, there is to the end a spiritual warfare, in which "safety is of the Lord." We cannot cope with our spiritual enemies but in His strength. We must be "strong in the Lord." We must be made conquerors "through him that loved us." "Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies."

* Hosea 14:1-3.

68-Pro_22:1-6

Proverbs 22:1-6

LECTURE LXVIII.

Proverbs 22:1-6.

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold. The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished. By humility, and the fear of the Lord, are riches, honour, and life. Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward; he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them. Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it."

You will observe that the word "good" in the first of these verses is a supplement. In the original we have simply "a name." But this does not mean a mere name of renown. The verse must not be understood as a justification of the love of fame as a principle of action. Nor is it to be interpreted as expressing a preference of ambition to avarice,-of the love of power to the love of wealth. Many, alas! have there been, who, from mere eagerness to be distinguished,-with little consideration of either the nature or the means of the distinction,-have succeeded in "making themselves a name;" but a name which ought to be a name of infamy rather thin of honour. They have been great in power, and great in renown for all the evil which power without principle rendered them capable of doing. Solomon does not assuredly mean such a name. The "good" is a proper supplement. "A good name" is a reputation among fellow-men for piety, wisdom, prudence, integrity, generosity, and any other virtues that enter into a good character. But remember it is not a mere reputation for these. They must not be assumed in appearance, and a reputation thus got for the reality. To a man’s own inward enjoyment there can be few things more opposed than a high reputation for qualities which there is no consciousness of possessing, but rather a consciousness that, if all were known, the feeling toward him would be reversed. This in itself must be worse than unsatisfactory, it must be most fretting and mortifying to a man’s spirit,-exciting the gnawing irksomeness of self-indignant scorn; besides the incessantly haunting apprehension of the truth coming out, and the shame of detection.

Observe, the character is one which is not held in admiration only, but in affection:-"and loving favour rather than silver and gold." The "loving favour" is the affectionate esteem which springs from the "good name," and which is drawn by it to the person. In the first place, the "good name" and "loving favour" are more really pleasing in themselves-imparting more of true happiness than "silver and gold" in whatever amount-than all the riches of earth. The satisfaction is comparatively low and grovelling, which a person receives from the mere possession of wealth. It may be common to him with men of the lowest standard both in mental and moral worth. There is no saying how mean or how bad a man may be, and yet come into possession of " silver and gold," and "great riches." The satisfaction that arises from character is of a much higher and purer

description; more worthy far of being coveted and valued. To a man of sensibility, indeed, few things can be more dear than a "good name." By such a man his purse will ever be esteemed as "trash" in the comparison. Few things are more distressingly painful to him than when any injurious suspicion is thrown upon his character. The full enjoyment of a fair fame is intensely gratifying. Hence arises a danger-(for what is there from which, to our deceitful hearts, danger does not arise?)-the danger of "thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think,"-and of making a righteousness of our "good name,"-getting secretly elated by it-and deriving a measure of self-gratulation and self-confidence from it even before God, and in the prospect of our final account. Hence also arises a necessity for self-jealousy. It is well for him who in any degree enjoys, and knows that he enjoys it, to counteract the tendency by looking to those evils in the sight of God, of which he must be a wonderful man who is not sensible:-to go over these in the secret chambers of conscience, those chambers to which no eye has access but his own and his God’s. When he thus faithfully brings his heart and life to the test of the spiritual law of omniscience, he will find enough to prevent his being puffed up-enough to make him feel deeply his unworthiness of the divine regard, and of even the very lowest place in "the kingdom of heaven,"-enough, amidst the affectionate tributes of admiration from his fellow-creatures, to draw from his inmost and heavy-laden spirit the prayer-"God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Secondly,-the one is more valuable than the other as a means of usefulness. Riches, in themselves, can only enable a man to promote the temporal comfort and well-being of those around him. But character gives him weight of influence in matters of higher moment,-in all descriptions of salutary advice and direction,-in kindly instruction and consolation,-in counsel for eternity. It not only fits its possessor for such employments, but it imparts energy and effect to whatever he says and does. His character carries a recommendation with it,-gives authority and force to every lesson and every admonition; and affords, by the confidence it inspires, many opportunities and means of doing good, which, without it, could not be enjoyed.-Riches, again, bring with them many temptations to sinful and worldly indulgences, such as are injurious to the possessor himself and to his family-both temporally and spiritually. Character, on the contrary, acts aa a salutary restraint,-keeping a man back from many improprieties and follies, and even outward sins, by which it would be impaired and forfeited. And this restraint is felt, and properly felt, not for his own sake merely, but for the sake of all those objects with which his name stands associated; and especially from a regard to usefulness in connexion with the truth, and cause, and church of Christ. This is a very solemn consideration to a child of God. O remember, it is not your riches or your poverty, your high or low condition, that is an honour on the one hand, or a reproach on the other, to the name and doctrine of your divine Master, and a means of promoting or hindering the reception and progress of His gospel; it is your consistent character,-your high and blameless reputation. How vast the good this does-this preaching of the gospel by the life-in every circle in which a man moves!-and O what essential, and often extensive injury springs from the contrary-from the name without the reality of religion,-without consistent practical godliness! It was this consideration that led the Apostle Paul to set so high a value upon his "good name," and made him so solicitous to preserve it free not only of reproach, but even of suspicion. His official usefulness was involved in it, as well as his personal satisfaction. A reflection on him was a reflection on his cause, and a hindrance to his apostolic success. For similar reasons, we should all be jealous of our character,-not as a point of mere touchy selfish honour, but from the thought of the degree to which an unblemished reputation, or the contrary, bears on the glory of the

Redeemer, and the salvation of souls. In this respect, it is incomparably more precious than "thousands of gold and silver."

Thirdly, I may further add, the "good name" lasts longest. The wealth of the rich man is often coveted even while he lives. When he dies, he leaves it for ever; and, if this has been his only or his chief recommendation and attraction, he is speedily forgotten, or remembered only with contempt. But "the memory of the just is blessed." It is embalmed in blessing. It is kept in affectionate reverence in the hearts of kindred and friends, of the church of God, and of society. And in "the day of the Lord," when the worthlessness of all distinctions of mere condition shall be made apparent-when all the "silver and gold" in the universe would not avail to bribe away the sentence of death-the Lord shall acknowledge those who have borne the character of holy practical consistency in the faith and profession of His name. Then, CHARACTER WILL BE EVERY THING, CONDITION NOTHING. Ay; and the "good name" will be retained in heaven,-retained for ever; and the principles from which it arose, freed from all admixture of baser material, will be the springs of everlasting blessedness, when "riches," however great, and "gold and silver," however abundant, shall all have been left behind, to perish with a burning world, and be as if they had never been.

Verse Proverbs 22:2. "The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all."-By the poor are here to be understood, not only the needy, the indigent, the dependent, but the inferior classes generally:-"the rich and poor" meaning the highest and the lowest, with all the intermediate grades. They "meet together:"-

1. In society.-Variety of condition arises naturally and necessarily from the operation of many causes:-from diversity in character and disposition, in turn of mind, in amount of ability and diligence; and from the endless variety of providential arrangements, so frequently above all human foresight or control. Every attempt to prevent this diversity is vain. "The rich and poor" are mutually dependent on each other. The rich could not do without the poor, any more than the poor without the rich. The comparison by which the apostle illustrates the reciprocal dependence of the members of the church on one another, may be applied to civil society-"The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you," 1 Corinthians 12:21. This ought to suppress, on the one side all emotions of supercilious scorn, and on the other, every rising of envy. Let "the rich and poor" feel their mutual dependence, and treat each other accordingly.

2. In the church.-There, in as far as the communion of saints is concerned, there is perfect equality. It is true, and an important truth, that union and communion in the church does not interfere with, or set aside, the distinctions of civil society, or the obvious and necessary proprieties thence arising in the social intercourse of life. But there is one gospel for all. All meet as sinners in a common condemnation; and all meet as saved sinners, on a common ground of acceptance. All are, in common, debtors to the same mercy, through the same atonement; all are renewed by the same Spirit; all supplied from the same fulness; all children of the same Father; all heirs of the same inheritance,-"heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." Yes, all-the poorest as well as the richest. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. who is above all, and through all, and in you all," Ephesians 4:4-6.

3. In the grave.-Ah! here the equality-the humbling equality is complete. "The small and the great are there." All alike are subject to the stroke of death, for all have sinned. On all, the stroke of death produces the very same effects,-the cessation of all vital sensibility, and active energy-the same cold, and the same corruption: "the worms are spread under them, and the worms cover them." Their funeral obsequies are widely different; but in the grave they meet, in the same darkness, and loneliness, and putrefaction. The worms that prey on the dead make no distinction between the prince and the beggar.

4. At the judgment-seat; on either hand of the Judge; and on either side of the impassable gulf-in heaven or in hell.-The supreme Judge will himself assign them their stations at His tribunal. When He separates the assembled millions of mankind one from another, and places the one class on his right hand, and the other on his left, "the rich and poor" will be blended indiscriminately; and it will be to assemblies of all ranks and conditions of men, that the welcome on the one hand and the banishment on the other-"Come ye blessed," and "Depart ye cursed," shall be addressed; and heaven and hell alike shall for ever be peopled by both. To all, the principles of the judgment shall be equally and impartially applied:-condition in the present world being only regarded in as far as it contributed to augment or to diminish the measure of guilt. "There is no respect of persons with God." This idea of ultimate impartiality is what is chiefly suggested by the latter part of the verse-"The Lord is the Maker of them all." He is so by creation. They alike owe to Him their being, and owe to Him every moment the maintenance of that being-the rich man and the honourable, equally with the poorest and the meanest on earth. Where is the monarch on the throne that, more than the lowest of his subjects, can draw a breath independently of God?-And they have the Lord alike for their Maker by providential allotment. The same Lord makes them what they are; and could at His pleasure reverse their conditions, making the rich the poor, and the poor the rich.-The Lord being "the Maker of them all" implies also the equal distance of all, as alike His creatures, from their common Creator and Governor. The distance is the same. In both it is infinite. When God is the object of common comparison, the distance between the highest and the lowest of mankind measures not a hair’s-breadth; it is annihilated. All the distinctions of which men make so much, sink into nothing before his infinite Majesty. Both are alike dependent; and both are alike responsible. And when we look forward to death, to judgment, to eternity-O how trifling are the points of difference, compared with the points of agreement!

Verse Proverbs 22:3. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished."-Prudence is a contraction of providence; and providence literally means foresight,-seeing before,-looking forward. Such, you perceive, is precisely its import in this verse:-"The prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself." It is true that man is not endowed with prescience. He has memory, by which he retains, though even that very imperfectly, the remembrance of the past; but of the future he can know nothing with certainty. The events of the future are beyond his vision. Hence it is that prophecy comes among the evidences of inspiration, or divine commission. When Jehovah challenges the gods of the heathen to produce evidence of their pretensions to divinity, He says, "Let them show us things to come." Prophecy is a miracle-a miracle of knowledge. When a prediction is delivered in proof of an accompanying testimony or message, the subsequent fulfilment of the prediction is satisfactory evidence of its having indeed come from God; for "no man could know such things, unless God were with him." But, although man has not prescience, he may often sagaciously forecast the future. By comparing the operation

of circumstances in former times similar to those which exist now,-by observing the tempers and dispositions of the persons on whom these circumstances exert their influence,-and by considering the probability with which certain events will lead to certain other events,-a man may form, in many cases, a very shrewd anticipation of what is to come. As we learn to discern the "signs of the sky," we may learn also to interpret "the signs of the times,"-and that, both as to what is private and what is public. A large amount of what we are accustomed to understand by prudence, consists in thus forecasting the future,-anticipating evils ere they arrive, and so making provision for avoiding them, or, if they are such as cannot entirely be shunned, for meeting them to the best advantage,-so as to mitigate at least their pernicious consequences. To the "prudent man" who thus "foresees the evil and hides himself,"-as the skilful mariner, who discerns symptoms of a coming storm which the inexperienced dream not of, and betakes himself to whatever harbour is within his reach, ere the tempest gather and burst upon the deep;-to this man stands in contrast "the simple, who passes on and is punished." The word "punished" seems here to mean, not judicial infliction, but simply suffering the injury and damage, whether in person or in property, which is the natural result of imprudence, of want of foresight and forethought. As when two men are on a road together, where there is danger approaching, the one, looking before him, sees it coming, and turns aside till it is past, while the other, entirely heedless, perceives not its approach, and, before he is aware, meets it, and suffers:-or, as when two travellers are passing through a country that abounds with wild beasts,-one of them, acquainted with the danger, knowing the haunts and the ways of the different animals, has all his eyes about lain, is ever on the look-out, before and on either side, avoiding this course and choosing that, moving cautiously and treading softly,-while the other, ignorant of the danger and of the precautions necessary to safety, goes forward heedlessly, and falls an immediate victim to his rashness,-so is it with " the prudent" and "the simple" in the journey of life. Not that prudence never fails of its end. It does. There is a Providence that is above human prudence: and often it happens, that that Providence orders events in ways that are quite in contrariety to the conjectures of the most sagacious foresight. All sayings like the one before us are necessarily of a general character.

Let us apply the maxim, as it is justly and strongly capable of being applied to spiritual and eternal interests. These interests are, in the Bible, actually reduced to a simple question of prudence,-a question of profit and loss.* Well were it could we prevail on men to take up the matter in this light-to bring to a fair calculation the concerns of the soul and of the body, of time and of eternity! Well were it could we get them but to apply to these one-tenth part of the earnestness with which they set about taking stock, and bringing their books to a balance, that they may have a correct estimate of the true state of their business,-of the prosperity or the declension of their mercantile affairs! O the imprudence,-the wanton, criminal, self-destroying imprudence of leaving your accounts with God unexamined and unsettled!-in allowing the debit side of those accounts to run up, day after day, to a perpetually augmenting amount, while, on the credit side, you have nothing !-literally nothing!-all debt, and nothing to pay! Will you venture to leave your prospects for eternity in so ruinous a position? Know you not, that there is no stock from which your debts can be discharged but "the unsearchable riches of Christ?"-and will you refuse to avail yourselves of that stock, though it is set open to you for the purpose, and to allow settling-time to come on, with nothing whatever to meet it? In other words, there is no thing that can cancel the charges of guilt against you in the book of God’s remembrance, but an interest in the blood and righteousness of the one Mediator;-and will you remain without that interest, and allow death and judgment to find

you with all your guilt upon your head, through your rejection or neglect of the atonement?-to find you without a justifying righteousness, because you slight and disregard that which has been provided for you? O why will you "pass on and be punished," when you have the means of deliverance at hand,-the means of reconciliation and security?

* Matthew 16:26.

Verse Proverbs 22:4. "By humility, and the fear of the Lord, are riches, honour, and life." *1-"Humility" and "the fear of the Lord" are naturally associated. They are indeed inseparable. There can be no true humility without the fear of God, nor any true fear of God without humility.*2 Lowliness of spirit is an indispensable characteristic of a religious life. It is in the valley of humiliation that the sinner first meets with God, and comes into a state of reconciliation with Him. It is with "a broken and a contrite heart" that he receives the mercy of the cross; and the spirit of humble self-renunciation abides with him all his future days. The spirit of pride cannot dwell in the same heart with "the fear of the Lord." And we have here afresh the lesson so repeatedly before us, that the tendency of "humility and the fear of the Lord" is to "riches, honour, and life "-to bring respect and wealth, and to render the present life a life of happiness; while securing the riches of divine grace, the honour that cometh from God, and a life of eternal blessedness hereafter.

*1 Comp. Proverbs 3:5-10. rr

*2 This is strongly indicated in the Hebrew, where there is no and; humility,-the fear of Jehovah. The two are in apposition.

Verse Proverbs 22:5. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward; he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them." There seems, in this verse, to be an intended antithesis with, the fourth. "The froward" stand in contrast with the "humble fearers of the Lord,"-and "thorns and snares" with "riches, honour, and life." The characters are opposite, and so are the effects. The man who makes his way through a thicket of "thorns" is vexed, fretted, and wounded; and when there are "snares" besides, by which he is rendered insecure at every step, whether his foot may not be taken unawares, and even the troublesome progress he is making be thus arrested, great is the addition to his distress and perplexity. What a strong representation does this figure contain of the entanglements, difficulties, hazards, and miseries of "the froward"-the unprincipled and ungodly! There is no path clear, but the path of straightforward, single-eyed integrity. "He that doth keep his soul shall be far from them"-far, that is, from "the froward." Whether we render the original word soul or life; it is equally true, that the further from such the better. He that regards the real happiness of his life, and he that regards the welfare of his soul, will study to keep aloof from their society.

Verse Proverbs 22:6. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This is a most important maxim-to parents and to guardians especially. The first observation we have to make upon it is, that the "training" spoken of must be considered as including all the parts of a truly religious education. The words are often quoted very much at random, and with hardly any definite meaning whatever. But you must not forget, where they occur. It is in the word of God. In all consistency, therefore, we must understand "training in the way he should go," as signifying training in the way which the Bible points out,-bringing up according to the principles and the practice which it prescribes. With no other kind of training can

we suppose the God who gives the book to connect any promise. And I cannot bring myself to think that Solomon here means no more than what may be expected to arise from the nature of the thing; for, though even in that view of the words, there is a certain amount of truth in them,-the promise of God's covenant to the truly faithful training of children must surely be taken into the account. The various branches of godly training may be thus enumerated:-1. Instruction in right principles,-the principles of God's word:-2. The inculcation of right practice,-the practice of God's will:-3. Salutary admonition, restraint, and correction:-4. The careful avoidance of exposure to evil company and evil example:-5. The exhibition before them of a good example in ourselves:-6. Constant, believing, persevering prayer. These are all necessary: and they are all connected with one another. The first must be accompanied with the second, and the second must be founded in the first; doctrine carried out to duty, and duty based in doctrine. The third and fourth neglected will render unavailing the first and second; for what will instruction in either doctrine or duty do, unless there be the avoidance of exposure to evil communications, and the admonition, restraint, and correction, necessary to show you are in earnest? What will food and medicine do, if there is no care to preserve from the infection of deadly maladies? The fifth-our own example-not attended to, will destroy the effect of all the preceding four. For what, in general, can avail mere talking to children, nay even correcting them, and warning them to keep away from evil companions,-if, with all this, our own conduct is in contravention of the whole, and, instead of recommending our instructions, exposing them to scorn, and when the rod is applied, giving them occasion to say, in their hearts if not with their lips-"Thou that judgest doest the same things?" And then, the omission of prayer will deprive all the rest together of their efficacy. When a child is early, carefully, piously, affectionately, and perseveringly, instructed, admonished, restrained, corrected-drawn and won with all tenderness, from evil to good, from the world to God,-inured to submission and diligence, and truth and integrity, and self-control,-an example set before him in harmony with all he is taught,-and all means, along with the subject of them, earnestly and constantly commended to God for His blessing;-if a child is thus "trained in the way that he should go,"-"when he is old he will not depart from it." The language is strong. It is so strong, that one is almost afraid to qualify it; inasmuch as professedly Christian parents are so sadly prone to lay hold on any qualification of the words, and to make a pillow of it on which they set their consciences to sleep. At the same time, I cannot regard them as containing an absolute assurance that in every individual instance in which the means are faithfully used, the result will infallibly be as here stated. There are two extremes. That which has just been mentioned is one of them; but by far the least pernicious of the two. Indeed, as I have said, I almost shrink from calling it an extreme; for it is certainly much more desirable that parents, in cases where there has been a failure, should be led to distrust of themselves than to distrust of God; to examine well whether there has not been something wanting,-something they have omitted, or something they have done wrong; some deficiency, or some error, in their instruction, their correction, their vigilance, their example, or their prayers; whether they may not have "done what they ought not to have done, or failed to do what they ought to have done;" or whether, in the entire system of training there has been that decided precedence given to.their spiritual interests which there ought to have been; or that tender and winning affection and earnestness infused into the whole manner of spiritual tuition which there ought to have been; or that fervour and that faith in prayer that there ought to have been:-better that they should be led to such inquiry, and to such selfjealousy, than that by any modifying of the words, they should be tempted to take matters easy, and to allow the failure to lie lightly upon their

consciences. Still, however, the verse may be interpreted on the same principle; as expressing strongly the tendency of early instruction,-what may naturally and reasonably be expected from it, as its appropriate result. Some, it is true, have gone to an absurd extreme,-as contrary to the Bible as it is to fact, in affirming the omnipotence of education,-so that anything whatever which you may determine to make of a child may be made of it-good, bad, or indifferent, and the first as easily and as surely as the others. While this is altogether wild and presumptuous, still there must be admitted to be not a little truth in the common lines- "'Tis education forms the infant mind;

Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined." And assuredly, we ought to be as assiduous in "bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," as if all depended upon our own efforts;-while we look, at the same time, for that divine aid and that divine influence, without which our labour will be in vain. But if that which I have mentioned be an extreme, it is, as has been already said, incomparably less injurious than the other: namely, that of lulling the conscience to repose on the incessantly reiterated sentiment of the freedom and sovereignty of grace. When their children "rise up a seed of evil-doers," they are grieved no doubt; but they shake their heads and say-with a great deal more of self-complacency than of self-reproach, Ah! you see, we cannot command grace:-grace is free; God has "mercy on whom he will have mercy;" we have done what we could; but God has not seen meet to give the blessing. And it is wonderful how very easy reflections like these make them; when, if matters were duly and scripturally examined, the saying "we have done what we could" might be found far short of truth,-both as to the duty itself and the manner of it. There are doctrines which have truth, Divine truth, in them, but of which particular uses are no better than cant. This is one of them. This continual reference, with a long-faced seriousness, to the sovereign freedom of grace, is nothing better than the cant of orthodoxy, to apologize for the neglect of duty. The God of the covenant has given ample encouragement to his people, in the promises of that covenant, to bring up their children for Him. But they are connected with commanded duty,-and dependent upon the due discharge of it. Let parents set their hearts on the salvation of their children; let this be first and last and midst in their instruction, in their prayers, in their whole general training, and in their inquiries and their selection as to their children's settlement in life,-a matter in which Christian parents too often forget themselves, looking too much a great deal, both as to business and as to marriage connexions, to this world,-and so contradict all their previous professions, and prayers, and efforts, and do what they can to thwart and frustrate all:-and if there be, in any case, a failure, let it lead to selfsuspicion, self-examination, inquiry into the details of the particular case, searching of heart, and prayer. They will then, and then only, have "delivered their own souls." *

* The expression in the verse thus commented upon, in the way he should go, in the Hebrew is, literally, hit way; and Stuart remarks-"It means the bent of hit mind or inclinations, the capacity which he has to pursue this occupation or that. The Hebrew cannot be made to mean more than that the child should be educated for usefulness, in such a way as the bent of his genius indicates that he ought to be trained." The reader must form his own judgment of this view.

69-Pro_22:7-16

Proverbs 22:7-16

LECTURE LXIX.

Proverbs 22:7-16.

"The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail. He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor. Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease. He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend. The eyes of the LORD preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor. The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets. The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein. Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want." The effect of wealth has ever been to impart influence and power. Through the corruption of our nature, it is often possessed in a degree very disproportionate to the real worth of the owner; and, through the same corruption, the power arising from it is sadly abused. The rich assuming self-sufficient haughtiness, domineer over the poor, and make them feel their inferiority, taking advantage of their dependence to trample upon them,-to demand of them what is unreasonable, and even what is sinful; thus rendering their dependence "a temptation and a snare," and extorting improper compliances, for their own convenience and advantage.

O let it not be supposed, that it is here held out as a motive to the pursuit and acquisition of riches, that you may thus "lord it" over the needy, and have a host of inferiors at your command. No. But it is a motive and stimulus to aim at an lowest and honourable independence, that you may not be subjected to such degradation, nor be exposed to the many temptations that arise out of it. Men naturally like to sway a golden sceptre over others; but it is neither in nature nor in grace to like to have it swayed over themselves.

"The borrower is servant to the lender" expresses a sentiment the same in kind. The man who lends lays the borrower under an obligation; and he is apt to feel his superiority, and to take advantage of it. He has "the borrower" under him. He asserts his claim upon him. He has it ever in his power to annoy him; and that he may make use of him for his own purposes, he may prolong the loan, and renew his bill. Having him by this means at his mercy, he contrives to keep him his humble servant. The precept-"Owe no man anything, but to love one another," may, doubtless, be interpreted with a literality which would render it an impossibility. This much, however, we may surely say with truth, that the more literally it can be kept the better. Adhere as strictly to the letter as you can. Maintain then an honourable freedom. Cherish the spirit of independence. Prefer being your own master to bringing yourselves under obligation and subjection. Study, as far as possible, to have it to say-that no man holds against you any undischarged obligation.

Verse Proverbs 22:8. "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity; and the rod of his anger shall fail."-In nature, the crop corresponds to the seed; and, as formerly noticed the figure is not seldom, in Scripture, applied to the final results (and sometimes even to the present,) of different courses of moral conduct. In the divine administration, as in the vegetable world, evil produces evil, and good good:-"They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same," Job 4:8. Be it observed here, that these words were not true in the precise sense and according to the purpose of him who used them. He meant, that invariably the providential dealings of God corresponded with men's characters; so that he inferred, from the very fact of Job's sufferings, that he must have been guilty of flagrant secret sins. He saw him reaping suffering, and he concluded that ho must have "sowed iniquity." This was false and cruel. But still, when the words are taken with reference to the ultimate issues of human conduct, they contain a most important truth. To "reap vanity" is to reap nothing that is substantial or permanently profitable. The man who "sows iniquity" may for the time, perhaps, obtain the advantage he seeks; but it will prove all worthless in the end. "The harvest shall be a heap, in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow." And this leads me to remark, that the word translated here vanity has also, and as properly, the sense of affliction, grief, misery. In the Vulgate it is rendered by the Latin word for mischiefs; in the Septuagint Greek the rendering is much the same; as it is also in other versions. From the latter part of the verse, it is likely that there is some special reference to the "iniquity" of oppression,-of the violence and wrong produced by haughty superiority and power:-"the rod of his anger shall fail." The rod by which he oppressed and smote the poor, for his own selfish ends-that rod "shall fail." Death shall wrest it from his hands. God shall break it in pieces; and his tyranny and iniquity shall leave him nothing but shame, remorse, and the fruits of divine vengeance.

Verse Proverbs 22:9. "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor."-In the Hebrew the expression is-"He that is good of eye." The opposite phrase-"an evil eye"-is frequent in Scripture, and is used in various senses. It is applied, for example, in a general way, to duplicity of principle; in which sense it stands opposed to what our Lord calls "having the eye single." *1 It is applied also to a perverted state of the affections toward any of their objects,-supposed of course to be indicated by the looks.*2 It is further used for envy;*3 and further still for a principle closely allied to envy-covetousness-eagerly looking at the object desired, and grudging at every expenditure of it.*4 *1 Luke 11:34. rr *2 Deuteronomy 28:54; Deuteronomy 28:56. rr *3 Matthew 20:15; Mark 7:22: where it is distinguished from covetousness.

*4 Proverbs 23:6; Proverbs 28:22: Deuteronomy 15:9. rr This meaning is illustrated by the use of the corresponding expression, in the verse before us,-"a good eye." It means the eye of compassionate and generous tenderness,-that looks, "with a desire to relieve, on the wants and woes of others, melting in sympathy over their sufferings; and that, at the same time, does not merely weep-shedding unavailing tears,-but, affecting the heart, opens the. hand-"for he giveth of his bread to the poor." Perhaps the expression-"he giveth of his bread to the poor," may mean, that he is ready even to share his own provision with them; not merely to give a small portion of his superfluities, but to stint himself for their supply. And this is the spirit of true charity. "He shall be blessed:"-blessed of men; and blessed of God.

Verse Proverbs 22:10. "Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease."-By "the scorner" in various occurrences of the designation in this Book, is meant the profane and impious scoffer at religion,-the "mocker, whose bands shall be made strong." Here it

seems to mean the man of contemptuous and sneering insolence,-of sarcasm and banter,-of sly and keen insinuation,-of malicious "jibes and jests and irony;" the man who is ever holding up others to ridicule or to suspicion; who vents his spleen against all in succession that come in his way, and whom it suits a present selfish or silly purpose to turn the laugh against, and to make the butt of satire and lampoon. The sayings and doings of such a character are the source of endless heartburnings, jealousies, and contentions. "The scorner" may be mixed up with these as a party,-himself the object of resentment and retaliation; or they may be stirred up by his agency among others. Men of this stamp are the very pests of social life, in families, in neighbourhoods, in the circles of acquaintance and friendship. They are such characters as Paul may be supposed to have had in his eye, when, in inculcating peace, he threw in his conditional if-his modifying clause-"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." There is really no living in peace with them. There is no agreement, no quietness, no comfort, no enjoyment, till you get rid of them. They are the blowers of the fires of strife. Their words are seeds of malice. Their very looks set friends at variance. Their jests are dictated by the gall of ill nature, at which the very laugh is meant to engender spite and foment discord. They are cankerworms in the flowers and fruits of social life.

There are persons who sometimes make their appearance in churches,-persons who are full of spiritual pride and self-consequence,-"wise in their own conceits"-"O how lofty are their eyes, and their eyelids are lifted up!"-"no doubt they are the people, and wisdom shall die with them!" They "trust in themselves that they are right, and despise others." They are supercilious "scorners" of all opinions but their own; and they treat all others with the sneer of selfsufficient derision. They thus produce "contention, strife, and reproach"-envies, resentments, charges and recriminations, uncharitable conjectures and surmises, schisms and divisions, wherever they go. And from church to church sometimes they do go,-carrying with them their tinder-box and their steel:-and woe to each in succession! Others are disposed to be at peace, and would live in it, in comfort and prosperity, if these strife-kindlers would but allow them. What, then, is the remedy, when such characters arise, and are found to be incorrigible? Here we have it:-"Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease." He shows a sad absence of the leading graces of the Christian character, and a consequent unfitness for a place amongst the children of God. His spirit is the very opposite of what is engendered by the influence of the gospel; and the prevalence of it is utterly destructive of all the ends of Christian fellowship. Humility and love, with their happy results, peace and harmony, are essential to the spiritual prosperity and growth of the churches of Christ. And surely that which is the very reverse of the example of the Master, and of what his Holy Spirit, when he dwells in the soul, produces, and which essentially and flagrantly mars and frustrates the very designs of Christian communion, ought to be put away. There is no cure but "casting out." Such men are the Jonahs of churches, and of the coteries of social life. As long as they are there, there will be nothing but the bluster and commotion of the storm,-"toiling in rowing," incessant distress, vain exertion, and no progress. The sea cannot "cease from its raging," till they are thrown overboard.

Verse Proverbs 22:11. "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend."-By "pureness of heart" we should surely here understand, in its full extent, what is usually meant by the phrase in the word of God. It signifies sincerity, it is true; but it signifies that sincerity as attaching to and characterizing something more. It is the sincerity of genuine piety, of

inward sanctity, of all the holy principles and affections which the heart-searching God enjoins and approves; which He loves; on which He smiles and "lifts the light of his countenance."*

* See Psalms 24:3-5; Psalms 73:1; Matthew 15:8; and, in connexion with these, to impress the necessity of guileless sincerity, Psalms 32:1-2; John 1:47; Psalms 51:6.

He that "loveth pureness of heart," is he who not only has an admiring affection for it in others, but desires it and cultivates it in himself,-using with constancy, diligence, and prayer, all the means of heart-purification. The Apostle, speaking of "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," says, "He that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God and approved of men." Solomon agrees with him. "He who loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend." By the "grace of his lips"' we are to understand, not merely propriety, correctness, and elegance of address, and persuasiveness of manner, but such address as the vehicle of wise and salutary counsel,-characterized by prudence, humility, and respect. Even when there is no liking to true religion, there are some of its effects which command esteem and win affection. Humble consistency, propriety, a conduct appropriate to station, firmness of adherence to principle with deferential gentleness of demeanour,-the great, even kings themselves, will admire and honour. So was it in the case of Joseph; of Ezra and Nehemiah; of Mordecai; of Daniel; of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and so has it been with others. My brethren, let us cultivate the character, independently of every consideration of its effects to ourselves, amongst men. It is good in the sight of God; and that is enough. That should be our supreme reason for seeking it. Many, instead of reaping from it the favour of the prince, have been exposed on account of it to persecution and to death. The will of God must be our law, and the approving smile of God our reward. "While we thank God for the favour He may give us in the sight of men,-we must see that we seek no friendships, whether among the greatest or the least, the highest or the lowest, by any other means whatever than the "pureness of heart" and the consistency of life here recommended. Even in regard to mere external ceremonial defilement, Daniel and his companions would not, in compliance with the wishes and for the sake of the favour of the king, pollute themselves. It would have been a transgression against their God. It would have defiled their consciences, and impaired their sense of integrity before Him:-and what would the favour of the king of Babylon have been to them, when for it they had forfeited that of the God of heaven? Never must the lips be allowed to assume a grace that is inconsistent with pureness and sanctity; or to give utterance to a single word of flattering courtesy, to which the heart does not respond-no not for the sake of the friendly regard of all the crowned heads of Europe. What Solomon says is rather an encouragement to love and cultivate "pureness of heart," than a motive to be directly regarded, and allowed to influence us to this duty. It is only one of those indirect results which may be enjoyed as a testimony of the higher approbation of God.

Verse Proverbs 22:12. "The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge; and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor." This language is susceptible of various interpretations:-

1. By some it is interpreted in immediate connexion with the preceding verse. According to this view "the eyes of the Lord preserving knowledge" means their being upon it at all times for its protection and safety; knowledge being thus put-the abstract for the concrete-for the persons who are under its influence; so that the words in the former part of the verse will amount, in effect, to much the same with the expression-"the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous." Thus Dr.

Lawson:*1-"When knowledge in the mind is attended by pureness in the heart and grace in the lips, they form an amiable and worthy character, which draws to it the eyes and hearts of wise men: but that is not the principal recommendation of it; for the eyes of the Lord himself preserve knowledge, and watch for good over the man whose lips and conversation are regulated by it."*2 This certainly renders the antithesis in the verse pointed and natural:-"but he overthroweth the words of the transgressor."

*1 So also Stuart.

*2 Comp. 2 Chronicles 16:9.

2. The first part of the verse has been understood of the vigilant care exercised by the Lord over knowledge,-that is, over the knowledge of Himself-over divine truth-over true religion in the world; of the providence of God preserving this truth, in the midst of abounding ignorance, idolatry, and infidelity under all its forms; of the successful overthrow of all opposition-all the false reasonings, the insidious sophistries, and corrupting heresies, of the unbelieving and ungodly; and the extraordinary preservation of the volume of inspired truth in such a measure of purity from age to age, amidst all the attempts to suppress and destroy it. This interpretation of the words has been illustrated by the calling of Abraham,-by the revelation given to Moses, and the commission of the "lively oracles" received by him from Jehovah, to the sacred custody of His ancient people, chosen from among the nations of the earth for the very purpose of the guardianship and preservation of "knowledge"-the knowledge of His law, of His purposes, and promises, and covenant:-and, under the New Testament dispensation, by the completing of the sacred canon, and its constant preservation through such a variety of concurrent causes;-its republication, after ages of darkness, at the glorious Reformation;-its translation and circulation in so many of the languages and dialects of mankind, so that now nothing could destroy it, short of the miraculous interference of the almighty power of its divine Author. If the former part of the verse be taken in this sense, then the latter may be interpreted of the vanity of "all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against it." Infidel writers, in the elation of their presumptuous confidence, have given utterance, at times, to predictions of the speedy overthrow of what they have stigmatized as superstition and old-wives’ fables. But their own words-not God’s, have been "overthrown," and have been proved "great swelling words of vanity." Shame hath covered their authors. And "knowledge"-the best, the highest, the most valuable-Hie knowledge of the "only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent," which is "life eternal," remains in all its perfection to this hour; and never did it present a fairer and surer promise of universality and permanence:-"The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever," Isaiah 40:6-8.

3. There is still another sense of the words,-which they may bear; though by some, perhaps, it may be regarded as fanciful:-"The eyes of the Lord keep knowledge:"-they retain it. What He sees, be it but for a moment, does not, as with our vision, pass away. It remains. We see, and, having seen, what passes from the eye passes also from the memory. Not so is it with God’s vision. The sight of His eye is no uncertain or forgetful glance. It is unerring and permanent. All that His eyes have ever seen is known as perfectly now as when it passed before them,-as when it existed or

happened!-And in the exercise of this permanent and perfect knowledge, "He overthroweth the words of the transgressors." All their evil desert remains before Him. They can neither elude His knowledge, nor bribe His justice, nor resist His power. They shall all be made to learn by fearful experience, "whose words shall stand, His, or theirs!"

Verse Proverbs 22:13. "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." It is not a common thing for lions to frequent streets. The forest is their place. But the indolent sluggard conjures up imaginary difficulties and perils, such as would never occur to any but a morbid mind. Any excuse will do: the fancy of danger-the pretence of fear. But what keeps him still, even in cases of the utmost urgency, is not cowardice; it is mere indolence. Yet would he rather incur the imputation of timid chicken-heartedness than make any exertion, than rouse himself to the slightest activity. He is ready to say, "Call me what you will-abuse me as you like-say and think of me what you please-but let me alone." The verse is obviously the language of sarcastic and cutting derision; and is intended, were that possible, to put the sluggard to the blush.

Let us beware of the encroachments of this somnolent and lazy habit. In calls of duty especially,-when the good of others and the glory of God summon us to exertion, let us strive resolutely against it. Never let it, in any case, be said,-never let our own consciences have it to say,-that indolence-the mere indisposition to bestir ourselves, has lost us an opportunity of glorifying God or benefiting men,-our families, our friends, our neighbours, our country, or the church of God. Never let us conjure up "lions" that have no being save in our own fancy, and, so lay up for ourselves regrets afterwards, and stings of conscience, which seasonable exertion, then too late, might have prevented,-nay more, might have substituted for them pleasing reflections and present and anticipated enjoyment.

Verse Proverbs 22:14. "The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein." For a full, affectionate, faithful, and fearful commentary on this emphatic and appalling sentence I refer you to the early portions of this Book, formerly under our review.* I have called the sentence before us an appalling one. Is it not? Can any words be more so? It is not so much the strong figure used-the "deep pit"-artfully concealed-into which the unwary passenger falls headlong ere he is aware, and perishes:-a pit this, into which a fall is more than danger, is certain death and destruction;-I refer more particularly to the latter words of the verse-"he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein!" O my hearers-my youthful hearers especially,-this is solemn, this is terrible. It is the language of bitter experience;-of a spirit that had felt the agony of being deserted of God, and in danger of being given up to judicial and final abandonment. Solomon had fallen into this pit. He had forsaken God, and God had for the time forsaken him. And Oh! the agony of awakened conviction and felt abandonment! To what do the fearful words amount? To this: that in His righteous displeasure, there is not a heavier curse which an offended God can allow to fall upon the object of His wrath, than leaving him to be a prey to the seductive blandishments of an unprincipled woman:-that if God held any one in abhorrence, this would be the severest vengeance He could take on him. O! let youth hear this, and tremble! There are few vices-if indeed there be any-more sadly prevalent; and there are few-if indeed there be any-more miserably destructive of soul, body, and estate. The abhorrence and the curse of God are in the haunts, whether open or secret, of profligacy and lewdness. Wish you to have proof of your being "abhorred of the Lord?" Court the company of the "strange woman." If not, flee from the temptation, as you would from the opening mouth of hell!

* See Proverbs 2:16-19; Proverbs 5:3-12. The following verse contains a statement of fact,-and the duty arising out of it. The fact stated is, that "foolishness is bound in the heart of a child." By "foolishness'" is to be understood not merely frivolity, levity, and nonsense; but something greatly more deplorable,-the principles of moral evil-of spiritual corruption. This "foolishness" is "hound in the child's heart." It has a firm seat, from which it is not easily dislodged. It is inbred-entwined closely and intimately, and with sad universality of influence, among all the natural passions, desires, and affections of the human constitution, as well as all the powers and faculties of the mind, which are all tainted by the corrupting leaven.

"The rod of correction shall drive it far from him." It is here implied that the foolishness is so "bound in the heart," as to need this, among other means of expulsion. I say among others; for nothing could be more preposterous than to suppose the rod by itself to be meant here. It is "the rod" as accompanying, and contributing to give effect to instruction, admonition, counsel, example, and prayer.* And in order, as we have seen, to the end being effectually answered, the nature and degree of the fault, the time, the temper, the manner, and the measure, of the correction, must all be carefully attended to. Injudicious chastisement, ill-timed, ill-tempered, ill-adapted to the case, and ill-proportioned in measure, may effectually frustrate the end in view; nay may even serve to promote its opposite, confirming, instead of expelling folly.

* See Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 19:18.

Verse Proverbs 22:16. "He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want."-How frequently, under different modifications and aspects, does the wise man introduce this subject! There are here two things which may and sometimes do go together-"oppressing the poor, to increase riches," and-"giving to the rich." The former is done to gratify avarice; the latter, to humour vanity. The one also furnishes the means of the other; the wealth that is obtained by the oppression of the poor, being employed in courting, by gifts and accommodations, the favour of the rich. There is something in this fitted to stamp the character with universal odium:-the idea of getting the riches that are spent in courting the rich, at the expense of the comfort of the poor, by screwing them down, stinting them in their means of life, grinding their faces, and defrauding them of their own! Such conduct brings a double curse, as that in verse sixth brings a double blessing:-first, for his oppression of the poor, who, as we have often seen, are God's special care:-and secondly, for his selfish application of what is thus obtained. There is no principle in either, of regard to God,-either to His authority or to His glory; nor of benevolence to men. The sole object is the gratification and aggrandizement of self. It is self that oppresses the poor, and keeps from them what they do need; and it is self that curries favour with the rich, by giving to them that which they do not need. Of the man who acts thus, want shall be the doom. He shall not prosper. The curse of God will blast his acquisitions, and bring him low:-and in the end his portion shall be destitution and misery for ever.

70-Pro_22:17-29

Proverbs 22:17-29

LECTURE LXX.

Proverbs 22:17-29.

"Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge: for it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. That thy trust may be in the Lord, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge; that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee? Rob not the poor, because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them. Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul. Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee? Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set. Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men." At this point, we enter on the third of the five parts into which, as I stated in the introductory Lecture, this Book has usually been divided. It extends from the first of these verses to the end of the twenty-fourth chapter. It is more of a connected character than the second part, and bears a closer resemblance to the style and manner of the first. The opening words-"Bow down thine ear, and hear"-enjoin the attitude of earnest, eager listening;-the attitude at times to bo observed in a public assembly, when anything happens to be introduced by the speaker particularly in coincidence with the likings of his audience. There is then a breathless silence; every ear is erect and forward; and where hearing is dull, every aid applied to the organ that may prevent a single word of what is said being lost. But too often, alas! are to be witnessed the listless countenance, and the drowsy eye; and the ear, instead of being bent to a listening posture, is allowed, with all indifference, to catch or to miss the passing sounds, just as it may chance; and thus sounds that convey the most important and solemn truths strike upon the organ, without the mind’s being conscious of the least impression. Hence, we have the further injunction-"Apply thine heart." There must be a feeling of interest-a desire to know and understand what is said. The connexion is very intimate between the state of the dispositions and the right exercise of the understanding. Simple ignorance,-ignorance that is involuntary and unavoidable-can never be culpable. The ignorance that is culpable, and that merits punitive retribution, is that which arises solely from moral causes.* There is divine wisdom, divine glory, divine suitableness and consistency, in the truths of God’s Word; but from the state of "the heart" there is a film on the eyes of the mind that renders sinners criminally, because wilfully, blind to all their excellence. When by the Holy Spirit’s power this film is removed and there is once spiritual illumination and discernment,-a taste and relish of divine "knowledge" imparted,-the eager longing is inspired for a growing measure of attainment in it. Then comes to be realized the truth of the

verse which follows:-"For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them (the words of the wise and the knowledge thence derived) within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips." "Keeping them within" refers not to the memory merely, but to the heart. They must be treasured up there from delight in them and love to them. Like Him who is their subject, they must "dwell in the heart by faith." As there is no kind of knowledge that can be compared in value with the knowledge of God's truth, there is none of which the acquisition is more exquisitely grateful. It introduces a "peace that passeth all understanding,"-a joy before unknown,-a "joy unspeakable and full of glory"-a joy that wakes into fresh life as, in the progress of our inquiries, new light is thrown upon any of the divine discoveries. What believer is there who has not experienced the exquisite nature of the pleasure? And what pleasure so reasonable? The philosopher may scorn it: but if the discovery of a fact, or the solution of a problem, or the establishment of a theory, in science, gives him satisfaction, why should not the Christian be vindicated in the delight he feels on discerning more clearly the mind of God, on points connected, not with time merely, but with eternity? Can anything be imagined more important, more full of interest than this?

* Compare Romans 1:28; John 8:43 (where hear means bear): Ephesians 4:18 (where blindness means more properly callousness or hardness-as in the margin-and as appears from the following verse-"who, being past feeling," &c): and Deuteronomy 29:3-4. The understanding and retaining of "the words of wisdom" are necessary qualifications for the right imparting of them. This seems, substantially, the lesson of the latter part of the verse:-"They shall withal be fitted in thy lips:" that is, thou shalt be able to communicate them fitly-in an appropriate, intelligent, and effective manner. In proportion as God's word is "kept within"-in the understanding with intelligence and discrimination, in the memory with clearness and readiness, and in the heart with experience and affection-will be the degree of capability to teach others, and of probable efficiency and success.

There is another benefit that may be connected with "keeping them within." When we have the word "hidden in our hearts," it is the means of progressive sanctification. It works with a leavening influence amongst all our affections, desires and passions, purifying the whole inner man.* And hence arises a further peculiar fitness of the words of wisdom in the lips. Most unfitting and incongruous are they in the lips of the ungodly. It is only when a holy life makes it manifest that they are in the heart, that they are appropriately "fitted in the lips."

* Psalms 119:11; 1 John 3:9.

Verse Proverbs 22:19. "That thy trust may be in the Lord, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee." On this verse observe the following things:-

1. The particularity of address,-"to thee, even to thee." In the days of prophetic inspiration, it was no unusual thing for the servants of God to receive express commissions to individuals, in which they alone were concerned. But the whole Book of God,-the entire "word of His testimony,"-should be considered by every one as addressed to him;-as much so as if there were no other human being besides himself, and as if it had been "given by inspiration" to himself alone. There is no room for any saying, as Jehu did of old,-"To which of all us?" The answer would, in every case, be-to each of you all-to thee-to thee-to thee. Not that there is no such thing as "rightly dividing the word of truth;" not that there are no portions of it that have a special appropriateness of application to the characters and circumstances of individuals. Still, the great truths of the Word are alike to each and to all. And speedily a man may be placed in one or other of the peculiar situations to

which the different portions of it are adapted! I know of nothing more important than for every individual to bring divine lessons home to himself. Too often, alas! we forget personal amidst general application of particular truths. We think of them as intended for men, and forget that they are designed for us. Would you then profit by what you hear?-keep in mind, that what is addressed to ail is addressed to each-"to thee, even to thee."

2. Mark the emphasis on the time-"this day." We set a mark, in our minds, on days that have been rendered memorable by events of special interest. Would Noah, think you, ever forget the day of the year on which he and his family entered the ark, and when "the Lord shut him in?"-or the day on which he again stepped out of it upon the green earth, to be the second father of mankind? Would the shepherds ever forget on what night of the year the angelic messengers, amidst the light of the glory of the Lord, announced to them the divine Saviour's birth, and when "the multitude of the heavenly host," bursting on their sight, "ascended jubilant," saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men?" Or would Cornelius ever forget the day and the hour when the angelic visitant directed him to that instruction whereby he and all his house should be saved? You, it is true, have many times heard the words of truth. Let me, however, remind any of you who have thus often heard, and who still neglect them, of the importance to you of each day that you enjoy the privilege. Every time you thus hear them, your eternal all depends on the reception you give to the message of God. This day may be important indeed, for it may be the last on which divine truth shall sound in your ears. O that it may be a day to be sacredly and joyfully remembered by every sinner now present, as the day on which he first felt its inestimable preciousness to his soul! If you thus hear, and thus improve the opportunity, the day will not be obliterated from your memory by the lapse of eternity. There is one thing of which with emphasis it may be said to each individual sinner-It is "to thee, even to thee:"-I mean the message of the Gospel-the message of free mercy through the divine Mediator. There is no exception; there is no difference. The Law speaks to each-"to thee, even to thee"-its sentence of condemnation. The Gospel speaks to each-"to thee, even to thee"-its offer of free, full, immediate, irrevocable, pardon on the ground of the universal atonement. To every fellow-creature we can say-An adequate atonement has been made for all; therefore for thee-"for thee, even for thee;" and on the ground of that atonement does divine mercy come near to thee-"to thee, even to thee"-with the offer of forgiveness, acceptance, and life. "This day" is the message of life again "made known! unto thee, O sinner; and there is no obstacle to thine acceptance and enjoyment of it, but what is in thyself;-none in God; none in Christ; none in the atonement; none in the divine offer of its virtue to mankind. "To thee is the word of this salvation sent;" and "now is the accepted time, now the day of salvation."

3. Mark the design:-"That thy trust may he in the Lord." Can there be a design more gracious? It is connected with the sinner's present and eternal happiness. "They that know thy name," says David, "shall put their trust in thee:" then it follows-"for thou, Lord, hast never forsaken them that seek thee." No. God "keeps them by His power, through faith unto salvation." God is revealed, to be trusted in: and He is worthy of all confidence. To trust in God is to trust in His perfections, as made known in the gospel,-in His mercy as it there appears in union with the justice and holiness of His character and government, and in His faithfulness to all the "exceeding great and precious promises" of His covenant, which are "yea and amen in Christ Jesus." All may thus trust in Him. I say to each hearer-"To thee, even to thee" is God in Christ made known, that thou mayest trust in

Him. This trust arises from the knowledge of him as in Christ the God of salvation. Mark the testimony-"Who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God" 1 Peter 1:20-21. A blessing is ever represented as accompanying and flowing from it; while the language dictated by it is that of unmoved tranquillity, and fearless joy-"O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation," Isaiah 12:1-2.

Verses Proverbs 22:20-21. "Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge; that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee."-There are differences among critics and translators about tho exact meaning of the original word translated, in the former of these verses, "excellent things." Yet I know not that it could be altered for the better. In all the views given of it there is still the idea, more plain or more covert, of superiority or excellence. If, with the Vulgate and Septuagint, we take up the sense "thrice repeated"*1-why are things thus repeated but for their excellence? If with the French translation, we render-"things relating to rulers or governors," this, when analysed, may yield the meaning of princely or royal things,-which is but a figurative way of expressing their transcendent superiority. And even the simple rendering-rules or directions (Parkhurst) must be taken, according to the etymology of the term, as implying their having in them a kind of royal authority or commanding excellence.*2 The discoveries of the Bible-its truths and precepts alike, are in the highest sense "excellent things." The word of God bears, like His works, the impress of His name and character. There is in it a self-evidencing power. It is its own witness. It meets all our consciousnesses, and is adapted to all our felt exigencies; and, though there are many things in it which our reason could never have discovered, yet they are such as, when discovered, are none of them contrary to reason, although above it: and those-that are within the compass of our understanding, recommend themselves to all our convictions, as worthy of the divine Being, and suited to us. There is impressed upon it throughout infallible proof of its divine original,-in its infinite superiority to all that unassisted human effort had ever been able to discover of God and of divine things. All is the harmony of perfect excellence. In this very Book of Proverbs-what a fund of practical wisdom!-all holy-all divine; all recognizing man’s relation to God, as every system of virtue ought to do; all founded in "the fear of the Lord" as "the beginning of wisdom!" And this divine "excellence" of the contents of the Sacred Volume is one of the evidences by which our faith in its certainty may reasonably be confirmed:-"that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth."

*1 This rendering is based on a different reading of the Hebrew.

*2 Stuart renders (perhaps rightly) "Have I not written to thee heretofore" &c.; and remarks that the Hebrew word ùìùø■, while meaning " literally the day before yesterday, has also a more general meaning, viz. formerly, in time past;" and considers Solomon as alluding to "the previous portions of this Book."

According to what has just been said, the more we know what the word of God is,-the more we study it, and become acquainted with its contents, and the more, in consequence, we experience

of its holy power, and of the happiness arising from conformity to its dictates,-the greater will be our assurance of its truth. We shall have "the witness in ourselves" of its divinity,-the experimental evidence of its heavenly origin,-the proof of its being from God in its tendency to God-in its influence, (according to the degree in which it is prized, and felt, and followed, its spirit imbibed and its principles obeyed,)-over human character, in assimilating man to his Maker, in the beauty of holiness. There is a certainty as to facts, which rests upon the nature and amount of the testimony by which they are affirmed.* But besides this, and besides all the variety and force of external proof of the genuineness, authenticity, and inspiration of the Sacred Volume, there is, in its doctrinal discoveries and holy precepts, and in the adaptation of its provisions to the state and the need of man, an internal evidence;-and there is, in the realized efficacy of the doctrine here taught, in changing the heart and bringing the whole man under the power of new principles and new affections,-all working out a holy and a happy life,-an experimental evidence of its truth and divinity not less valuable and satisfactory, than they are, in their nature, in perfect harmony with the soundest reason. O! it is a blessed thing, to perceive clearly the one, and to possess largely the other!-a blessed thing thus to "know the certainty of the words of truth." It is thus that we "have peace with God," and that we "go on our way rejoicing."

* See Luke 1:1-4. And from an intimate and experimental acquaintance with revealed truth arises another advantage, here mentioned by Solomon-"that thou mightest answer the word of truth to them that send unto thee." "Them that send unto thee," is most naturally explained-them that consult thee, or apply to thee for instruction. This may be the case, not with public teachers alone, but with private Christians. And, as we have already seen, on verse 18th (Proverbs 22:18), (of which the sentiment is similar,) it is a clear, familiar, discriminative, and experimental acquaintance with the contents of the inspired volume, that imparts fitness for this important duty. A professed believer in the Bible cannot but feel embarrassed and awkward, when inquiries are made by any desirous of instruction in its great truths, and they are constrained from the want of this, to "send them away empty." See then, beloved, that you seek to make yourselves more and more intelligently and extensively familiar with the varieties of divine communication in the Sacred Scriptures,-that you may be able to "instruct the ignorant and them that are out of the way," and "ready always to give an answer, with meekness and fear, to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you."

Verses Proverbs 22:22-23. "Rob not the poor, because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them."-O the condescending kindness of God-the God of love, to the poor! to those who are most in danger of being overlooked and despised. Old and New Testaments are full of the repetitions of it. Frequently have we had the subject before us. We do not-we dare not pass it. Where there is repetition in the Word of God, it is right that there should be repetition on the part of those who teach it;-that its lessons may be impressed the more deeply, and never allowed to slip out of mind. In the midst of the sameness too, there is variety.-"Robbery" of the poor may be practised directly or indirectly;-by taking from him, or by keeping from him; or by making his poverty a temptation to him to part with what he ought to retain. Few may think of "robbing the poor" in the first of these ways. Robbers generally seek better game. Yet even the little of the poor does not always escape the hand of covetous rapacity. But many there are, who "rob the poor" in the second of the ways mentioned. They deprive the poor of their due-keeping back from them what they are in fairness

entitled to, and taking advantage of their urgent necessities to effect this; screwing them down to the very least for which, by the dread of starvation, they can be prevailed upon to work. And not seldom too has the poor been tempted to surrender his rights and privileges by being made to feel, for the purpose of extorting it from him, his helpless, unprotected, friendless condition. This has been done by private extortion; and it has been done, as Solomon here hints, "in the gate"-that is, by an undue advantage taken of the law, against the man who has no means of selfdefence, and who has thus cruelty and unrighteousness added to his affliction. Every way in which the poor is robbed "because he is poor,"-that is, in which advantage is taken of his indigent and dependent condition,-provokes the indignation of Heaven: "For the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them." We are here reminded, that the poor are not friendless. The words "will plead their cause" have an immediate reference to judicial proceedings, alluded to in the previous phrase-"in the gate"-the place of such proceedings. At human tribunals, we sometimes find disinterested and benevolent counsel, who step forward to the protection of the poor, and gratuitously offer themselves to "plead their cause." JEHOVAH HIMSELF is the counsel of the poor. He "will plead their cause." He will interpose by his providence for their protection; or if here they are allowed to suffer, He will not permit their oppressors to pass with impunity, when He rises up to final judgment. He will show himself their friend and patron by avenging them on their adversaries. He will "spoil the soul of those that spoiled them."

Verses Proverbs 22:24-25. "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." In this wise and prudent admonition, it is evident, that by "friendship" is to be understood intimacy,-the alliance of mutual trust and confidence, and unbosoming familiarity and interchange of mind and heart; and by "an angry man," a man of hot, fiery, passionate temperament. For the comfort of personal and domestic life, there are few things more important than looking carefully to the tempers of those whom we choose as intimates, either with ourselves, or at our firesides, in the circle of family privacy and love. Whatever other qualifications a man may have that are fitted to make his society agreeable and tempt us to court it,-they may be many and attractive,-temper may more than neutralize the whole. Nothing can be more painful than a state of incessant apprehension of waking slumbering fires,-kindling to sudden ignition some latent combustibles; so that, instead of unreserved and open freedom, which is the very life and soul of "friendship," every word must be carefully weighed ere it is uttered, lest it should prove a spark, and cause an explosion. It is insufferably irksome, to be ever under such restraint, and ever in the midst of such risks of touching the secret springs of hasty passion. And the consequences are mischievous. Not only will the intimacy of such men, men who are thus choleric and quarrelsome, endanger our getting involved in numberless factions and feuds with themselves, and, what is worse, with others through their means,-so that we shall not be able, how desirous soever we may be, to live in peace,-that first and best of blessings in social life to a good man:-but another and a greater hazard is mentioned in the latter verse-"lest thou learn his ways." It may seem strange that we should be supposed in danger of learning what we feel to be so very disagreeable. And yet we may. As already hinted, a passionate man may have interesting and attractive qualities otherwise. Now, in proportion as we either admire or love him for these, will be the hazard of our thinking the less evil of his one defect, and trying to palliate and to smile at it. And there is no little truth in the saying, that we either are like our friends and intimates, or will soon be. But more than this. The sudden and often unreasonable heats of the passionate man are ever apt to fret and irritate our

spirits and thus to form a habit of resemblance by the very reaction upon ourselves of his hot and hasty temper. And thus, from being good-natured and agreeable, we may gradually become very much the reverse. This is "a snare to the soul." It not only affects the comfort and tranquillity of our own minds and our social enjoyment-but our spiritual interests. Angry passions "war against the soul." They are inconsistent with the principles of the truth of God, and with the precepts and example of our divine Master-and consequently with the evidence of true godliness, and of our relation to Christ as his subjects, and to God as his children. "The fruit of the Spirit is Love."

Verses Proverbs 22:26-27. "Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee." On all subjects, we require "line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little."-You may think the subject in these verses is one on which we hardly require much urgency:-that there is enough in general of self-love in the heart to prevent any great excess of readiness in "striking hands and becoming sureties for debts." But there are some dispositions that are generous and obliging; and there are those who are young and unexperienced in the ways of the world, who do stand in need of having such cautions repeated and urged.* * See on this subject Proverbs 6:1-5; Proverbs 11:15; Proverbs 17:18. The language evidently implies, not a universal prohibition of suretiship, as of a thing wrong in itself and under whatever circumstances, but an advice and admonition to special caution and circumspection. There may, as I have before said, be cases in which it is more than justifiable,-in which every claim of necessity and mercy renders it an imperative duty. But still, we are not entitled, for the sake of one, to expose others to risk. We are not entitled to overlook and disregard either the risks and rights of other creditors, or the interests of a dependent family. The reason too assigned here for the caution shows us, that in our dealings with others, a prudent regard to our own interests is a perfectly legitimate motive;-"if thou hast nothing to pay"-that is, if, on the failure of the party for whom you have become responsible, you have not enough to make good your suretiship,-"Why should he take away thy bed from under thee?" This may seem a very rare case. Yet such creditors there have been, and may still be, whom selfishness and resentment drive to the extreme of harshness:-and whose irritation, perhaps, is exasperated by their seeing, that but for the said suretiship the party would have come to a stand and to a settlement earlier, and with so much the less loss to those whom he has involved. We are commanded to "love our neighbour as ourselves:" but to do for him what might expose us to having our very bed sold from under us, is to love him better than ourselves, which is a step beyond the divine injunction. And so many are the cases in which it is most difficult for us to get at the precise state and prospects of the person-friend though he may be-who makes the application, that there is hardly anything that calls for greater care, or warrants, in the eyes of all sensible and candid people, a larger measure of reserve, and even, generally speaking, of steady refusal.

Verse Proverbs 22:28. "Remove not the ancient land-mark which thy fathers have set."-This is in correspondence with the express statutes of the Mosaic law.* The act is one of detestable deceit and fraud. A man may by this means, if he goes about it cautiously and by degrees, and chooses carefully his opportunities,-and especially when he has to do with one who is somewhat careless and unobservant in such matters,-add to the border of his own inheritance, and thus benefit himself and his family. But it is in a way which the God of truth and righteousness abhors. O let every one bear in mind, that how cleverly, ingeniously, and successfully soever this may be

effected, and how secretly soever "from the eyes of all living," eluding the detection of the defrauded himself, of his relations, and friends, and creditors, and of those public authorities to whom it is given in charge to search out frauds and to right the injured,-yet is it not unknown. The eye sees it, to which "the darkness and the light are both alike." Every inch of land, every fraction of wealth, so acquired, has the curse of the Just One upon it.

* See Deuteronomy 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:17. The words have been sometimes applied in a very different department-even to the danger and the criminality of intermeddling with old and long-established articles of doctrine in religion, and principles and statutes of civil polity. On this subject there are two extremes. There is, in the first place, an apprehensiveness and jealousy of all that bears the aspect of innovation, which is absolutely morbid, and becomes a weakness; and there is, in the second place, an excessive fondness for whatever has the charm of novelty to recommend it,-and a restless inquisitiveness after everything of the kind,-an incessant propensity to change, and to list for every shifting wind of doctrine. It may at once be admitted, that the latter is the more dangerous of the two:-and really when we see persons getting hold of principles which to them are new, becoming enamoured of them, pushing them to extremes, and perverting everything else into conformity with them,-hasty to question whatever is old, and as hasty to embrace whatever is novel,-so that, with minds unsettled and roving, it is impossible to predict to what lengths they are to go, and where they are to land,-we hardly wonder that others should run to the contrary extreme, be frightened from inquiry altogether, and speak, with grave apprehension, of the danger of "removing the old landmarks which our fathers have set." It is clear, however, that there can be no period of prescription for truth,-or rather for falsehood,-no length of time, that is, by which error that has passed for truth can become anything else than error. No time can transmute wrong into right. Changes, no doubt, should be made with caution. The longer anything has been received as a truth, the improbability of its being found an error becomes ever the greater. But if any dogma in any human system of Christian doctrine is proved, from a full and careful investigation of the word of God, to have been set down and held as a truth by mistake,-it would be a most strange and mischievous attachment to antiquity for its own sake, that would resist its being expunged and the truth discovered substituted in its room. Never must we forget, that the most ancient land-marks of truth and duty are those which have been fixed here-in the Bible-by the hands of prophets, apostles and evangelists, under the immediate direction of the "Spirit of the Lord." There are none so old as these. From the Bible human standards have been formed. Their land-marks profess to be in agreement, in the bounding lines of truth and error marked out by them, with those which are set down there. But when, on a careful survey, any of them are found to have been misplaced, and to bring any part of the region of error within the boundary of the territory of truth,-their removal becomes a duty of imperative obligation. All that has been introduced, in the form of doctrine or of practice, inconsistent with the statements and prescriptions of the Inspired Volume, has been unwarrantable innovation; and to be charged with innovation for returning to the original and only authoritative test of truth and error, of duty and sin, would be most unreasonable. "The traditions of the elders," among the Jews had great antiquity; yet they were innovations. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." And then, as to innovations in the institutes of civil polity,-while hasty changes are admitted to be dangerous and undesirable, there is a clinging to things as they are that is little less than fatuous. To err is human. What system of human polity ever existed, that was perfect, and unsusceptible of improvement? While, therefore, in all that

regards the constitution, and laws, and precedents of our national policy, every approach to a revolutionary spirit is greatly to be deprecated, yet the puerile dread of innovation ought not to prevent either the correction of abuses, or the introduction of improvements, corresponding with the advance of knowledge and experience. It should be laid down as a maxim that "final measures" belong only to God; that in all human administrations, the very phrase is presumption. Old customs cannot always suit new times and new circumstances. The occasions in which they originated pass away; the state of things is altered and reversed; and when change of condition requires change of law and practice, adherence to the old is folly. The general principle laid down in the closing verse, is the tendency of diligence,-of activity, promptitude, and cleverness, quickness in apprehension, and dexterity and perseverance in execution,-to advancement in the world,-to the attainment of its wealth and its honours. It implies also, that wise and prudent princes will select for their own service and that of the state, men who have given proof of vigorous, intelligent, enterprising, and steadily persevering character in the departments in which they have been engaged:-"Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men."

Reverting for a moment to the language of a former verse, let me, in conclusion, press earnestly upon all THE CERTAINTY OF THE WORDS OF TRUTH. The evidence of the divinity of the Bible, instead of ever being shaken by all the efforts of infidelity, has been augmenting from the beginning hitherto. Its external evidence has grown in the fulfilment of its predictions. Its internal evidence, though in one sense ever the same, has, in another, been increasing also; inasmuch as it has stood its ground amidst all the advances of human knowledge, and men have never been able to improve upon it or to get before it:-and it is the one only book of which this can be affirmed. And its experimental evidence,-the manifestation of its truth in its saving influence,-in its power to dislodge and change the evil passions and habits of the worst of men,-has multiplied by thousands and tens of thousands of dead and living witnesses. In our own days, we have but to point, not only to cases of revival in our own land, in which the gospel has proved itself "mighty through God" to the pulling down of the strongholds of worldliness and corruption, and turning hearts long alienated to God,-but to the lands of Heathen idolatry and cruelty and vileness, wherever Gospel truth has found its way and has been embraced. There, in the marvellous changes that have been effected,-in the contrast between previous stupidity, and pollution, and heartless and murderous ferocity, to intelligence, and purity, and virtue, and peace, and harmony, and happiness, we have the triumphs of the Cross, and the manifestation of the "certainty"-the divine certainty-"of the words of truth." They have thus shown themselves to be indeed "excellent things " by the excellence of their effects. We call upon all to examine for themselves. The Bible courts examination. It is the unwillingness and refusal to examine, that is most to be deplored. The genuineness of its writings, the authenticity of its histories, the reality of its recorded miracles, the fulfilment of its prophecies, the sublimity and consistent harmony of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, the origin of its commemorative ordinances, and its tendency to personal and social virtue and happiness,-all court examination. The testimony of the celebrated earl of Rochester, when converted from infidelity and profligacy to Christianity and virtue, will be found the truth. Laying his hand on the Bible, he would say-"This is true philosophy. This is the wisdom that speaks to the heart. A bad life is the only grand objection to this Book."

71-Pro_23:1-11

Proverbs 23:1-11

LECTURE LXXI.

Proverbs 23:1-11.

"When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee; and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties; for they are deceitful meat. Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats; for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee. The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words. Speak not in the ears of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words. Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: for their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee."

Diligence is commended in the close of the preceding chapter; this opens with the commendation of temperance or moderation. This virtue the people of God ought to practise in every thing. They should "let their moderation be known unto all men"-that is, their self-government in the desire, the use, the enjoyment, and the regret, of all that pertains to the present world. In the opening verses, we have one particular description of moderation,-the laying of a restraint, at all times, but especially on occasions of peculiar temptation, on the animal appetites. The verses suggest the following observations:-

1. There are few things, if any, more disgusting and degrading, than the studied and anxious indulgence of these appetites:-to see a man surveying the table, with an epicure’s eye; carefully selecting his favourite articles; and in his manner of preparing and eating them, making it manifest to all about him that his whole soul is on the contents of his plate, and that nothing annoys him so much as any interruption such as endangers their getting out of season, and losing their nice relish. It is particularly loathsome, when the man appears to catch with extraordinary avidity the occurrence of a feast, and to be resolved on making the most of the opportunity. What man can be more despicably low than he "whose God is his belly?" When Solomon says-"Consider diligently what is before thee,"-it is for a very different purpose, and in a very different frame of mind, from those I have been mentioning. It means-Consider well the scene of temptation that is before thee, and be upon thy guard.

2. There are, on such occasions, temptations to over-indulgence and excess. And then our self-jealousy and watchfulness should be proportioned to two things-namely, the strength of propensity, and the amount of temptation. This is the import of the strong expression in the second verse-"and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite." The import seems to be-eat as if a knife were at thy throat;-eat in the recollection and impression of thine imminent

danger; remember that the knife wherewith thou dost feast thy delicate or thy gluttonous appetite had better be at thy throat than used for such a purpose,-so prejudicial to health, to reputation, to the credit of thy profession, to the interests of thy soul. In several versions we have the sense given-"Otherwise thou wilt put a knife to thy throat, if thine appetite have the dominion." For-

3. A man’s conduct, on such occasions, is marked;-especially if he be a religious professor. He may, in this way, bring reproach upon religion: which ever ought, and which, when genuine and duly felt, ever will, impose a restraint on such indulgences. How sad, when a religious professor gives occasion to the ungodly, with the leer of sarcastic scorn, to say-"Ah! did you see how the holy man--the man of spiritual abstraction-how he did enjoy himself!-he made the most of it!-with what a gusto, and what culinary connoisseurship, he discussed his meal!" Thus are all his pretensions to spirituality turned to ridicule; and from his example encouragement is taken by others to persist in such indulgences and excesses: while any usefulness he might have is impaired and lost, and his reputation for consistency forfeited.

4. On the other hand, we should be on our guard against the ostentation of abstinence and plainness,-the affectation of extraordinary abstemiousness;-declining this, and refusing that, merely for the purpose of drawing attention, and further fixing that attention by incidental remarks-incidental in appearance but studiously introduced and timed,-for the express purpose of having it said-What a singularly abstemious man he is! how plain in his tastes! how exemplarily indifferent to the gratification of his appetite!-This would be little better than gratifying one carnal principle instead of another,-vanity, instead of gluttony or epicurism, the love of notice and distinction, instead of animal appetite and the love of dainty fare,-the lust of the mind, instead of the lust of the flesh.-Our duty, then, is-indifference to the indulgences of the table, without the obtrusive ostentation of it; eating and drinking in moderation, what is set before us, without the affectation of singularity.

5. There should be special vigilance, if there be reason to suspect any snare-any intended temptation, for answering a selfish or a malicious purpose. Worldly men sometimes do, very wickedly, lay such snares for the godly. They do so to try them,-for the diabolical satisfaction of witnessing the inconsistencies into which they thus seek to entice them. They then laugh at them, and make sport of their principles: for "fools make a mock at sin."-I do not say that anything of this kind is meant to be conveyed by the terms of verse third-probably not. The meaning of that verse seems to be no more than that evil often lurks under the semblance of good;-that while present enjoyment is promised and pressed upon us, the consequences, if we suffer ourselves to be thrown off our guard, may be bitter.-"When you see a number of dishes, of very different kinds," says a sensible expositor, "think with yourself-Here are fevers, and agues, and gouts in disguise. Here are snares and traps spread along the table, to catch my soul, and draw me into sin. Sense gives a good report of this plenty; but reason and religion tell me to take heed, for it is deceitful moat."

Verse Proverbs 23:4. "Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom." "Labour not to be rich." What a startling interdict this! What an immense proportion of the world’s toil, and especially in such a community as our own, does it bring under condemnation and proscription! Were all the labour directed to this forbidden end to cease,-how little would be left!-what a sudden stagnation would there be of the turmoil of busy activity with which we are daily surrounded! What are the

great majority of men about,-in our city and in our country? What keeps them all astir? What is the prevailing impulse of all the incessant bustle and eager competition of our teeming population? Are not all,-with a wider or a narrower estimate of what riches mean,-"labouring to be rich?"-The love of fame has been called the universal passion. Is not the love of money quite as much, if not more, entitled to the designation? Yes; and many a time does the wisdom of the world set itself to the defence of the world's toil and the world's aim-alleging many plausible, and some more than plausible, things in its pleadings. "Riches," say they, "keep a man and his family from dependence. Riches enable a man to enjoy many comforts that are in themselves lawful and desirable. Riches procure a man distinction and influence in society. By this and other means, riches put it in a man's power to do good:-why should we not 'labour to be rich?'" It is all true; and the plea is in part quite legitimate. Yet Solomon, by the Spirit, with the authority, and in the kindness of God, enjoins-"labour not to be rich." His meaning evidently is, that the acquisition of the worldly wealth must not be a man's primary aim-that which chiefly occupies his desires, his thoughts, his schemes, his time, and his toil,-to the neglect of concerns of incomparably higher importance, and to a forgetfulness of the amount of temptation, and of danger to these higher concerns, which success in his pursuit brings with it,-so as to preclude serious inquiry about the grand problem-the most momentous by infinite degrees, that can occupy the mind of man-how an eternity of being may be to him an eternity of well-being.

"Cease from thine own wisdom" may be considered as regarding both the object of pursuit, and the manner of pursuing it. The object, considered as the main end of life, is infinitely unworthy of a reasonable being; and the manner in which the pursuit of it is carried on is characterized by a disregard of God that is the very essence of impiety. All this is true, even on the supposition that the result of the labour were certain acquisition, and the riches, when acquired, a sure possession,-sure for life and for posterity. But-

Verse Proverbs 23:5. "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not J for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven."-How emphatically strong this language! "Upon that which is not!" So precarious are the riches when obtained, that they are hardly allowed the attribute of existence!-that which is not!-How beautifully the air-bubble glitters in rainbow hues, as it floats on the stream, or mounts into the atmosphere!-but in a moment, it bursts, and is gone. Solomon here uses a different figure:-"for riches verily make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." Such was the experience of the wise man's times:-surely I need not say in what a degree it has been the experience of our own. How frequently, and how affectingly in many cases, has it been exemplified!-Sometimes the wings grow gradually. Their begun and advancing growth is perceived by the owner, and the result dreaded, when others know nothing of it, and are fancying all secure. His eyes are sleepless with solicitude amidst the envy of the ignorant around him. At other times, the event is as unanticipated by the possessor as it is by others. The wings are the product of a moment, and the flight unexpected and sudden. A single unlooked for contingency in providence,-and all is gone!-the accumulations of half a life-time vanished in an hour! A change in the commercial tariff of a foreign state;-a sudden fall in the markets;-a single unsuccessful speculation, from which additional thousands were expected;-the bankruptcy of some house that was esteemed of established and unshaken credit;-a hundred causes may, one or other, occasion the sudden annihilation of property and prospects. The very "labouring" to be rich,-the very eagerness after the object,-the "hasting" to its attainment, is not

unfrequently the very means of bringing all to nothing.

"Wilt thou," then, "set thine eyes upon that which is not?" To set the eyes upon it, is to set the heart upon it. The fixing of the gaze on any object, is the expression of fond desire. The original word contains the idea of special avidity. Nothing can be more unwise:-not only because we may lose the object of desire, how largely soever acquired, even while we are here, but because we must part with it very soon at the longest. Riches may leave us; we must leave riches. How simple, yet how conclusive the consideration-"We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out," 1 Timothy 6:7. And then-how solemn but how little thought of, the lesson which follows-"They that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows," verses 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

Verses Proverbs 23:6-8. "Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee. The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words."-We had formerly occasion to notice the different acceptations in which the phrase "an evil eye" is taken in Scripture. Here, it has evidently the sense of a covetous, penurious, stingy, grudging disposition. Such persons as are here described were to be found then. They are to be found still. They invite and entertain others, under the impulse of various selfish motives. They must, for appearance and reputation’s sake, pay back their debts of this description; or it is necessary in the way of business; or they like to make a little show, to gratify a spirit of ostentation, and yet grudge and fret at the means. Their entertainments, therefore, are not given from any motive of regard for any but themselves. So that, while with the lips, as a matter of course, they profess great hospitality-"Eat and drink, saith he to thee!"-every mouthful that is swallowed, when, unfortunately their invitation is accepted, is eyed with a secret twinge of fretful regret for having asked you. They would have been better pleased had the invitation been declined. How does this discover itself? It does not always. It may, at times, be pretty successfully concealed. But in general it may be known from the character of the parties, as apparent in other things. A stingy disposition can hardly hide itself. And when a man’s general character is known,-it is known how very ill a particular display of profusion and finery assorts with his ordinary doings, and his established reputation; and hence cannot fail to arise the suspicion, and more than suspicion, that there is something under it,-something else than the unwonted appearance of friendly generosity. And then, unless the simulation is singularly well kept up indeed, the difference will be perceptible between the open, frank, sterling cordiality of genuine heartfelt kindness, and the affectation-the hypocritical pretence of it. The eye belies the lips. While he says one thing, he looks another. While "Eat and drink" is on his lips,-he will, at the same time, by his remarks on the dearth of living, and the high price of particular articles, and the great pains he has been at for your entertainment,-he will betray the true state of his feelings. They are far more with his purse than with his guests.

It is evident, from the very expression, that the man is supposed to be in some degree known. "The bread of him that hath an evil eye" means the provision of one, of whose character this is a manifest feature. The dissuasive advice may be considered as suggested by different considerations. It is painful to the spirit of sensibility to be laid under obligation to men of this

sort,-persons who hold their favours so high, and look for so much in return for them. It is, moreover, most irksome and distressing, to partake of any thing respecting which there is the remotest ground of surmise that it is grudgingly given. A share of the very homeliest meal,-even of the crust and water of the beggar,-with a real hearty welcome, is preferable to a place at the most sumptuously covered board, where the dainties have been provided and are partaken with a grudge. When this is the case, there is loathing at the very idea of having so much as tasted them. This appears to be the sentiment in the eighth verse:-"That which thou hast swallowed shalt thou vomit up." The very thought of the spirit in which the entertainment has been given, will sicken thee to nausea:-and withal "thou shalt lose thy sweet words."

"Thy sweet words" may mean the words spoken by him to thee. The guest at the time might augur good from them; might flatter himself with his being a special favourite; might, like Haman, go home merry and glad of heart, and full of expectation. But "the good words and fair speeches" were only another part of the simulation. They are mere air. They come to nothing. They are followed, when you have gone away, and he sees your back and the door fairly shut upon you, with fretting and grumbling against you for the expense you have put him to. He reckons up the cost, and curses you in his heart.-But, "thy sweet words" are more naturally understood of the words spoken by thee to him. They were words of thanks and compliment-of flattery for the style, abundance, and variety of his entertainment,-his equipage, his dishes, his wines, his entire set-out. They are lost on one who in truth, when all is known, so ill-deserved them,-a mere dissembler of hospitality and friendship. Your having accepted his invitation, laid him under the necessity of asking others; and your having partaken of his sumptuous dinner, is recorded in his mind against you as a deadly offence; and all your "sweet words" go for nothing! Surely one would rather be famished than be regaled with such grudged abundance. The injunction, or dissuasion, I need not surely say, is by no means intended to give any license or encouragement to a spirit of pride or disdain. No. It is only a salutary warning to be cautious of bringing yourselves under obligation to any selfish and hypocritical dissembler of kindness, who only wishes to lay you under such obligation to serve purposes of his own. The man who has thus entertained you will boast of his hospitality; tell others of it, making the most of it for his own behoof; set it down against you, debiting you on account of it with certain expected good turns at your hand, when he comes to need them. He will throw it up to you, should you not do all he looks for; or rail at you to others for ingratitude and meanness in forgetting his kindness. He will remind you of it again and again, with vexatious importunity,-teazing you for your favour and influence in some object he has in view for himself or his family. It is amazing what an amount of expectation a man of this sordid and selfish disposition will found upon a dinner! Your having sat at his table, eaten of his dainties, and drunk of his wines, is price enough even for your conscience itself. Beware of him. Keep yourself free.

There is nothing more odious in the sight of God than every description of hypocrisy, whether practised to Himself or to fellow-men. He "desireth truth in the inward parts." And let all bear in mind, that, whatever a man may succeed in feigning himself to be with his neighbours-the representation in the words before us is, in regard to God, always true-"As he thinketh in his heart, so is he." No imposture can succeed with God.

Verse Proverbs 23:9. "Speak not in the ears of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."-The lesson here taught is one of discretion. It refers to all cases, in which we have reason to apprehend that the latter part of the verse will be the result. In such cases, it is generally better

to hold our peace; since by speaking we only give the fool occasion to sin. There may be many cases in which it becomes essential for us to deliver our own souls by bearing our testimony to the truth, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear;" that our consciences may be at ease, being clear of their blood. And the lesson here taught is one of judicious discrimination as to the times and seasons when speaking is likely to be profitable, or the contrary. And the lesson relates, not only to our speaking directly to the fool himself, but to speaking in his presence and his hearing, when, by his contradicting and blaspheming, or by his light and "foolish jesting," he may not only render what we say unavailing to others, but even injurious.* * See Proverbs 9:7-8; Matthew 7:6.

Verses Proverbs 23:10-11. "Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: for their Redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee."-We had this subject before us, under its general form, in Proverbs 22:28. Here it comes before us in a more special form. But when the twenty-eighth verse of the preceding chapter is connected with the twenty-second and twenty-third, the connexion will render the lesson very much the same with that in the verses now claiming our attention. And its recurrence again is only an additional proof of the peculiar interest taken by the blessed God in the description of persons mentioned. The shifting of landmarks, and the plundering of fields,-in any case a flagrant act of injustice and wrong,-is here represented as having in it a much more than ordinary heinousness when the objects of the unrighteous fraud and aggression are the unprotected-those who have been deprived of their natural guardian and maintainer of their rights and interests. The claim of such to sympathy and care is one which has been very generally admitted by mankind-in word and theory at least; but selfishness has too often come between the sufferers and the kindness which was their due. "When, however, this has been, in any remarkable degree, the ease, it has been regarded as indicating an inhumanity that was fit for the perpetration of any deed whatever that is oppressive and ruthless. When Job’s friends, in their irritation, are disposed to be most severe upon him, this is one of the charges they falsely prefer against him.*1 And when Job draws the character of wicked men who merited the wrath of heaven, this is one of its heavy features,*2 And when he denies the charge against himself, the very opposite is strongly affirmed by him as the true description of his character.*3 On behalf of "the fatherless," God’s jealous protection and avenging omnipotence are here anew pointedly pledged. The word for redeemer signifies the man who was "next of kin,"-the kinsman, on whom, by the law of Moses, it was incumbent, as a matter of duty, and with whom too it was a matter of interest, to look after the concerns of his poor relations; with whom lay indeed the avenging of their blood, if, in any case, their life should, in cruel selfishness, be taken away. It was on the principle of that statute that Boaz called upon the next of kin to come forward and redeem the inheritance of Elimelech at the hand of Naomi, and that, upon his hearing the conditions and declining, he did it himself. Now he who happened to be the redeeming kinsman might himself be poor, and powerless, and without either means or influence. But they should not, on that account, be unprotected and unbefriended. Jehovah himself would take the place of their kinsman,-would "plead their cause" would maintain their rights, would redress their wrongs, would bring His power to bear against their oppressors. He would fulfil for them the part of their near relation: and he is "mighty." Hear his words:-"Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless," Exodus 22:22-24. These, you may think, are Old Testament threatenings, be

longing to a judicial law that has passed away:-or, more properly, they belong to the special theocracy, being strictly no part of the judicial law, inasmuch as they do not prescribe any punishment to be inflicted by the hand of roan, but announce what Jehovah himself would, by his own interposition, execute. Be it so. But think you that the character of God has changed? Such assurances and threatenings are not mere warnings of punishment; they are expressions of character. And do you imagine that under the new dispensation,-which, in a special sense, is the dispensation of love, the ministration of mercy,-the compassion of Jehovah towards those who need it, has diminished? that His zeal in their behalf has suffered abatement? That, assuredly, were a grievous mistake. The God of love has not ceased to pity, and to pity with a special compassion, the unprotected, the friendless, the poor. Look at his character as it was manifested in the person of Him who could say-"He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." This exhibition of the divine character introduced the new and spiritual dispensation. And was there any failure of regard for the poor?-of pity for the fatherless and the widow?-of power in behalf of the destitute? Let not the oppressor fancy that there is no Jewish law now,-no theocracy now. There is a theocracy, although of a different kind. "The Lord reigneth;" and woe to the defrauder or oppressor of the destitute! He shall not escape. "Their Redeemer" is no less "mighty" than he was of old. He will avenge their cause at last, with terrible retribution.

*1 Job 22:5-10. rr *2 Job 24:3-4; Job 24:7-10. rr *3 Job 29:11-13; Job 31:16-22. rr

Let the poor, the fatherless, and the widow, when wronged, beware of harbouring and cherishing in their own bosoms the sentiments of resentment or revenge. Let them rather, in humility and forgiving meekness, put their case into the hands of Him, of whom it is said-"The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless." He will appear for them. If God allows them to suffer, when thus submissive to His will, He will graciously give them to experience that "all things work together for their good,"-and that His "grace is sufficient for them;" and He will at last give them to the full of "the unsearchable riches of Christ." In their most destitute condition even here, enjoying the rich provisions of the gospel, they have no reason to envy the wealthiest of the wealthy, the greatest of the great. The latter may envy them. Jehovah himself "is the portion of their inheritance and of their cup; he maintaineth their lot." He is theirs, and they are His. They who have the fulness of God’s covenant promises have infinitely more than the world can give to its most successful and favoured votaries. They to whom Jehovah says, "Thy Maker is thy Husband," have strong consolation in their desolate widowhood. They who, though they are deprived of an earthly, have a heavenly Father, are better off than those who have the earthly without the heavenly. They who are heirs of the eternal inheritance, who are, in every step of life, advancing nearer to possession of that from which no power of earth or hell shall ever be able to eject them, are more blessed far than the men of this world whose possessions are present, who are, at every step through life, coming nearer to the end of their lease,-a lease of whose duration they themselves are ignorant, and which, at the will of the universal Proprietor, may terminate in a moment when least they are thinking of it. Their landmark is fixed for them in the better country. It shall never be removed. They shall be "found in their lot in the end of the days"-in the consummation of all things:-and having settled in that lot,-the lot of their inheritance,-they shall hold it in eternal security.

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Proverbs 23:12-23

LECTURE LXXII.

Proverbs 23:12-23.

"Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge. Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine; Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things. Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off. Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old. Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." The exhortation in the first of these verses, of which we have had the spirit and substance, though not the identical terms, frequently before us, is one that can never be too often repeated, or too urgently enforced. The words might be adopted by the teachers of all departments of useful knowledge, as their counsel to their pupils; and such an enlarged application of the words we can have no objection. But oh! my friends, and my young friends especially, we do feel that the admonition or the entreaty, has a peculiar appropriateness in the lips of those whose province it is to communicate divine knowledge,-the knowledge which God has been pleased to lay up in store by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit in this blessed Volume. Of its precious contents all of us have still much to learn. By whom have they ever been exhausted? The counsel, therefore, is in all cases, appropriate. The oldest, the most experienced, and the best informed Christian may take it, as well as the youngest beginner in the study of sacred science.

Verses Proverbs 23:13-14. "Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." "We quoted these verses, in connexion with others on the same subject, formerly: and we entered then, pretty much at large, into what may be called the theory and practice of early discipline; of which, therefore, we do not now resume the discussion. I only entreat parents to mark, and to bear in mind affectionately and steadily, the end to be kept in view. It is to save from "the second death"-even "from hell." Of all parental instruction, admonition, restraint, correction, example, and prayer, this is the great aim. How unutterably precious to the heart of every truly Christian parent! O the anguish of the thought of a child, the object of the heart’s fondest love, dying that death, sinking into the pit of woe! That parent deserves not the name of Christian, who would not cheerfully lay down his own life, to save his child from such a doom. O! it was not the mere temporal death of Absalom, that wrung with agony the spirit of David, when, on hearing the tidings, he "went up to the chamber over the gate of his palace, and as he went, wept, and said-O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

It was not the thought merely of the darts with which the heart of that son had been transfixed, that pierced his own with grief so acute and overwhelming. It was the thought of his having died in rebellion against his father and against his God. This was the barbed and envenomed arrow, of which "the poison drank up his spirit."-And there is every reason to fear that a false tenderness, and an inexcusable laxity of parental discipline, had contributed to the profligate character and the fatal end of Absalom.

Let parents be further again reminded, that the conduciveness of correction to the end mentioned depends, to a very great extent, upon the manner of it. The why,-the when,-the what,-and the how? are all most important questions, each requiring to be seriously pondered in this department of parental duty. "Beating with the rod" may be so applied as to beat folly into the child instead of out of him. Too often have parents whipped their children with indiscriminate harshness, with the tear of anger and not of love. They have measured the chastisement by the mischief done, rather than by the evil disposition displayed. They have made religious duties a task, and exacted their performance on pain of the lash, and visited their neglect with the rigour of corporeal discipline. They have conducted the entire process of educational training on a system of scolding, and driving, and coercion, and flogging. They have thus produced sullenness and disgust; secret and smothered irritation; aversion to all that bears the name or aspect of religion; duplicity and cunning; a longing for freedom,-for the hour of release from such restraint, and of becoming their own masters; and, when that hour arrives, unbridled licentiousness.

Verses Proverbs 23:15-16. "My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things." What is the wisdom that is meant? The same which the writer so often describes*-the wisdom of spiritual principle,-the wisdom of the fear and love and service of God,-the wisdom that chooses what is best and most lasting as its portion,-that aims at the very highest attainments of which created natures are capable, likeness to God as its character, and the enjoyment of God as the All of its happiness. It is this wisdom that is the spring of the intensity of joy, that is evidently implied in the emphatic repetition of the terms of delight thrice in these verses. This-Oh! this is what parents who themselves fear God should desire most earnestly to see in their rising offspring. This should most of all gladden their spirits. Their souls should thrill with joy-joy the purest, the most exquisite, as they discover the opening indication of right principle in the mind and heart-"when the lips speak right things"-when there is the language of truth, unvarying, undissembling truth; of reverence for God and divine things; of gentleness, and kindness, and obedience, and sensibility to reproof, and apprehension of evil,-all manifesting an inward and vital change.

* See Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 2:1-5; Proverbs 9:10. But here I must address to parents a word of caution. They are exposed to the danger of one or other of two extremes:-

1. The first is that of expecting too much in children:-more than, from the nature of the case, we are at all warranted to expect. An extreme it assuredly is to leave out of account the natural buoyancy and glee and frivolity and fickle mutability of childhood, and, at that early period, to look for the consistency, gravity, and stayedness of advanced life. To this extreme those are specially more prone, whose minds have in them a tendency to the gloomy and morose. Persons of this mental cast are ready to construe all the harmless merriment and sprightly playfulness and light-heartedness and fun of children, and all their trifling, nonsensical talk, into sad indications of

the want of grace and of the fear of God. This is expecting children to be men; ay, and something more. I would say to parents, If you wish to gain the ear and the interest of your children to your graver instructions and counsels at graver seasons, you must win their affections by entering kindly and cheerily into their innocent pastimes. Be merry with them if you wish them to be grave with you.

2. Then, there is the other extreme of being satisfied with too little. This is sadly common,-especially with parents of an easy, credulous, unsuspicious temperament. They are prone to flatter themselves that all is well,-to be easily pleased with their children, and thus to make their children (for in this lies the danger) too easily pleased with themselves. They are too prone to treat as levities what ought to be treated as sins, and to be content with symptoms of goodness that are at best equivocal and precarious. While I would warn parents against being too easily or hastily satisfied with the symptoms of early piety, and against allowing themselves to be deceived, by confounding the imitative, merely, or the effect of the wish to please, with the real operation of the germinant principles of godliness in the heart, yet would I not be understood as speaking the language of discouragement. Most delightful, indeed, it is to mark the effects, in the progress of early instruction,-the listening ear,-the moist and melting eye,-the tender conscience,-the fondness for the Bible,-the disposition to prayer, though in "the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try,"-the sensitive regard to truth, and all the indications of a filially affectionate and obedient heart.

3. I call on all the young now hearing me to mark the expressions in these verses. They are evidently intended to operate as a motive. If not, what is their meaning? They are an appeal-pointed and touching-to filial affection:-"My son, if thou be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine." The latter words have been rendered-"yes, I myself"-the father, the mother, whom you love, and who, you know, so tenderly loves you. Would you make glad the hearts of these your parents-dearest to you of all on earth?-then yield to the admonition, "Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge." Not, as I have before said, that this is to be your only, or oven your chief motive. Imagine not that I am exhorting you to piety, merely to please your parents. In that case, there would be no fear of God in the matter. It would be fear and love "in word," not "in deed and in truth." It would be profession without principle; the most worthless of all things. The authority of the blessed God himself must be your supreme consideration,-associated with regard such as He enjoins, to your best and highest, your everlasting interests. But with these, in all propriety, may be associated also the consideration of the delight it will afford to the hearts of your parents. I would not have you depart, in one iota, from principle-from what the word of God tells you is right, to please even the dearest of parents; for God’s claims, both on the ground of authority and love, are first. But when the thing itself is right-divinely right-then there can be no harm surely in your having a respect, in doing it, to the gratification and happiness of those whom, next to God, it is incumbent upon you to honour and to love.

We may take in, in this connexion, verses Proverbs 23:24-25:-"The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice; and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice." In the verses on which we have been commenting, Solomon,-whether or not with his own son Rehoboam in his mind we cannot determine,-speaks in the character of a father. Thus at least I have understood him, although it is

possible that he may use the compilation "My son" as one of fatherly affection to youth in general, in the same way in which similar designations are used by inspired apostles in the New Testament. The strength of the language, however, corresponds so much with that in other passages, that I cannot but think the light in which we have taken them up the more natural one. In these two verses, the united joy of both parents,-their sympathy of fervent delight-in witnessing the piety and virtue of their children,-dear to them as their very heart's blood, nay as their own souls,-is expressed with emphatic tenderness and force. And observe the peculiar stress that is laid on the mother's affection:-"Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice." I believe there are not, in the whole compass of animated nature, feelings of more exquisite tenderness, than those of a mother of sensibility, whose instinctive love is heightened and hallowed by piety.-"A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world," John 16:21. This is the first joy of a mother;-a joy which, when the conjugal bond has been one of true affection, is intensely shared by him who is the partner of every throb of delight or of sorrow that visits her heart. But besides this first joy we have here before us another,-a purer, a higher, a nobler, a more lasting. The former is the joy of nature; this, the joy of grace;-the former, the joy that "a man-child is born into the world," the heir of a fleeting and precarious life; the latter, that an immortal has become a child of God's spiritual family, and an heir of life eternal. This, then, my youthful hearers, is a very tender appeal,-well fitted to touch and move the heart of every right-minded and affectionate son or daughter:-"she that bare thee shall rejoice." O! did you but know all that she has felt and suffered for you,-her anxieties, her alarms, her watchings, her tears, her prayers-it would "pierce you through with many sorrows" to be the occasion of sending a single pang to her bosom. That youth is ominously hardened,-is fit for any of the dark deeds of hell,-whose heart does not soften towards the mother that bare him! I hardly can fancy any other description of right feeling remaining in that breast. Every warm drop of generous sensibility must have been wrung out from the heart, ere it parted with its sense of a mother's love,-ere those earliest and tenderest meltings of nature ceased to be felt! And what is the special joy of which Solomon speaks? It is the joy of parents who, having been the instruments of giving you being, yearn for the happiness of the being they have given. They have learned to view your existence, as well as their own, in its eternity. They have given commencement to an existence that is never to close,-to the existence of an accountable agent, whose unending state is to be bliss or woe! Can you wonder at their solicitude? or can you wonder at the joy, when they see the germs of eternal goodness and eternal blessedness putting themselves forth, even in their most incipient promise, in your hearts and characters? O! this is joy indeed! If the child lives, it is joy in his life; for he will live unto God. If the child dies, and dies before his parents, it is joy in his death, as he leaves behind him grounds of assurance that he is gone to live unto God in a higher, a holier, and a happier world. And if they die before the child, it is joy in their own departure, as they leave him in the cheering hope of his following them to glory. It is joy at the tribunal of Christ in the great day, to have their child with them on the right hand of the Judge, and. included with them in the gracious welcome-"Come, ye blessed!" and it is joy in heaven for ever, in the joint participation of its pure and perfect felicity! O what a joy, here and hereafter,-on earth and in heaven,-when parents and children, united by the ties of nature, are, at the same time, all one in the bond of grace,-one with Christ, and one in Christ,-and thus, having enjoyed the happiness of this double union in the present world, meet in the world to come- "And form a family anew, Unbroken in the

skies!"

Mark the striking antithesis in next verse, where the address is still to youth:-"Be not envious of sinners; but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Such envy produces the danger of casting off the fear of God. But cultivate this fear. Cleave, with increasing firmness and constancy, to God and to his ways; and by and by, sinners will envy you:-"For (Proverbs 23:18) surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off." Here, I apprehend, is a twofold consideration enforcing the counsel. The words refer at once to the end of the sinner, and to the fulfilment of the hope of the righteous. Ah! my youthful hearers, the prosperity of sinners, by which you are so prone to be deceived, is a delusive prosperity, seducing them from God, and luring them to eternal death. "Their end is destruction." But, of those who are "in the fear of the Lord the expectation shall not be cut off." No. It shall be realized and satisfied to the full-satisfied in the enjoyment of perfect, unchanging, endless bliss.

We shall dwell but briefly on the verses which follow:-verses Proverbs 23:19-22. "Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."-"The way" in which Solomon, in the first of these verses, enjoins the young to "guide their hearts"-is clearly "the way of God’s commandments"-the way of believing and holy obedience. And the counsel can only be complied with by your taking God"s Word as your directory for the way, and seeking God’s promised Spirit to make the way, by means of it, plain before your face; to save you from all biassing and seducing influences, and incline your heart steadily to follow it. The warning against gluttony and drunkenness-against the sensual indulgences of the table-is enforced by motives taken from the effects of such a course. "Be not amongst them"-that is, be not one of them: be not thyself a glutton or a drunkard;-thus degrading thyself below the beasts; contracting guilt before God; searing thy conscience; deadening thy heart to every good impression; preparing thyself for every other description of wickedness, and for temporal and eternal ruin. The three things in the 21st verse (Proverbs 23:21) are often united in the same character. Indolence frequently leads to gross indulgences; and it is ever confirmed and increased by them,-the habits grow together; and what good can be looked for to the person or the family of the lazy beastly sot?-the lowest, the most contemptible, and the most loathsome of all characters; whose time is divided between eating and drinking and sleeping, except the remnant that is given to debauchery and wickedness of other kinds. Shun, then, their company-for two reasons;-lest you learn their ways, and lest you share their doom. The next verse is a repetition of the counsel in previous verses-but with an addition. The addition is-"despise not thy mother when she is old." There is a connexion to be noticed, of this verse with the two preceding. The youth who frequents such company as they describe, will find much said, of which the object is, to coax him to go to excess. Among other things, he will hear not a little of the unreasonableness of parents in not making allowance for the young,-in tying down youth to the maxims and the precision of age. What harm in a little joviality?-it is natural to youth; why not indulge it? And if his father or his mother be "old" he may hear hints, perhaps, with a shrug of the shoulders, and a sly look to those about him, of the good old gentleman, or the good old lady, that is beginning to get into dotage, and has forgotten what it is to be young. Now, mark me:-the youth who allows himself for once and for one moment to listen to such reflections, has already begun to violate the command here given.

Respect was enjoined by the law to old age.* What peculiar respect then, must be due to the silver locks of a father or a mother!-How incumbent the duty to smoothe, by every affectionate and reverential attention and kindness, the declining path to the tomb of those who have been the guardians of your childhood and youth!-to strive to make them happy, instead of breaking their hearts by neglect and misconduct! Fearful was the retribution of the stubborn and rebellious son, under the law:-"If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear," Deuteronomy 21:18-21. This law is passed away. But it indicated the mind of God. And the rebellious son is still as of old, the object of His condemnation, and will be visited with His vengeance.

* Leviticus 19:32.

Verse Proverbs 23:23. "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding." The allusion is to the merchandise of the world;-the buying and selling of its commodities. In such merchandise, benefit is expected from both. A merchant buys, for the very purpose of selling; and he will not buy, unless he has a pretty good assurance that he can sell at a profit; that he can get for his article more than he has given. The case here, then, is quite a peculiar one. It is all buying. The article is one which is to be bought, but never sold. And why? For the best possible reason,-that it never can be sold at a profit, there is nothing too valuable to be given for it, there is nothing valuable enough to be taken for it. Get for it whatever else we may, the bargain will be a losing one. The latter clause of the verse may be considered as comprehended in the former; for to secure "the truth" is to secure "wisdom, instruction, and understanding;" and of wisdom and understanding the highest proof is the securing of "the truth." In further illustration then of the words "Buy the truth, and sell it not, observe:-

1. The buyer tests his article. He uses means to ascertain its genuineness. Suppose it is an article whose component parts are "gold and silver, precious stones, and pearls." Such to the eye it appears. Such, by him who offers it for sale, it is declared to be. But the cautious purchaser will make sure of his bargain; and all the surer, the higher the price. He will assay the purity of the gold and silver; and chemically ascertain that the precious stones and the pearls are not factitious imitations.

Now, all that is presented to us as truth, must thus be tested. It must be proved to be what it professes to be. In physical science, scientific men will not take upon trust what professes to be a new discovery-especially if it happens to be at variance with previous theories,-without examining thoroughly the experiments by which it is said to have been ascertained, and trying, by counter-experiments, to determine whether there has been any slip or mistake in the processes, and any consequent fallacy in the conclusion. Thus too does the metaphysician in regard to every new theory in mental science; and the moral philosopher in the department of ethics. Everything in the various provinces of inquiry is examined by evidence according with its nature. The one question is-Is it truth? Truth alone is valuable; alone worthy to be received and held.

Now, we are as far as possible from wishing it to be otherwise in the department of religion. In proportion to the importance of the case,-to the height of the authority on which the claims to acceptance are rested,-the magnitude at once of the benefits promised, and of the risks incurred,-ought to be the solicitude and care with which the testing process is conducted. This then is the last department of all, in which what professes to be truth should be taken upon trust; in which inquiry should be careless, and faith easy. The obligation to examine is imperative and solemn; and marvellous, indeed, is the indisposition of men to enter on the investigation. Men who, with the utmost earnestness and perseverance, will test every alleged truth in science, in history, or in politics, cannot be persuaded to apply their powers to an inquiry more important, by infinite degrees, than any other that can engage the attention of the human mind! They either decline it altogether, or they set about it with a levity and a superficiality utterly at variance with what such a question demands, and from which no just appreciation or correct conclusion can be anticipated.

2. It is not enough for the buyer to ascertain the genuineness of his article. He sets about estimating its real worth; its worth intrinsically, and its worth adventitiously; its worth in itself, and its worth to him. The two may be widely different. The diamond is of incomparably more intrinsic worth than the grain of barley; but the cock in the fable spurned away the former and picked up the latter. In the present case,-having once ascertained the divine authority of the record,-there can be no hesitation about either the intrinsic or the relative value of what it makes known. All truth is precious; but its preciousness is, of course, endlessly varied in degree. Two things may be considered as combining to constitute its value. These are-its subject, and its utility. In natural science some truths present a union of both. The discoveries of astronomy, for example, are, many of them, full of intrinsic interest from their vastness and sublimity, and the impressions they give of the transcendent majesty of God; while, in some of their practical bearings, they are of pre-eminent advantage to men. But in a peculiar sense may this be affirmed of the discoveries of divine revelation. These discoveries present views of God’s moral government, in its great essential principles and in their practical application, such as have in them a weight of moral grandeur, and a consequent depth of absorbing interest surpassing all that nature can disclose. And, while they possess intrinsic preciousness above all other truths,-think of their value when estimated by the blessings which are unfolded in them, and to which the faith of them introduces the believer, in time and in eternity! The purchaser values the article he is about to purchase, by the amount of benefit the possession of it will bring him. In like manner must you estimate the value of "the truth" you are here counselled to buy. The value of it, in this view, is summed up by our Lord himself, when he says-"THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL." What then, the real worth to you, of any other compared with this?

3. The buyer, when he has estimated the value of his article, makes proportional sacrifices to obtain possession of it. Foolish estimates there may be; and these foolish estimates may be the occasion of foolish bargains; and these may be the grounds of regret and self-dissatisfaction. But supposing the certainty of all the benefits, for time and eternity, which in the Bible are promised and guaranteed in connection with "the truth." O! what is there, in the whole compass of what this world can confer, that should not, without one moment’s hesitation, be sacrificed for its attainment? The language, observe, does not refer to any compensation to the Author of "the truth,"-anything to be given by which we can ever make it ours by purchase-ours as a matter of right or desert.*1 But there are some things which stand in competition with it. These must be

parted with if it is to be ours; and these, whatever they may be, are what Solomon had in his eye, and what our Lord had in His, when the one directly, and the other virtually, counsels the sacrifice of them all for the sake of it.-By the "pearl of great price," and by the "treasure hid in the field," our Lord meant the blessings of the gospel,-"the unsearchable riches of Christ;" and all these are comprehended in "the truth" here spoken of. And in His parables, there is a manifest reference to the circumstances in which many of those who embraced the principles of His kingdom,-who believed and professed "the truth," would be placed,-the sacrifices they might be called to make, on account of those principles. Often does He forewarn his disciples of this; and tells them faithfully the necessity of preferring their principles, and parting with every thing for them,-and for the blessings of course associated with them; believing that at every kind and amount of sacrifice, they should be gainers.*2 He holds out encouraging assurances to them of what would be infinitely more than a compensation for any such sacrifices.*3 In all cases the bargain is one of gain,-gain unspeakable.

*1 See Isaiah 55:1; Romans 6:23; Revelation 22:17. rr *2 See Luke 14:33. rr *3 Matthew 16:24-27; Matthew 19:27-29. rr

4. In proportion to the buyer’s estimate of his article, and the cost at which he has obtained it, will be the jealousy with which he retains and guards it. "Sell it not." Selling the truth, is not simply letting slip from the mind the remembrance or the knowledge of mere abstractions; it is to give up the profession and faith of it for the sake of the very things which we sacrificed for it.-But "sell it not." Sell it not for the pleasures of sin. Sell it not for the riches and the honours of the world. O part not with "the pearl of great price" for the husks which the swine do eat. And sell it not for any other description of knowledge. Sell not the most valuable of all knowledge, for that which, how legitimate and attractive soever, can never compensate for the loss of the other, or ever supply its room. Let no book usurp the place of your Bible. The more you know of "the truth" revealed in it; the more richly "the word of Christ dwells in you;" the more you have experimentally tasted its sweetness and felt its blessed and holy power upon your hearts,-the more unwilling you will be to part with it; the more tasteless in comparison will every other kind of reading and knowledge become to you; and, were a library of all the world’s literature and science, in all their departments, put in your offer for YOUR BIBLE, you would bind the sacred treasure to your hearts, and reject the offer, saying, as you clasped it to your bosom, with tears of gratitude-"THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL."

Get THE TRUTH, then, at any price; part with it at no price. And, be prompt with your bargain. Those who are much set upon an article, will not delay their purchase, lest perchance it should pass from their hands. Blessed be God! there is no danger here, so far as others coming forward before you is concerned. The store of divine truth and divine blessing is never reduced by the number of purchasers. One buying-thousands buying-will not leave the less for you, or at all interfere with your obtaining, whensoever you make up your mind. But if not now prompt and decided, you may be thwarted in another way. There is one who may ere you are aware, decide the matter for you, by putting the acquisition for ever out of your power. Death may lay his sudden arrest upon you. And if The Truth is not then yours; if its blessings and its hopes are not then yours,-woe unto you! You gain the world, you LOSE YOUR SOUL; and in the bitterness of hopeless despair will deplore your bargain through eternity.

73-Pro_24:1-12

Proverbs 24:1-12

LECTURE LXXIII.

Proverbs 24:1-12.

"Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief. Through wisdom is an house builded, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of counsellors there is safety. Wisdom is too high for a fool; he openeth not his mouth in the gate. He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person. The thought of foolishness is sin; and the scorner is an abomination to men. If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small. If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?" The first verse of this chapter is very naturally connected with the close of the chapter preceding. Truly there is little room for "envy" of such characters as the one there so graphically depicted; and of all men on earth, they will be the last whose company will be "desired" by the wise and the good.-But the counsel before us may be taken more generally. Far be it that "evil men" of any stamp should be envied-either for their boasted freedom or their apparent prosperity. Their freedom is but the semblance of the blessing. It is the reality of bondage. They promise liberty, and are themselves the slaves of corruption. And their prosperity-O deem it not a mark of God’s favour! It is all deceitful. It ends in ruin. "Desire not to be with them." How oft-repeated is this counsel! * And how often is the warning enforced by similar reasons!-"For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief."-Their designs of evil duly matured find utterance. They communicate their projects to others like-minded with themselves;-projects of fraud, peculation, robbery; or if, on such matters, there be a sense of social honour, and an adherence to the conventional morality of the world, there may be projects of impurity,-of lewdness and seduction; of drunken frolic and revel; of the snares of temptation for some simple but sober youth, whom it will be so excellent a joke to induce to join them in sin. All this, under what palliative epithets soever it may pass in the world, is "mischief" and "destruction."

* Proverbs 1:10; Proverbs 4:14-15.

Verses Proverbs 24:3-6. "Through wisdom is an house builded, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of counsellors there is safety."-In these verses the tenses are, in the original, future: and by some are rendered, as the future tense in the Hebrew frequently is-"By

wisdom let thy house be builded," &c. In all probability, such is the designed connexion. Envy at the prosperity of evil men might be a temptation to seek the furtherance of personal or domestic estate by improper, and thus emphatically foolish, means. The "building of a house" indicates the advancement of family prosperity, and the "establishment" of it is the maintenance of that prosperity. "Wisdom," "understanding," and "knowledge," in this, as in other places, have much the same signification; and are not intended to be minutely analysed into their precise shades of difference. No doubt they imply ordinary prudence and discretion,-the management of everything on intelligent and well-examined principles, and in harmony with the maxims of a sound and judicious policy. Neither personal nor family estate can prosper without this. I am disposed, however, to think when I consider the sense in which these terms are generally used by the writer of this Book, that they mean here something more:-that they have more especial reference to the general tendency of the principles of true religion, when consistently carried out. When thus carried out in the intercourse of life, and the transactions of business, they lead to the uniform practice of all the social virtues. Now such a manifestation of the influence of these principles, as satisfies the world that he who is under their dominion may be trusted,-may be safely depended upon to any extent,-obviously has a tendency to the building, establishing, and ample storing and furnishing of the house,-that is, to the prosperity of personal and domestic interests. The blessing of God is upon the labours of those who thus honour Him by a consistent exhibition of the principles which have His approbation and sanction. Not that God engages by promise for the invariable success and prosperity of all they plan and do. He reserves to himself the prerogative of selecting, in this, as well as in any other department, the means of salutary and faithful discipline. And the man who sets a due value upon the divine blessing, and knows that that blessing can only be enjoyed in the way of consistent obedience,-even though his efforts should not be crowned with success, yea, though all on earth should fail him, will hold fast his integrity. Having faith in God, he will firmly trust that it is for some end in full harmony with the promises of His covenant, and subservient to their ultimate fulfilment, that He is pleased, instead of building, to stop or partially to pull down the rising house, to shake its stability, or to dismantle it of its furniture and diminish its stores. Never will he have recourse to any methods for the prevention of such results that are not in perfect accordance with the principles and precepts of God’s Word; for well he knows that it is such riches only as are gotten in the fear of the Lord, in the spirit of dependence and the exercise of obedience, that can ever merit the appellation here given them, of "precious and pleasant riches," And "precious and pleasant" they are when enjoyed with a sense of God’s love,-with His paternally gracious smile-when God is in them all.

"Wisdom" and "knowledge" are, in the fifth verse (Proverbs 24:5), represented as procuring, in addition to prosperity, influence and power:-"A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength." One great use of strength is the security of its possessor:-and this end is represented as still more effectually answered by wisdom. It has a tendency to this result by the respect which it commands, and by the confidence which it inspires. It holds proverbially true, as a general maxim, that knowledge is power; and especially knowledge in union with wisdom. Wisdom may, to a vast extent, supply the want of power; but not power the want of wisdom. And taking wisdom in the sense of true religion, it imparts security to its possessor, which no amount of power which mortal can enjoy is capable of yielding. By making God his confidence it imparts the security to be found in the combined wisdom and power of the Infinite. In the sixth verse (Proverbs 24:6) the general principle and spirit of the passage is applied especially to kings:-"For by wise counsel

thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of counsellors there is safety." This stands opposed to two cases,-that of the self-sufficient and self-willed monarch, on the one hand, who follows his own way, and will take no counsel at all:-and on the other that of the monarch who places his entire confidence in some single favourite, who, by flattery or otherwise, has gained an ascendency over him,-who gives himself up entirely to his counsel. To the subjects of the monarch, in both cases, there is danger; especially when, either by the haste and pertinacity of self-will, or by submission to the self-interested and flattering advice of a favourite minister and minion, they are induced to undertake rash and unrighteous wars-wars justifiable by no plea of necessity, which is the only plea of justice.* * Compare Proverbs 20:18.

Since the kings of Israel and Judah may be considered as specially referred to, the former part of the verse might, with some plausibility, be regarded as having reference to tho counsel which the good kings solicited and obtained from the inspired and commissioned prophets, who on such occasions were either sent to them with express messages, or sent for by them to receive direction from the Lord. The latter part of the verse, however, appears rather to favour a more general interpretation; inasmuch as, when inspired prophets were consulted, the safety did not arise from "the multitude of counsellors.'' The voice of God by one, when well accredited, was as sure as if it had been by hundreds:-and one of the prophets of Jehovah was better than any number of others.* While the general principle holds true that in cases of importance it is well not to trust to any single judgment, yet is there room for exception and for caution:-for sometimes in "the multitude of counsellors" there is distraction and indecision-and all the evils consequent upon delay, or upon dubious, shifting, vacillating measures, measures adopted without confidence, and prosecuted without energy.

* Comp. 1 Kings 22:10-30.

There is a war in which sinners are engaged, which all the created counsel in the universe, united in its support, would not only fail to justify in the principle of it, but could not free from the charge of madness in its utter hopelessness. "Wo to the man that striveth with his Maker!" O hearken to no counsellors that would encourage you in maintaining that war. All the counsellors in this Book, with one voice,-the voice of earnestness, authority, and affection, dissuade you from it. Here is a "multitude of counsellors;" and here is "safety." And yet the counsel of them all is but one. They all wrote by one Spirit, and their counsel is the counsel of God. Obey it and live. In the verse following, we have first, a matter of fact,-"Wisdom is too high for a fool."-The fool in this verse is probably the same as the evil man in the first. He is the man of low, grovelling dispositions, desires, and pursuits,-who "minds earthly things;" seeks his enjoyment in the gratifications of sense; does not even cultivate his mind, far less aspire at the highest of all wisdom, "the wisdom that cometh from above,"-the illumination of heaven, the knowledge of God’s word, and the course of life which is in accordance with its principles and directions.-Wisdom being too high for him, does not mean that it is of such difficult acquisition as to be beyond the reach of his natural powers; (were that the case he would not be blameworthy for the want of it) but that he has no desire after it, and therefore will put himself to no trouble to attain to it. The "price of wisdom" may be "in his hand," but he has "no heart to it," and therefore it lies neglected and remains as far from him as ever.

Then we have the natural consequence-"He openeth not his mouth in the gate." As "the gate" means the place of public assembly and judgment, the expression is evidently equivalent to-men never think of placing him in any situation of honour or of trust. They never consult him in difficulties; never choose him as an arbitrator or judge in any cause or controversy. He may be ready enough to "open his mouth;" he may have a sufficiently good opinion of what he has to say; the greater his folly, the more may be his self-conceit; the emptier of all that is worth having, the fuller is he of himself. But his opinion is never asked; and when he does put himself forward to give it ultroneously, all are impatient; he is put down, his judgment being held in contempt.

Verses Proverbs 24:8-9. "He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person. The thought of foolishness is sin; and the scorner is an abomination to men."-The spirit of these two verses is the same, though the expression be different. There seems at first view in the former something like the tameness of a truism. To be sure, one might say, who should be called a mischievous person, if not the deviser of evil? Two remarks may place it in a correct light:-1. The deep designing villain, who hatches in secret his schemes of evil, may have art enough to draw, by his sly and insidious and plausible representations, the simple and unwary into participation,-and even, as his tools, to take the chief part-in their execution. In these circumstances, the verse teaches that the deviser of the evil should have the infamy, the guilt, the condemnation, the punishment. He is the "mischievous person;" not his unsuspecting and inexperienced dupe. And, when the facts of the case are discovered, and it comes to be known how it stands, so it will be. Men will generally have justice enough to lay the blame, and to affix the infamy and the stigma in their proper place.-2. Thus too it is in the estimate of God. The "deviser of evil" is, in His eyes, the "mischievous person;" and shall be held and treated, condemned and punished, as such, even although his devices should never be carried into execution at all, or should be executed by others than himself.-This, you perceive, brings the sentiment into a close affinity with the first clause of the following verse:-"The thought of foolishness is sin." But while this connexion may be recognised, the sentiment must be generalized. It holds true in the utmost latitude of application. Every foolish thought-every imagination, every wish, though never uttered to men, and never so much as indicated, even by a look,-is perfectly before the all-seeing, all-searching eye of God. And observe-it is not known only; it "is sin." If the thinker of the evil meant to be also the doer of it, and was prevented only by causes which he could not control, he will be regarded by the righteous Judge as if he had actually done it. It stands, in the book of God’s remembrance, the same as if thus recorded against him.

How deeply solemn in this view the statement! O how much passes in the mind and heart, to which fellow-men are strangers,-to all of which God is privy! And how does this accumulate the amount of sin in the divine indictment against every one of us! And how should a consciousness of this shut us up to exclusive reliance on the mercy of the gospel! There is not one secret "thought of evil," that does not require for its forgiveness the virtue of atoning blood; and that does not require faith in that blood, confession, and supplication for mercy, in order to the sinner’s obtaining the forgiveness! Well, then, may we exclaim, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand!"

We have, observe, in the phraseology of this part of the verse, the clearest evidence that foolishness means more than mere weakness, mere intellectual imbecility. It is here, manifestly, moral pravity. In the latter part of the verse, "the scorner is an abomination to men,"-"the scorner"

means, as in other cases, one who openly scoffs at all the restraints of divine authority, the precepts of law, and the principles of rectitude; by whom they are, in word and act, set at defiance; who not only devises evil, but does it, with a stubborn heart and a high hand. Such a character "is an abomination" amongst men; and he is "an abomination to men." He is so, as a matter of course, to the godly-whose minds are one with God's, and whose "hearts are right with Him." And he is so even to men in general, on the principles of that conventional morality, which it is found necessary to maintain, in order to the union and the wellbeing of society; for his pernicious influence is felt on the very bonds of social order. And were his principles and example followed, all would be mutual jealousy, distrust, injury, anarchy.

Verse Proverbs 24:10. "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small."-This also has the aspect of a truism-or at least of a very simple and self-evident truth. But simple truths are often the most important and useful: and such is this when duly weighed in its bearings.

We have seen (Proverbs 24:5) that true wisdom is strength.-Religion, when it occupies with presiding influence the mind and heart, will impart this strength in adversity. A man's strength-the vigour of his principles, is tried and tested by adversity. It is only then he is put to the proof. A tree or a house may stand firm in the calm and the sunshine, and to the eye present every appearance and promise of immovable stability; but when the clouds gather, and the tempest raves, the one may be uprooted and the other laid in ruins. What was said cruelly and unjustly of Job, is but too frequently verified in human experience-"Now it has come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."-Further, in ourselves, we have no strength to bear adversity aright; and it is when a man is made to feel this-to feel, by his "fainting in the day of adversity," that "his strength is small," that he becomes truly strong, by being led to rely more on a power above his own.*-Adversity thus contributes, among other benefits, to the deepening of humility,-producing diffidence of ourselves, and confidence in God; while the measure of spiritual vigour,-the power of genuine principle-is drawn out and made apparent, for the advantage and encouragement of others.

* See 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

We must beware of self-reliance. Boasted strength will ever be found weakness-ever, in the day when the trial comes, inefficient. Thus was it with Peter. He thought his strength great. O! there was not any thing for which it was not adequate. He was fit for every emergency. Nothing could shake, nothing could daunt him. Yet he "fainted in the day of adversity," and learned that "his strength was small." And the lesson, though dearly learned, was of eminent use to him all his days; and the record of it has been of use to many a soul since. Let us learn to place our reliance on the Lord. While in Him we have "righteousness," in Him too we must have "strength." All is from His infinite fulness.* * Comp. Isaiah 40:28-31. The two following verses bring before us an important duty and considerations enforcing it:-"If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?" The duty directly enjoined is evidently that of taking part with the oppressed. The case supposed and described is clearly that of a fellow-creature standing exposed to death, from unrighteous oppression, from false accusation, from malicious prosecution, or from persecution for conscience sake. And the duty incumbent

upon us in such a case, whatever be its variety, is that of doing all that lies in our power to deliver such. We may by various causes be tempted to refrain from the discharge of this important duty. But it clearly comes under the comprehensive law of love:-"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." We may dread the vengeance of the imperious and self-willed despot, or the selfish and partial magistrate, or the unjust judge, or the interested and vindictive private prosecutor. We may be tempted by indolence, that cannot be troubled; by selfishness, that says, It is none of my business; by avarice, that shrinks from risk of loss. But let all such excuses be well weighed. They may serve to suppress the demands of conscience now, but they will not stand in the judgment. The spirit of the duty may be illustrated by a few Scripture examples.-Obadiah fulfilled it, when, at the peril of his life, he took part with the prophets of Jehovah against Ahab and his bloody queen-hiding them from persecuting violence, and providing them with the means of life, when all the resources of royal power and fury were astir to discover and destroy them.-Jonathan fulfilled it, when he placed himself between his exasperated father and the unjustly pursued, the innocent David,-exposing himself, for the sake of his unoffending friend, with noble generosity and self-denial, to the unnatural execrations of an unreasonable and vengefully jealous parent, and to the point of the madman’s javelin.-Esther fulfilled it, when, to save from impending massacre and extermination her own people, treacherously sold to the cruel caprice of the haughty, unprincipled, and mean-spirited Haman, she ventured into the presence of the king, uninvited, at the hazard of his fitful wrath and of her head, saying-"If I perish, I perish."-The midwives of Egypt fulfilled it, when on the ruthless edict of Pharaoh having gone forth to cast all the male children of the Israelites into the Nile the instant they were born, these women, "fearing God," disobeyed the royal mandate, and saved them alive.-Ebedmelech the Ethiopian fulfilled it, when taking part with the persecuted Jeremiah against the princes of Jerusalem that had accused him to king Zedekiah and demanded his life, and, when the king himself had given him up into their hands from pusillanimous dread of their power,-he went in boldly to the royal presence, protested against the prophet’s accusers, charged them with wrong, obtained an order for his release from the dungeon into which they had cast him, and himself executed the order.-Saul’s guards fulfilled it, or acted at least in the spirit of it, when they disobeyed the command of their master to fall upon and slay the priests of the Lord-an order of most monstrous iniquity; while the time-serving, ungodly, and blood-thirsty Doeg violated it most flagrantly by instant compliance.-Aquila and Priscilla fulfilled it, when for Paul’s sake "they laid down their own necks," jeoparding their own lives for the preservation of his.

It was in the full spirit of this lesson that all the measures were prosecuted for effecting the termination of the execrable system of slavery with all its horrors of unrighteousness and deadly cruelty; and it is in the spirit of the lesson still, that all possible means should be put in operation for accomplishing the abolition, throughout the world, of the accursed traffic in human flesh, and the breaking of every yoke, that the oppressed may go free,-that the "drawn unto death may live." The condition of sinners may be regarded as here very aptly set forth. They are "drawn unto death"-seized, or apprehended for death, and "ready to be slain:"-and the death to which they are doomed,-O how unutterably fearful! But you may naturally meet me with an objection here. In their condition there is no injustice; no unrighteous and cruel oppression. The sentence of death under which they lie is a divine sentence-in perfect accordance with all the principles of equity:-the sword with which they are ’’ready to be slain" is the sword of divine justice itself. They deserve to die the death. To attempt to prevent it would be to arrest the hand of God. Ought not divine, and therefore

unimpeachable, justice to have its course? The objection-otherwise irresistible-God has himself removed. Justice, infinite justice, had all its claims acknowledged and fulfilled on Calvary. On the ground of the sacrifice there offered,-the atonement there made,-the God of justice and mercy has called on sinners to accept pardon, in the name and for the sake of his Son. His call comes with authority. It is a command. It is in virtue of the satisfaction of justice in the atonement of Christ, that we ourselves enjoy our own deliverance from the death and destruction to which, in common with all. we were devoted. And the very same authority that commanded us to believe and be saved, enjoins on us to be agents in attempting the rescue of others. O! what should we not be ready to do, to sacrifice, to suffer, for such an end!-to effect such a rescue!

Turn we now to the considerations here enforcing the duty:-

1. It is a duty of which the very nature ought to render it agreeable. It is a duty of Benevolence. It ought, in every case, to be a pleasure to have, and to be able to put in operation, the means of doing good-and in a special manner, when the good is, not temporal and secular merely, but spiritual and eternal. Some duties, even of benevolence, are of a mingled character, partly pleasant, partly painful. There are at times contending, or seemingly contending interests;-so that, when we are doing good to one, we are not sure what the possible effects may be to others. But in the present case there is no such apprehension-no drawback. It is all pleasing. By the conversion of a sinner, the sinner himself is infinitely benefited; and what but benefit can accrue to any one else? Benefit to him is benefit to all who come within the sphere of his influence. There is no possible result but blessing. In delivering one who was "drawn unto death and ready to be slain," we raise up an agent for the deliverance of more. The benefit spreads,-spreads around; spreads onwards. The rescue of one may be the rescue of thousands; and to individuals, to families, to circles of kindred, to neighbourhoods, to cities, to kingdoms, to the world, it is all benefit,-all blessing; blessing for time, and blessing for eternity.-Still, notwithstanding all this, we are in danger of being tempted to the neglect of this duty. Let us bear in mind therefore- 2. That we have an account to render to God of the manner in which we have fulfilled it. This is evidently the main point in the various awakening questions of the twelfth verse (Proverbs 24:12):-"If thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?" These questions all go to impress our minds with the light in which even the guilt of forbearing to succour and to seek the deliverance of the wronged and oppressed appears in God’s eyes:-and how much more heinous must the guilt appear to Him of leaving fellow-sinners without even an attempt to rescue them, to perish for ever! The blessed God has shown His estimate of the worth of human souls, and the value of salvation,-by the ransom He has paid for them. How criminal in His sight must be all indifference! What an affront to Him, to affect to make light of an object on which He has impressed, by the whole scheme of redeeming grace, in the incarnation, obedience, sufferings, and death of His Son, so high a value! We dare not plead indifference with Calvary before our eyes!-with the testimony there borne-borne by the infinite God, in the tears, and agonies, and blood of Immanuel, to the sinfulness of sin, to the fearfulness of the perdition to which it has doomed the sinner, and the unutterable preciousness of deliverance and life!-The expression here used might be interpreted as that of indifference-"Behold we knew it not!" intimating that they cared not to know it,-were at no pains to find it out. But the plea of indifference, on the part of a professed child of God, would be doubly inconsistent and strange. It would imply at

once a supercilious disregard of the revealed judgment of God, and the absence of all right impression of the worth of his own soul; for such an impression it is impossible for any one to have, who feels not for the perdition of other souls as well as of his own. No sinner can be in a state of salvation himself, and think, and talk, and act with a spirit of cold-blooded heartlessness and unconcern, about that of his fellow-men! But we cannot, at the bar of God, plead ignorance. We cannot plead it with regard to the worth of salvation, when God has, both by word and action, so plainly and impressively declared it; so neither can we plead it as to the fact of others requiring it. Many cases of oppression and wrong, of suffering and danger, may exist around us, without our "knowing" them, or being able, by any pains of ours, to discover them. But to say-with regard to-the guilt and misery, and exposure to perdition, of the mass of mankind among whom we daily live and move,-"Behold I knew it not," would be, and could not but be, the utterance of a lie,-an unblushingly presumptuous falsehood. To live anywhere on earth, where there are human beings, and not to know it, is impossible:-to live in a city like this, teeming with every variety of ungodliness to be found out of hell, and pretend not to know it, would be a plea only to be accounted for by the loss of reason. Thousands are perishing at our very doors, under our very eye, "without Christ, and without hope!" We see it; we know it. The frequency of it is so great,-the sight of it is so constant, that we are in danger of becoming so familiar with it as to lose all impression of the fearful fact. Against this we need to watch. But ignorance can never be our plea.

Further, every plea by which we would vindicate or palliate neglect, would argue ingratitude to God for his kindness and grace to ourselves. This seems to be the spirit of the expression-"He that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it?" When applied to the case immediately referred to by Solomon-the case of temporal life exposed to hazard from malice, oppression, or persecution-the case of men thus "drawn unto death and ready to be slain,"-the expostulation, (taking the word soul in its frequent application to animal life) has its full spirit:-"He that keepeth thy life,"-sustaining it every moment, guarding it from the approach of ten thousand dangers,-without whom you could not draw a breath, and without whose bounty and beneficence life would be a curse instead of a blessing,-"doth not HE know it?"-know thy unfeeling neglect of the life of thy fellow-men? And "who maketh thee to differ?" Could not He at once reverse your respective circumstances? And how would you feel, and how would you wish, and what would you expect, were your circumstances theirs, and theirs yours? And has not God, by the law of mutual love, made you mutual guardians of each other’s lives and well-being?-And is it becomingly grateful to Him who is the God and the guardian of your life, in whose hand your breath is, and from whom comes everything that in the slightest measure contributes to life’s enjoyment, to be thus heartlessly unconcerned about the lives of others?-Let Christians apply the expostulation to higher interests. The life of your souls is in God’s hands. He has given it; He sustains it. In Him you have your spiritual as well as your animal being, your heavenly as well as your earthly life. Is there, then, anything like becoming gratitude to the author and sustainer of that immortal life, when you are listless and heedless about souls that are dying and dead around you?-Remember the answer of God to the sullen question of the first murderer, "Am I my brother’s keeper?" "The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground." Remember too, that next to the murderer who directly takes away life, is the man who, with the means of life in his possession, suffers his fellow-creature to die. Remember still further, that this is true of the soul as well as of the body; true with an emphasis proportioned to the superior value of the soul’s life to that of the body,-of the eternal to the temporal.

Finally, mark the principle on which the judgment of the great day will be conducted:-God will "render to every man according to his works." This implies, that by their world the principles of men shall be tested; and thus the two great classes separated from each other,-those who are placed on the right, and those who have their station on the left hand:-those who believed, and loved, and feared God, being proved to have been under the influence of these principles, by the "work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope." And of all descriptions of works, none of the least distinctive of state and character will be such works as we have been describing; and foremost in rank the all-important work of caring for the souls of others. If this is not to be a distinguishing criterion, what else will? How, then, shall we find our place on the right hand of the Judge, if we have taken no interest in such matters?-if we have allowed souls to perish around us, without any concern to save them?-if we have failed to do either the much or the little that was in our power?-Have we not reason to put the question to ourselves, "with fear and trembling," whether will He whom we call Master and Lord in that day own us as his?-"Doth not He consider it?"-Yes; and we have seen the light in which He does consider it. O remember what He who is to be the Judge hath done for souls! And think how heavy, in His estimation, must be the guilt of neglecting them, and leaving them to perish! What evidence can they possibly produce, in vindication of their professed faith in him, who, in this essential point, so sadly fail of resemblance to him? Can they be Christ’s, that leave souls to perish, when for souls Christ shed his blood? Can they be owned as disciples of Him who came "to seek and to save the lost," who can allow the lost to remain in their lost estate, with hardly a yearning wish or a faint effort for their recovery? It implies also that while the whole of the glory and blessedness of heaven will be the gift of grace, the Father will testify His love to the Son and satisfaction in His work, by proportioning the honour He confers for His sake to the amount of faithful service done to Him by those on whom the honour is bestowed. And that amount will be estimated, not absolutely but relatively-relatively to the amount of talent, opportunity, and means; so that, in many instances, the proportions will not be according to what appeared to men, but according to the righteous measure of divine knowledge. Thus "many that are first shall be last, and the last first." Ought we not then to be emulous to abound in acts of faithful and devoted service to our divine Master? Is it right in any servant of His, to satisfy himself with as much only as may just serve to prevent his being rejected? Would not the very exercise of a principle thus ungenerously selfish, be sufficient of itself to ensure, or at least to warrant his rejection? Should we not be solicitous to be able to say-"Thy pound hath gained ten pounds?"-not only not to wrap it in a napkin and let it lie unimproved altogether, but to put it forth to the best possible advantage for the credit of our Master and his cause?-And ought we not as a church, collectively as well as individually, to be zealous of good works; and to "consider one another," to stimulate to their multiplied performance?-that thus we may be mutually "helpers of one another’s faith and joy," and contribute to brighten the gems of each other’s crowns in the day of the Lord?

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Proverbs 24:13-22

LECTURE LXXIV.

Proverbs 24:13-22.

"My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off. Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place: for a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief. Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth; and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth; lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked. For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out. My son, fear thou the Lord and the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change; for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?" A COMPARISON is, in the first two verses, instituted between objects of natural and spiritual taste, and natural and spiritual benefit.-God is good. His benevolence appears in this, among other ways, that in the provision made for us in temporal things, He does not, by any rigid law, prohibit the use of all but what is necessary to life and health. There are many things gratifying to taste, and sight, and smell, of which such necessity cannot be affirmed. And from these, when used in moderation, and in the spirit of gratitude and dependence, we are not interdicted. We may eat "honey" not only because it is "good," or nutritious, but also because it is "sweet." We must not forget, however, that honey is both; for in regard to both, the comparison appears to be designed. Canaan abounded in honey; and it was used, not only as a luxury to the palate, but as an article of diet. "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good," Isaiah 7:15. "Butter" is not considered as the proper import of the original word here. It means thickened or curdled milk, which is "still a favourite article of food in Syria, Arabia, and the neighbouring countries: and, when mixed with honey, is exceedingly agreeable to the taste."* And that "honey" was used as an article of diet, and an accompaniment to other kinds of food, we learn from an incident on a most interesting occasion-when Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection:-"While they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honey-comb," Luke 24:41-42.-In the reference to "honey" and "the honey-comb," then, we have the two ideas of pleasantness and nutritiveness. The comparison follows-"so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul."

* Henderson.

There are some men who might as well, for all the use they make of them, have been without minds. Their mental powers lie dormant. Their enjoyment is all in what is sensual and frivolous. But the experience of such fools no more proves that general knowledge imparts no pleasure, than

instances of palates which have lost their relish can prove honey not to be sweet. The cultivation of the mental faculties, and their employment in the acquisition of knowledge, is a source of pure and exquisite pleasure. It is so in regard to general and scientific knowledge, how much more so in regard to divine knowledge,-the knowledge of those truths which divine inspiration has been given to communicate, and divine power has put forth in miracle to confirm!-The truth of the comparison presupposes for its ascertainment, the existence of a spiritual taste. Spiritual things are "spiritually discerned;" and the spiritual perception of their excellence imparts a pleasure to the soul, of which no power of human sophistry can ever deprive it. A man whose palate is in a healthy condition, and who has tasted honey, can never be argued out of the conviction of its sweetness. You may reason with him to the end of his days; but he will die in the conviction that honey is sweet. So it is with the soul that has received "the knowledge of wisdom," that has once tasted the sweetness of spiritual discoveries, and of those spiritual enjoyments to which the faith of them introduces. Experience is more than all argument;-" more than all the atheists in the world with their sophistry, and all the profane with their banter."*1-And the relish, once felt, produces a growing desire. He who relishes sweetness, having tasted honey, will long for it again. So the sweetness of divine knowledge will quicken the liking for it, and the eagerness for more.*2 The soul having extracted a little of the sweetness of the word of God,-of the "honey from the rock,"-will long, with a keener relish, for a larger portion;-will long for a progressive acquaintance with its rich and varied contents; in their relative bearings, in their beautiful harmony, in their holy and heavenly influence.-And such progress, while pleasant, is profitable to the soul. Its practical effects are most precious. It promotes spiritual growth,-the nourishment and the healthful exercise of all the principles and affections of the divine life.

*1 Henry.

*2 Comp. Psalms 19:7-11; Psalms 119:103; Psalms 119:97; Psalms 119:47; Jeremiah 15:16.

There is one point in which the comparison fails. "Honey" is only good in moderation. If its sweetness tempt to the excessive use of it, it becomes both nauseous and hurtful.* But this is not true and never can be true, of "the knowledge of wisdom "-the knowledge of God’s truth. It never can be found sickening the mind, and producing nausea and rejection. The maxim of all in possession of it will be-a maxim held the more strongly the more abundant has been the acquisition,-"The more the better."-"Surely there is a reward." There is a present reward; a reward of present enjoyment, present benefit, present blessing; not the reward of the man who takes honey to excess,-whom it cloys and sickens, and whose constitution it injures; but the reward of spiritual pleasure and spiritual prosperity, in due proportion to the amount of acquirement. And there is a future reward:-"Thine expectation shall not be cut off." This may refer, indeed, to present enjoyment and present benefit. The "expectation," in this respect, can never go beyond the reality; the reality will ever be found to exceed the "expectation." But the "expectation" may be regarded as connected with eternity; with the consummation of the divine life in heaven, as well as with its commencement and progress on earth. That "expectation shall not be cut off," when every other shall.

* See Proverbs 25:16; Proverbs 25:27.

Verse Proverbs 24:15. "Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place." This is an admonition to evil men to beware of all oppression and persecution of

the good. The language is evidently not to be confined to unrighteous infliction on account of particular crimes charged, of which the accused are innocent; but extends to, and especially means, the oppressing and evil-entreating those who are "the excellent of the earth," on account of their very excellence,-as bearing testimony against and condemning the world.

"Spoil not his resting-place." Thus is his dwelling designated. It is the abode of love and peace, of quietness, and holy harmony and domestic joy. It is the place of his family altar, around which are poured out the social devotions of a united and affectionate group, in tender and blessed mutual sympathy, the sympathy of nature and of grace.-Intrude not, with unhallowed foot, and ruthless hand, on this abode of piety and love-this chosen resting-place of the affections-this habitation of the God of the families of Israel. Disturb not, with the voice of cursing and bitterness, the "melody of joy and salvation" that is heard in the "dwelling of the righteous." The reason is assigned in next verse-"For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief."

It is quite clear that "falleth" here means falling into calamity. Were there nothing else in proof of this, the antithesis between the two parts of the verse would suffice to show it. The sentiment of the verse is, that how often soever the righteous may thus fall by the hand of man, God is still with him, and he shall recover again. There are in Scripture many delightfully encouraging statements of the same general truth;-full of comfort to God’s people, and full of fearful admonition to their enemies.* Even in the very midst of temporal sufferings, there is a sustaining buoyancy in genuine principle. It rises, like the life-boat, over the billows of tribulation. It may seem, at times, as if actually whelmed by them, but it emerges again with noble energy, and braves, and buffets, and rides out the storm! Such principle is of God. He inspires it. He exposes it to the trial. He enables it to bear up and to triumph.

* Job 5:17-19; Psalms 34:15-22; Psalms 37:23-25; Psalms 37:39-40; Micah 7:5-10; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; 2 Corinthians 4:8-12. But I must not pass from these verses without observing how miserably they have been misapplied and abused. The falling has been interpreted of falling into sin; and the words have often been so quoted. They have been applied to the doctrine of final perseverance; and as meaning that, how frequently soever, and even how grossly soever, the true believer may fall, he can never finally fall away, so as to be lost. It is easy to give such a statement an aspect of plausibility, and to weave it nicely into the tissue of the orthodox system. But in the Word of God things are in no instance represented in such a light; and it is wrong so to use the language, even in the way of accommodation. As for argument in support of any doctrine, it should never be forgotten-though it too frequently is-that there can never be aught of the nature of argument or proof in any passage, further than as that passage is used in the precise sense it was intended by the Holy Spirit to bear. It is not words, but sentiment, that can have any weight whatever in the way of evidence: and arguments that are founded on a different sense from that which the words were designed to express, have in them just-nothing. They are literally words and nothing more. The application of the language to which I now allude is mischievous in the extreme. Everything must be so that holds out the slightest encouragement to confidence and ease of mind under even one fall into sin; much more under repeated, under many such falls. There is nothing of this kind, I again affirm, in the Bible. When sin has been committed, all there is warning and alarm. The order to the man of God then is:-"Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." Nowhere is there

anything to be found that can be interpreted into an assurance of safety, how often soever they may fall. Whatever is there said to preserve against despair, is said in such a way as to forbid presumption. I can imagine no state of mind more antichristian and delusive than that of the professor who gets himself settled down in the conviction that however often he falls, he cannot finally fall away. His confidence rests on a sufficiently manifest, though alas! too imposing a fallacy. It supposes a man to have ascertained to a certainty his being in a state of grace, independently of present evidence. "Once in grace, ever in grace," may, in a certain sense, express a Bible truth; but so applied, there is not a grosser or more pernicious anti-Bible error. Of present life there must be present evidence. It would be a strange way of proving a tree to be now alive, to enumerate the crops it had borne in former years. To prove it now alive, you must show us the fruit it bears now. In like manner, it will not prove a man to be one of God's family, to show how good he once was. The question forces itself on notice-What is he now? We have just as good a right to conclude from what he is now, when he is falling into sin, that what he was before has been appearance only and a delusion, as others can have to conclude from what he formerly was, that what he is now is only a temporary backsliding. And in the former conclusion there is less-much less of danger than in the latter. Than the latter, indeed, the devil could not suggest a more ruinous. Every fall into sin should give rise to serious and deep searching of heart,-to self-suspicion,-to humiliation, and confession, and fear,-to the tears and prayers of a broken and contrite spirit. And yet, strange to say, the words have even been improved upon, to render them, as is imagined, still more systematically orthodox, but in reality so much the more pernicious in their tendency and effects:-"the just man falleth seven times in a day, and riseth up again." O let professors, when they have fallen into sin, instead of indulging in a delusive self-complacency, and unwarrantable and presumptuous confidence in "former signs of grace,"-tremble at their peril, which is imminent. Let them call to mind the Lord's own words-"Thine own wickedness shall correct, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts," Jeremiah 2:19. "Remember whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent," Revelation 2:5. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" 2 Timothy 2:19. "Wherefore, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," 2 Peter 1:5-7; 2 Peter 1:10-11.

Perhaps the words which follow, or the admonition contained in them, are to be connected by a natural association with the close of verse sixteenth (Proverbs 24:16)-"but the wicked shall fall into mischief." No doubt the ultimate reference of the language is to the final and irremediable "mischief" into which the wicked shall fall, when the righteous shall have his reward, and reap the fulness of his believing expectation. But the wicked persecutor may "fall into mischief" now: he may be brought, by the providence of God, and that too even by means of his violence against God's people, into circumstances of trial and calamity. And when such happens to be the case, the admonition suited to his case is here addressed to those righteous, who had been the object of his rancour and violence:-"Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth; and let not thine heart be glad when

he stumbleth." Such is the propensity of our corrupt nature. Had not our nature fallen from its original innocence,-had it not "left its first love,"-"enemy" would have been a word unknown; for it expresses a state of feeling which no need would ever have existed of a term to indicate. There would have been no doing of wrong, and therefore no resenting of it. But multiplied, alas! are the wrongs done; and many, and often strong, are the temptations to both the feeling and the act of vengeance. The injunction in this verse is, in the highest degree, spiritual. It condemns the inward feeling of satisfaction at the fall of an enemy, even when we have in no way contributed to bring it about. Though we should not actually, and with our own hand, avenge an injury,-being aware how express and peremptory the precepts are against that; and while, for the same reason, in order to keep out character clear among men from the imputation of a resentful spirit, we carefully conceal our feelings,-we may yet be secretly, within the privacy of our own bosoms, cherishing the very feeling, which we abstain from uttering or putting into act. We may be inwardly delighted on learning that our enemy has met with what we cannot but think, and call to ourselves, well-merited retribution. So it must not be. Never must we in this spirit say within ourselves,-"Ah! so I thought: no more than I have been looking for and desiring might come." The reason is in the next verse:-"Lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him." The import of this evidently is-lest the tokens of God’s displeasure, which would have come on thine enemy, should be transferred to thyself; lest thou, instead of he, should be made to bear them. On this case observe-

1. When we thus inwardly rejoice-our joy is the very spirit of revenge; and our abstaining from actual and open retaliation is thus shown to have arisen from no proper principle, but to have been dictated by considerations themselves of a selfish character; or at least by some self-deceiving distinction between doing the thing with our own hand, and being gratified in seeing it done for us;-two things which, in the principle of them, are the very same-for God looks to the heart.

2. Solomon cannot possibly intend to intimate, as a motive to prevent our rejoicing in the fall of an enemy, that thereby we may turn away his calamity, and arrest the hand of God from inflicting it; because this, it is clear, would be still the very same spirit. It would be rejoicing in the continuance of the divine displeasure, and taking care to avoid whatever would remove it. This would evidently be to suppose him making the very gratification of the spirit of vengeance in one way, the consideration by which it is restrained from giving itself indulgence in another,-the very gratification of the temper prohibited, the motive to its suppression. The frequency with which the counsel of the next verse is repeated, is well fitted to impress on our minds the strength of the tendency existing in our fallen nature to the evil reprehended,-and the consequent need for unceasing vigilance against it. O! it is a sad tendency! Only in an apostate and sinful nature can it ever be found;-the tendency to prefer prosperity without God, to adversity with Him; to look with an enviously wistful eye to the "purple and the fine linen, and the sumptuous fare" of "the rich man;"-and to forget, in the contemplation of his destitution and nakedness, the ample and blessed reversion of the poor and afflicted Lazarus. And what is the reason assigned for the suppression of all envious feelings and desires?-It is ever substantially the same: (Proverbs 24:20.) "For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out." We are thus always carried forward to the end. O! what is the "light" of that worldly prosperity,-what is its worth-which is so speedily to be quenched in darkness! How much better to go through darkness to light, than to go through light to darkness! How much better to pass through a trial of fire to a "wealthy place,"

than to pass through "a wealthy place" to the "fire that never shall be quenched!"-"The candle (or lamp) of the wicked shall be put out." His light-that is, whatever contributed for the time to spread a temporary joy through his heart and his habitation, shall be extinguished for ever. At the very moment when the light of God's people shall rise in all its pure and unfading splendour,-at the very moment when their "day dawns and their day star arises,"-the sun of the wicked's earthly glory and earthly joy shall go down in unending night. But to the righteous,-" the Lord shall be their everlasting light, and their God their glory!"

Verses Proverbs 24:21-22. "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change: for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both." There are some words of general import which are susceptible of application to different objects with modified amounts of that import. Of this description is the word "fear" which is here applied to Jehovah and to human rulers:-"Fear thou the Lord and the king." The word expresses the general idea of reverence,-or of holding in awe. God is to be feared according to the nature and authority of His government, kings according to the nature and authority of theirs:-God supremely; kings subordinately:-God as the source of all power; kings as holding theirs of God, and responsible to Him for the use they make of it:-God for His character, as well as for His authority; kings simply as the representatives of power-their personal character being, not seldom, anything but venerable:-God with a fear ever associated with the love of complacency toward all that He is; kings with a fear with which such love can be blended only in cases where the personal character admits of it,-love being out of the question where there is nothing of the amiable. The connexion of the two fears in the passage before us is evidently intended to impress the one by the other:-If you fear God, fear the king. God, whom you are bound supremely to fear, and whose fear should produce obedience to His will, has enjoined the fear of earthly rulers:-so that a failure in the fear due to them becomes a violation of the fear due to Him.

I need hardly say, that by the king we are to understand the government of the country. It may be monarchical, or it may not. We are by no means to look upon such expressions as this, in Scripture, as attaching the authority of inspiration to one form of government more than to another. Respecting the comparative merits of different forms, the word of God should not be regarded as giving any decision, whether for the kingly, the aristocratical, the popular, or the mixed. The respect, or fear, is due to the legislative and executive powers, of whichsoever description these may be.

It would certainly too be a grievous mistake, were the admonition here tendered against association with those who are "given to change," so interpreted as to condemn and proscribe everything of the nature of public spirit. There may, in different countries,-in their different administrations of government and political usages, be many things in which change is most desirable and essential. There may be flaws in old systems which require to be rectified; customs that are absurd and injurious, which it is desirable to have exploded or modified; partial and oppressive laws which demand revision and alteration; principles of policy which have become unsuitable to the times and to the advancing character and civilization of a people, which call loudly for amelioration. Such improvements patriotism may render it a subject's incumbent duty to do what he can to promote;-to use for this purpose all legitimate and constitutional means which he finds accessible for their attainment; and with a zeal, an energy, and a perseverance proportioned to the magnitude and importance of the end in view, as it bears upon the prosperity

and well-being of the community,-or the greatest good of the greatest number. It may not only be lawful, on the great principles of public morality, for a man to desire and seek such changes, but his manifest and incumbent duty to labour and make sacrifices for their accomplishment. Valuable changes have thus been effected, at different periods, in our own country; and there is room for beneficial changes still. They are in progress. Great principles of improvement are at work. But we should be on our guard. All change is not improvement. Some restless spirits are in danger of identifying the two. The men against whom we are here warned are men of a discontented, unsettled, factious, turbulent, revolutionary spirit; men who can be satisfied with nothing as it is; who, with a mighty conceit of their own wisdom, talk and act as if they thought the world would never be right but under their dominion, and boast of what a world it would be, could they but get all their own way. They are such seditious demagogues as keep a country, for any purpose or for none, in a perpetual ferment; whom nothing pleases; who are thankless for the liberty they have, however far surpassing that enjoyed in other nations, because this or that is not entirely to their mind; who look to their real or imaginary grievances, much more than to their many and valuable privileges; who are ever finding dead flies in the precious ointment, that turn all to unsavouriness,-so that even the sweets of the greatest amount of liberty enjoyed by any nation under heaven, would to them be turned to bitterness by whatever little circumstance, in the constitution or administration, not exactly to their mind, should from time to time discover itself. It must be obvious, that some such characters are intended by "them that are given to change:"-inasmuch as to be "given to" anything means to be set upon it, and dissatisfied without it, and ever on the look-out for it; seeking, and therefore sure to find, reasons for it. Every man must admit that all change is desirable that is a change from wrong to right, and there seems to be no reasonable qualification to this but one; namely, that, since it is a rare thing that changes can be effected in the policy of nations without a greater or a less degree of public agitation and dissension, we should always be sure that the change which we set ourselves to prosecute is of such a nature,-such in the principle of it, or such in the results anticipated from its introduction,-as to warrant for its sake, the incurring of what must always be an evil, the temporary excitation of discordant passions, and the possible risk of more permanent disunion. Such will be the conduct of every reasonable and sober-minded citizen. As for the men who are "given to change"-ever on the hunt after novelties, and reckless of present or future consequences to the peace and well-being of the country, if they can but draw away political "disciples after them," get themselves the credit of leaders of a party, and make themselves notorious as agitators of the public mind, mere political adventurers;-these are the men whom the people of God will shun, neither imbibing their spirit, nor giving them any countenance. They will themselves, while, as in duty bound, they cherish public spirit, as the spirit of patriotic benevolence,-and while, in such questions as, they are satisfied, involve great public interests, they give all the weight of their influence, actively and zealously, on what they believe to be the side of truth, and liberty, and humanity, and justice,-they will, at the same time, bear in mind the example of that Master whose followers they profess to be, who was "meek and lowly in heart," firm in purpose and act, but gentle in the manner of its prosecution,-who "did not strive nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets." They will not imitate those who seem as if they thought it the mark of a manly and independent spirit to scorn and vilify all above them, and the higher others rise, to make it a point of honour to slight and traduce them the more; but, at the risk of the contempt and abuse of such, will remember the authority which condemns "speaking evil of dignities," and while they "fear God" will by that very

fear be induced to "fear" and to "honor the king."

There is one motive by which the conduct enjoined is here enforced. Of all peoples on earth no people were ever so unjustifiable in being "given to change" as were the people of Israel. Even when Jehovah himself was their king, they were "given to change." Their very desire of an earthly king over them, like the other nations, arose from their infatuated love of change. They then rejected Him from being king over them: and in many instances did they suffer for it. But, when they had a king, it became their bounden duty to fear him. And in their history, various striking illustrations present themselves of the fulfilment of the words of this verse. The calamity of insubordination and rebellion "rose suddenly;" and both leader and led came to overthrow and ruin. And how frequent have been the exemplifications of the same thing in the history of modern Europe!-and never more than within the last half-century. How many aspiring demagogues, who have seemed for a time to get all their own way,-the tide of public favour rising and flowing along with them,-have experienced the instability of that favour, the fickleness of a mob, the sudden mutability of their likings and dislikings; have found themselves overtaken by unanticipated reverses, and have perished in their own ambitious devices:-up to the very throne today, and down to the grave to-morrow. Genuine patriots, it is true, there have been who, for their resistance to real tyranny and unrighteous oppression, have bled on the scaffold, and whose death has been their honour. It is not, I repeat, of such that Solomon speaks, but of the devotees of an ambitious selfishness, who bring upon themselves not "the wrath of the king" only, but the wrath of the King of kings:-and then, well may it be said-"Who knoweth the ruin of them both?"

75-Pro_24:23-34

Proverbs 24:23-34

LECTURE LXXV.

Proverbs 24:23-34.

"These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect to persons in judgment. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him: but to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them. Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer. Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house. Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips. Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work. I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." The principle laid down in the first of these verses, while it immediately relates to the public exercise of judicial power, and (as we have had occasion more than once to notice, and to show from many express citations from the Old Testament,) is by divine authority strongly and repeatedly urged on judges under the ancient economy,-has obviously, at the same time, a direct and forcible application to other two cases:-to the case of private arbitration, and to the discipline of the church of God. Every arbiter or referee, in any cause, is by such reference constituted a judge, and bound to the honourable and faithful exercise of the judicial function. Departure from this in one iota would involve the twofold guilt of a violation of integrity and a breach of trust,-of a sin against God and a crime against man. And as to the discipline of the church, the very same law is actually laid down for it, as for the dispensation of justice by civil functionaries.*

* Comp. Leviticus 19:15 as a specimen of such passages in the Old Testament, and James 2:1-9 for the same principle in the New.

Verse Proverbs 24:24. "He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him."-Integrity, honesty, justice, are virtues of society, which the men of the world, though themselves without godliness, and regardless of the dishonour done by the violation of them to the divine Lawgiver, are fully competent to appreciate, in regard to their influence on the condition and well-being of civil communities. They will bear with much that is dissolute and vile in the conduct of their rulers. They think little of it. They regard it as if it affected only their private characters,-nay, in this respect they are not at all ill-pleased to have the countenance of such high example in what they are inclined to practise themselves; and as to religion, they never give a thought to the question whether they know anything about it or not:-but they are very sensitive as to the violation of the principles of equity in the administration of the

laws. When a public man acts a flagrantly unrighteous and dishonest part,-whether he does it under the influence of fear, or self-interest, or avarice, or indolence, or favouritism, or any other misleading principle and motive,-he becomes the object of general detestation. His people, instead of looking up to him with affectionate gratitude and confidence, become alienated from him, and-timidly and secretly perhaps at first, but more and more openly and loudly as they find a responsive feeling in the bosoms of others,-they load himself and his government with bitter execrations:-so that if the man has any feeling, he will read his sin in his punishment, as, amidst spreading and thickening murmurs and imprecations, coming, even though partially on his ear, he trembles on his throne:-for though he may have found that "the king’s wrath is as the roaring of a lion," and that his subjects for a time quailed before it, yet the wrath of a once awakened and vengeful people, roused and united by a sense of common and deep-felt wrongs, is incomparably more fearful.

How pleasing the contrast, verse Proverbs 24:25:-"But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them." Whence this delight? From various and obvious sources:-as 1. From the consciousness of having done rightly. He who acts unjustly, treating the wicked as righteous, and the righteous as wicked, cannot have this;-the sweetest and richest of inward delights,-infinitely surpassing, in real value and happy influence, all the charms of adulation and flattery. Of all conceivable things, indeed, to a man who has any conscience at all remaining, or any sensibility, praise must be the most cutting and distressing when there is the inward consciousness of its being undeserved, and that it comes out of either ignorant or feigned lips:-2. From the possession of public approbation, affection, and confidence. The attachment of others to him should not be either a man’s or a magistrate’s supreme end. But still, the enjoyment of it is sweet. Few things, indeed, to a mind of sensibility, can be more so. For a monarch not only to be greeted with the assurance by the lip of fulsome flattery, but to see and know by indubitable proofs, that he reigns in the hearts of a devoted and grateful people, must be a spring, to that monarch’s bosom, of a "delight" inexpressible:-3. From a sense of divine approbation. Human commendation and attachment little avail any one, unless they are in harmony with this. God’s blessing,-and that is indeed "a good blessing," the best of all,-comes upon the head of the man who, in the firm exercise of right principle, in opposition to all intimidation and to all allurement, to the frown of one and the favour of another, keeps, with unshaken steadfastness, to the dictates of straight-forward truth, and unbending rectitude.-4. From the affection and complacency of all good men,-and-the grateful acknowledgments of those whose causes have been carefully, disinterestedly and righteously investigated and determined:-even those who fail having, notwithstanding, a testimony in their consciences to the soundness of principle and the sincerity of the desire to do right, with which all has been conducted. This kind of general approbation is strongly expressed in the following verse:-"Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer."-It is a truth, established by the history of the world, that a truly conscientious and good ruler, who acts upon principle, and in all things shows that he is seeking his people’s good, will be the object of a warmly loyal attachment, such as would rally that people round him at the risk of life for his protection and that of his throne,-ready to shed their blood, if need be, in his cause. It has been at times, of course, the fate even of such, to be mistaken and misrepresented; and to become for a season the victims of prejudice and alienation most unmerited. But the misapprehensions having been cleared away and the suspicions proved unfounded, the wrong felt to have been done him has but endeared him the more.

Similar will be the attachment of the people to such ministers and counsellors of the crown as "give a right answer"-an answer dictated, not by flattery, not by a desire to secure the royal favour to themselves by conforming to the royal likings, but by a sincere regard to right principle and to the national welfare;-that is, public favour will be the lot of the man who, having the royal ear, avails himself of the privilege and the confidence, to give faithful and disinterested counsel. And although royal fools (for such there have been) may cast off such men, because they refuse to give counsel against their own convictions, merely to please their masters and keep their places,-yet monarchs even of ordinary principle will respect the conscientious principle that sacrifices interest to fidelity and truth; and on experiencing the happy results, will "kiss the lips that gave a right answer" instead of one time-serving, selfish, and flattering. And the words certainly involve a pointed condemnation of all the venial and unworthy adulation too often lavished on wicked men when in power, by sycophant courtiers; by orators, and poets, and party authors; by ministers of state, and alas! by ministers too of the altar of the God of truth!-palliating and excusing vice and injustice,-extolling unreal or questionable virtues,-investing wickedness and licentiousness with a halo of false and illusive splendour,-bestowing on the tyrant or the debauchee the honour and the praise that belong only to the upright prince and to the good man. O how sadly and criminally have human talents and human influence been thus prostrated and prostituted at the shrine of power, in the spirit of selfish venality!-"This proverb," says a judicious expositor, "contains a useful rule for private persons, as well as for rulers. When we are asked an important question, or consulted on an affair of importance, every man will esteem and love us, if we ’give a right answer.’ And, that our answer may be right, it is necessary that it should be sincere, prudent, and meek. We must not give an answer calculated merely to please the person that advises with us; for that would not be consistent with integrity. We must consider all the circumstances of the case, that we may give a proper and pertinent answer; and we must speak with that meekness which renders wisdom lovely. If our answers to those who advise with us have these qualifications, although they may sometimes be distasteful, because truth compels us to speak things disagreeable, yet they will tend, on the whole, to the advancement of our character:-and our character is no contemptible object, because the goodness of it is necessary for us in accomplishing the great business of life, glorifying God, and doing good to men." *

* Lawson.

There is one question, my hearers, to which, above all others, "a right answer" is desirable. The question is that of the jailor at Philippi:-and assuredly he would have kissed those lips that gave him the answer,-the faith of which inspired his own heart and those of his family with "joy unspeakable." It was the right-the only right answer. It was the answer "given by inspiration of God." The same had come from those lips into which "grace was poured"-the lips of the "faithful and true witness." Sinners, in their infatuation, may wish a different answer. But the "right answer" is the only one that will obtain favour in the end. All who receive that answer, and experience the blessed results, will "kiss the lips" that have given it. But, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear"-the one answer must be given. It is the answer that points to the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." The answer that was the right one to the jailor is the right one to each of you:-"BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED." We might give you an answer more in accordance with your spirit of self-righteousness, and worldliness, and pride. You might bless our lips for it, possibly, now; but we are fully assured, you

would curse them in the latter end.

Verse Proverbs 24:27. "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house." A large number of proverbial sentiments, and maxims of practical wisdom, are to be found couched in terms taken from particular departments of life and business. Every one at all acquainted with even the ordinary, but frequently very terse and pithy proverbs of our own country, must be aware of this. It is so in the verse before us. The advice thus given, to bring the lands into good heart, and make the estate productive, before we lavish large expenditure upon the mansion, is clearly intended to convey a general lesson. What is it? I answer-One or other of two things.

1. Begin no undertaking, without due forethought and adequate preparation. Let needful calculations be previously made. Look before you. Think what you are doing. See that you have means for going forward and finishing as well as for commencing. Let all be planned and laid out; materials collected or secured; your way clear. This view of the admonition is often too little regarded; and the important principle of it too often violated. Men set about objects of great magnitude with little of either reflection or anticipation,-with partial information, inadequate provision, and unascertained resources. All is imposing in the outset, and great expectations are excited. But all comes by and by to a stand; and shame, disappointment, and loss are the result,-their unfinished works remaining to future generations as the memorials of their folly.

2. Let those things which are obviously most important and necessary be done first, and the less urgent afterwards. Let not a man begin business by building, and expensively furnishing, a fine house. Let the land be first cultivated. Let your business, whatever its nature, be faithfully and diligently minded, and well established, as far as human industry can effect, or human foresight calculate. Be content, in the mean time, with inferior accommodation. There is an ambitious hasting to be great upon little, as well as an eager hasting to make little much, that is deeply reprehensible, because it is injurious to others as well as to the speculator himself. A man should have property well realized and secured, before he enters on schemes of expensive building. He must not, with sanguine infatuation, appropriate the very first proceeds of his trade to the erection of a palace to live in! The principle of the general maxim, as one of prudential wisdom, is applicable in other departments than those of worldly business. The man violates it who, in the department of literature or science, undertakes works for which he either has not from nature adequate capacity, or for which he has not adequately endowed himself by preparatory study and information. There is the certainty, in such cases, of a disgraceful failure; and, if others have been made to depend upon his instructions, and he proves himself utterly incompetent to redeem the pledge held out, he becomes chargeable with the injustice and wrong done to them, as well as the butt of ridicule himself. By the highest of all authorities, Jesus himself, the principle is applied, in tho department of religion, to the duty and importance of avoiding a hasty and inconsiderate profession of it. He wished and warned all to think what they were doing; to count the cost; to act on the principles of prudential calculation; to consider, whether what they were to obtain by becoming his followers, was, or was not, worth the sacrifices which the step might demand of them. The man who founds a mighty profession on very scanty and imperfect acquaintance with the doctrine he professes, and with the nature and effects of the profession it requires, is like the man who makes a fine show by rearing a splendid mansion, while his fields are not in a condition to support it. Such a man, instead of maintaining his profession out of his capital, puts all his

capital into his profession. There is nothing else. He cannot stand. The principle of the maxim has also been justly applied to spiritual knowledge. "There are first principles which ought in the first place to be well studied, and then we must 'go on unto perfection.' To think of going on to perfection without learning the first principles is as foolish as to think of raising the superstructure of a house without laying the foundation; and to rest in the first principles, is as foolish as to lay the foundation of a house, and then to fancy that our work is all over."*

* Lawson.

Verse Proverbs 24:28. "Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips."-So far as witness-bearing is concerned, we have had this same subject repeatedly under our notice. It may be an imperative duty at times, painful as it ever must be, to "bear witness against our neighbour." It may bo required of us, by our regard to the good of society, to the glory of God, and to the rights of individuals. Our testimony, whensoever we are called and bound to give it, must invariably be according to the strictest truth. But there is, in this verse, something more than this. Not only are we forbidden to bear false witness against our neighbour,-we are not to bear witness against him at all,"without cause:"-that is, when our unfavourable testimony is uncalled for; when it is not required by any of the considerations mentioned, or even by that of self-exculpation,-when we are implicated, and our character, reputation, or interest, is at stake, and cannot be vindicated or secured without the crimination of another. The interdiction is violated, when a man, from any improper motive, ultroneously and needlessly, pushes himself forward to offer his testimony,-though fully aware of the results to the party who is the subject of it. If a man is induced to give unfavourable testimony by any selfish or unwarrantable consideration, he transgresses this prohibition. You will at once perceive,-and I trust you will have the impression of it fixed deeply and indelibly in your minds, so that it may duly influence your entire practice,-that the terms apply, directly and forcibly, to all descriptions of scandal that consist in the needless repetition of real evils. Of this there is a vast and lamentable amount. Slander is properly "false invective;" but there may be a great deal of scandal, even where there is not an atom of slander. Deem it not enough that the evil you tell of your neighbour is true. Still think of the golden rule. Still ask the question, whether, if you are conscious of anything wrong in yourselves, which another knows, you would like the possessor of the secret to bring it into publicity. And, as you feel how decidedly you would deprecate this in your own case, venture not on it in the case of another. Venture not, even in the way of the most confidential secrecy. Keep what you know in your own bosoms. It is best and safest there. In all such matters, proceed on the maxim that a whisper in solitude may one day become the buzz of a public fama,-that what is "told in the ear in closets" may be by and by "proclaimed upon the housetops;" that however unseen you drop the stone into the stillness of the lake, you give thereby the first impulse to a circling and widening wave.

"All very good," you may say, "as regards friends and neighbours that have done one no wrong, and to whom one owes no grudge. But what of enemies, of persons who have slandered and injured us ?-are we to be schooled and censured for only paying them in their own coin?" The answer is in next verse. It is clear and pointed. Ponder it well;-"Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."*

* On the general subject of retaliation, see on verses 17th and 18th of this chapter (Proverbs 24:17-18) and preceding passages. The general subject of the following verses (Proverbs

24:30-34) has been more than once noticed;* but they not only bear but require repetition,-" line upon line, precept upon precept." Solomon describes what had come accidentally under his eye. It was a scene of desolation,-not the result of the barrenness of the soil, nor of the violence of the invading foe, but of indolence and neglect. The field which had before been cultivated lay waste; the vineyard, which before had been dressed and productive, was now overrun with every description of useless and noxious weeds. Solomon looked on this scene, and gathered a lesson from it; a lesson to himself, which the Holy Spirit directed him to put on record for all generations:-"Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction." It has been said, and truly said, that "wise men profit more by fools, than fools by wise men: for wise men will learn to avoid the faults of fools, but fools will not learn to imitate the virtues of wise men." Let us learn from the scene described- * As in Proverbs 6:6-11.

1. How gradual may be the approaches of the evils of sloth, while, at the same time, they are irresistible in the end. This is the lesson of the thirty-fourth verse. The traveller approaches by degrees. When comparatively at a distance, he appears harmless; but, when he has advanced a certain length, he is discovered to be "an armed man,"-all resistance to whom is too late, and consequently vain. Famine, though gaunt, is irresistibly mighty. Who can stand before it? Not the man of habitual sloth. The very habit has the more thoroughly incapacitated him for plucking up any spirit to ward off the final ravages of the frightful enemy. He succumbs, sinks, and dies. The same lesson is read to us in the case of the field and the garden. It is by degrees that they come to the state of utter desolation and luxuriance in all that is profitless and hurtful, here described:-but though slowly, it is surely. And so surely is the tendency realized in a neglected business and a neglected family. You may possibly have chanced to see two little gardens adjoining each other; the one the garden of the diligent-neat, clean, orderly, beautiful, wellstocked and productive; the other that of the sluggard, here so graphically described. Now, as you see the garden without, you may expect to find the family within:-in the one, all clean, and snug, and tidy, and comfortable; in the other, all dirty, and bare, and tattered, and cheerless: and this too, where there is the same amount, or rather the same scantiness of means,-nay perhaps the advantage, in this respect, on the side of the sluggard.

How opposite the feelings produced by these two scenes!-what delight in the one! what disgust in the other! And of one emotion, in contemplating each, we are especially conscious. If circumstances of trial and loss are imagined to come upon the one, how prompt in purpose we feel to help him,-to keep him up, or, when he falls, to raise him again. His neighbours will unite to stock his garden for him from their own store,-to provide for his children, and to furnish him anew with the means of doing well, and will pray for a blessing upon him. The other will meet with but little sympathy. He will be left to reap the bitter fruit of his own laziness and folly; no eye pitying, no hand helping him.

2. Our souls are committed by God to our own spiritual cultivation. This is no sinecure. They will not thrive themselves. If we would have them "as a watered garden, and as a field which the Lord hath blessed," we must apply spiritual activity and labour, to stock them with the appropriate graces, affections, and virtues, and to promote the growth and productiveness of them all. We must sow the seed, and seek by prayer the showers of the divine blessing,-the promised influences of the divine Spirit. We must watch over the germination, the springing, the growth, and the fructifying of the seed. "Without this all will be stunted and sterile. The noxious and unsightly

weeds of sin will spring and luxuriate, and overspread the soil; all growing tliat ought not to grow, and nothing growing that should. Ignorance and error,-foolish and sinful imaginations,-all the lusts and passions,-all the thoughts, and words, and acts of vice and wickedness,-will make room for themselves, choking up and destroying everything else. If there be any fruit in the field, it will be "thistles instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley:"-if any grapes in the vineyard, they will be "wild grapes;"-the "grapes of Sodom, the clusters of Gomorrah," "grapes of gall, clusters of bitterness,"-while all the under-soil will be fertile only in what is worthless or worse,-in the weeds of foolishness, and the poisons of iniquity and death. A neglected garden is unsightly; but how much more unsightly to the spiritual eye, a neglected soul!-a soul left to itself; uncultivated, and unprotected; left to produce what it will, and exposed, by the breaking down of its fences, to the ravages of every passing devourer; "the lion from the bottomless pit wasting it at his pleasure!"

Let us, then, my beloved brethren, attend with unremitting diligence to the fencing and the cultivation of our minds and hearts, in the knowledge, and faith, and love, and holy influence, of divine truth; that so all that is noxious may be repressed and rooted out, and that we may be "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." "Herein," said Jesus, "is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples." O let us beware of bringing upon ourselves the complaint of Jehovah against his ancient people-who enjoyed so much privilege, but proved so sadly degenerate-fertile in evil, and sterile of good!* Let us bear in mind, that it is only when we wait for, and "drink in" the rains of divine influence, and "bring forth fruit unto God," that we can receive an increase of blessing; and that when, in the midst of all means and all advantages, we are, solely through our own listlessness, and indolence, and negligence, in the use and improvement of them, barren and unfruitful, or fruitful only in evil, we are exposing ourselves to the righteous desertion and curse of God.

* Comp. Isaiah 5:1-7.

Let parents apply the principle to the spiritual instruction of their children. Your families are as vineyards committed to your care and culture. Imagine not that, when left to themselves, they will spontaneously yield good fruit. The experience of all generations reads you an opposite lesson. You must enclose; you must dig, and sow, and water, and watch, and protect the springing blade, till it comes to the ear, and the full corn in the ear. You must train from their earliest germs your tender plants, and guard, and support, and prune them, and clear and manure the soil around them. The incessant care of both parents must be bestowed upon this; and all little enough. They must look for the help and for the blessing of God. O see to it, that the verses before us be not a just description of any of your families,-from your parental negligence, indifference, and sloth. Let every family be as a sacred enclosure for God; fenced in from the blasts and blights of the world, where the "plants of his right hand’s planting" are reared from the seed, for future productiveness. And it would ill become me to forget,-deeply humbling as the remembrance is, as being associated with the consciousness of great failures, and great, though some of them unavoidable, deficiencies,-that the Church is the Lord’s vineyard, and that every separate church of Christ is a section of that vineyard; that ministerial watchfulness, and diligence, and fidelity, and prayerfulness, are required, for its protection from the inroads of Satan, and for its suitable culture, and divinely required fruitfulness. When, through erroneous, unfaithful, speculative, heartless preaching,-by a shunning to declare the whole counsel of God,-by the teaching of doctrine without practice, or of practice without doctrine,-and by the laxity or entire neglect of instituted

discipline,-by carelessness in the admission of members, and the want of vigilance over their conduct when received,-by allowing to pass without admonition what ought to be admonished, and retaining that which ought to be excluded,-any portion of that sacred enclosure becomes overrun with the briars and thorns of conformity to the world from which it ought to be separate, and from which its distinction ought to be apparent to all,-a solemn responsibility may be incurred, and a heavy account may have to be rendered. And let us look with pity on the vast outfield of the world, both in Christian and in heathen lands. Is it not, on a fearfully extensive scale, what is here described? "It is all grown over with thorns, and nettles have covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof is broken down." It is overspread, in sad luxuriance, with all the varieties of sin; it is open to the wasteful malignity of the enemy of God and of souls. Instead of being, as it should have been, one great garden of the Lord, it is rank with all that is hateful in His sight. It is the duty of Christians to reclaim this desolation. Jehovah has given to his Son "the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession." The "desolate heritages" must be brought in. It has been through the criminal indolence and apathy of the church of God, that they have lain so long and so extensively waste. The world, as committed to the care and culture of the people of God, has, alas! for many an age, been "the field of the slothful, and the vineyard of the man void of understanding." There has been for some time an awakening to a more intelligent view of the relation of the church to the world, and to a sense of the sin and shame of former indolence and neglect. The great duty is now, in no small degree, felt, of clearing away from the face of this apostate earth the "thorns and nettles" of sin and the curse, and bringing the whole into spiritual cultivation and productiveness. O let Christians be more and more, personally and unitedly, diligent in this good work, that so "the wilderness and the solitary place may be glad for them; and the desert may rejoice and blossom as the rose," Isaiah 35:1. Let the prayer of the ancient church be ours: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause thy face to shine upon us. That thy way may be known upon the earth, thy saving health among all nations." Psalms 67:1-2.

76-Pro_25:1-7

Proverbs 25:1-7

LECTURE LXXVI.

Proverbs 25:1-7.

"These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out. It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter. The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable. Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness. Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: for better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen." At this point commences the fourth division of this Book, extending to the close of the twenty-ninth chapter.-In 1 Kings 4:32, it is said of Solomon, in enumerating the particulars of his extraordinary wisdom,-"he spoke three thousand proverbs." And what he is thus said to have spoken, it is evidently designed to be understood, he committed to writing. The full collection of these sententious maxims of wisdom had been kept, it would appear, in the possession of the house of David, or of the kings of Judah. The selection in the preceding part of the Book had been made by Solomon himself. Those which follow were added in the time of good king Hezekiah; by the direction, there is every reason to suppose, of that exemplary prince, for the religious benefit of his people. "The men of Hezekiah" stands in the Septuagint translation, "the friends of Hezekiah"-meaning, in all likelihood, Isaiah and other inspired men. Like the proverbs-which precede, these must be regarded, by their admission into the Jewish canon of Scripture, as having the sanction, not only of the wisdom and experience of Solomon, but of divine authority; and we owe them the same reverential regard as we owe to other parts of God’s Word. The "men of Hezekiah" by whom they were "copied out" were employed, by the providence of God, in doing a service to all future generations. They have added to the precious practical instructions by which we are directed in our conduct on earth, and are trained for the perfection of heaven. Thus are there various kinds and degrees of usefulness in the church of God. Solomon, in selecting and composing these gems of moral and spiritual instruction, was more honoured than those by whom they were merely copied; but the copyists were of eminent service.-And what would have become of the church of God, in ages preceding the invention of the art of printing, but for the labours of scribes, in taking copies of what had been "given by inspiration of God?"

Verse Proverbs 25:2. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings to search out a matter."-Without entering at large into the interesting subject of the union of manifestation and concealment,-of discovery and of secrecy,-in the divine administration, (which the style of exposition does not allow,) perhaps the following truths may be considered as comprehended in this brief but striking statement-"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing:"-

1. Taking it in contrast with the latter part of the verse-"but the honour of kings is to search out a matter,"-there is implied the idea that the divine knowledge is universal, perfect, and free from everything of the nature of inquiry, investigation, effort, in the acquisition. His acquaintance with all things is, in the strictest sense, intuitive, and, in the strictest sense, complete. He requires no "searching out" in order to discover anything; nor is it possible to make any addition to His knowledge. The past, the present, and the future are alike before His all-comprehensive mind. He sees all the present. He remembers all the past. He fore-sees all the future. His knowledge is "light without any darkness at all;" and it is light that is equally clear through the immensity of the universe, and through all time and all eternity!

2. The language implies God’s entire independence and supremacy, as a part of His glory. He "giveth not account of any of his matters," further than, in sovereignty, He sees meet to do. He conceals when he pleases. He discloses when he pleases:-"Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" and who can demand the disclosure of any one of the secrets of the infinite and independent Mind?

3. The impenetrable depth of his counsels is a part of God’s glory. His "judgments are a great deep." What line of created wisdom can fathom them?- "Not angels, that stand round his throne, Can search his secret will!"

"Canst thou, by searching, find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." "O the depth of the riches, and wisdom, and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" This is fitted to inspire us, His intelligent creatures, with "reverence and godly fear." In the sovereign secrecy, the unapproachable reservation, the unfathomable mysteriousness of the divine counsels,-in the very requirement that we humbly bow, in adoring submission, where we cannot comprehend, without asking a question, or urging a further disclosure:-in all this, there is something that gives the Creator His proper place. There is in it a sacredness, an awfulness, that mates us feel, as we ought to do, our infinite distance. This is God’s glory.

4. In all God’s most mysterious and incomprehensible ways, He is entitled to entire and undoubting confidence. His very secrecy is a test of principle, and thus one of the means of bringing glory to his name in the exercise of principle in our feelings and conduct towards him. Were there no concealment, there would be no trial of faith, no trust. And while God brings honour to himself by thus drawing forth the confiding filial love of his children, He lays up glory for his name against the day of future disclosure, when all shall be made plain,-the day of the "revelation of the righteous judgments of God!"

It is His glory, that, after all the discoveries of himself made to us, both in his works and in his word, we yet are constrained to exclaim-"How little a portion is known of Him!" The little is full of wonder; but infinitude is still in concealment. And even of the vast and complicated schemes of providence and of grace, how much is there, after all we see and all He has told us, respecting which we are still left to say-"The day will declare it!"

"But it is the honour of kings to search out a matter."-The general meaning and spirit of these words, from the position of contrast in which they stand, appears to be, that it belongs not to man,

how elevated soever in authority and honour he may be, to assume airs of divinity, and presume to think of imitating the peculiar prerogatives of the supreme Ruler. It is the province of earthly rulers to keep their own place, and, instead of "thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think," to "think soberly," and, in humbleness of mind, to endeavour, in the application of all their powers, to fulfil the ends for which they have been entrusted with their power.

It becomes kings to imitate, in the administration of their government, the righteousness and the mercy of the divine;-but there are points in which all imitation would be presumption. They must not imitate Him in intuitive discernment and instantaneous decision; nor must they imitate Him in profound secrecy and impenetrability of counsel and procedure. As to the former:-it must be the effect of one or other of these things-pride, or vanity, or hasty passion, or indolent remissness. And no one of these is an honour to a prince, but the very reverse. In every case of judgment that involves the rights and affects the well-being of individual subjects, and in every measure that embraces more extensively the prosperity and happiness of the community, and may either, on the one hand, effectually promote these, or on the other, expose them to injury or to risk, it is his incumbent duty, and it is his "honour,"-instead of hasty and peremptory decision,-to search out the matter; to consider, to consult, to compare advices, to weigh all evidence, on either side, with scrupulous conscientiousness,-laying together, in regard to every public measure, all its various bearings and tendencies, and possible or probable results. Intuition belongs only to God; and instant decision can be warrantable only in the case of him who possesses it. And as to the latter:-it too is the result of pride and selfsufficiency,-of the arrogance of royalty. From nothing else can the assumption proceed of studious secrecy, and distance, and elevation, and mystery, into which their subjects beneath them must not presume to pry, or attempt to penetrate;-and the affectation of deciding and acting on grounds that must by no means be known, but wrapt up in the mystery of sovereignty and the haughty reserve of false greatness. Such procedure, considered as the general character of the dealings of royalty, maybe dictated by fear; but not by attachment nor confidence; nor is it fitted to engender either. The honour of a king, in "searching out a matter" is-to show, in his general procedure, with openness and unreserve, the grounds on which it is founded,-thus manifesting confidence in his people, a desire to show them and to satisfy them of his real regard, while, at the same time, he keeps his place, maintains his legitimate authority, and is unswayed, to the right hand or to the left, by any momentary clamour of popular threatening. This is his glory. This gives the most desirable and enviable of all honour to a ruler,-a place in the hearts of his people, a throne in their affections. The same principle, it may be observed, applies to all in authority, as well as to kings,-whether in the state or in the church; to all magistrates and judges, to all private arbiters, to masters in reference to their servants, to parents in reference to their children; to pastors of churches, and to brethren entrusted with any matter for investigation. It is at once duty and honour to search out everything that comes under their cognizance. The honour should ever be regarded as lying in the fairness and impartial justice of the decision, and in the completeness with which it meets every branch and bearing of it, so as to leave no ground for subsequent dissatisfaction and complaint; not in the mere off-hand and summary quickness with which it is dispatched, and by which fools seek to get to themselves the credit of extraordinary perspicacity,-of seeing at a glance through intricacies that would cost others a process of anxious scrutiny. In the next verse a comparison is intended: "as the heaven for height, and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unsearchable."

It is quite true, notwithstanding what we have before said, and in perfect consistency with it, that a wise prince will, in regard to some of the measures of his administration, be on the reserve. There are plans which depend on secrecy for their success, and of which the premature disclosure would be the ruin. There may at times be secrets that are confidential between governments, as well as between individuals,-of which the divulging would be a breach of the faith of treaties, and might expose the rights and liberties of other nations to hazard.

I scarcely think, however, had this been the sentiment intended, it would have been expressed in terms so very strong. That "the heart of kings is unsearchable," and as incapable of being known as the height of the heaven to be measured and scaled, or the depth of the earth to be penetrated,-is surely too strong a mode of expressing the propriety of secrecy, howsoever profound, in regard to some of their measures. As the third verse seems to stand in opposition to the second, I am inclined to think that it is not to be understood as commendatory, or as expressing what is right and ought to be; but rather as having reference to the generally prevailing character of the monarchs of those days, and of those eastern countries. They were despots;-their governments absolute, and inimical to everything like popular freedom. Decisions were come to, and sentences pronounced, and both carried into instant execution; persons were seized; property was confiscated; liberty was forfeited; life itself was taken away, without warning, and for reasons which nobody knew, and nobody dared to ask: and complaint was more than unavailing;-it was unpardonable presumption, for which death was lenity. All was hidden, all mysterious; and no one could be sure for an hour what might, amidst the dark intrigues of a despotic court, be impending over him. With public measures, it was the same. Wars were waged; treasures were lavished; blood flowed; for causes which many a time had their origin in personal caprice, or whim, or resentment. The secret depths of the despot’s bosom were out of reach. Should it, on the other hand, be thought unlikely that Solomon, himself a king, should speak in terms so strongly condemnatory of kings in general,-and should it be thought more reasonable, as by many it will, and perhaps justly, that the words are descriptive of the greatly superior difficulties and weighty interests and cares of royalty, to those in all ordinary and more private occupations-I cannot illustrate this view of the subject better than in the language of another:-"The affairs of government are so various and complicated, they have so many designs to carry on, so many mischiefs to obviate, so many opposite tempers of men to consider, and so many difficulties to encounter, that persons in a lower station cannot possibly understand the reasons of a great part of their conduct, or the ends which they have in view. It is therefore presumptuous in subjects to be rash with their censures on the public management. Those who take a liberty to despise dominions, and speak evil of dignities, should be sure that they do not speak evil of those things which they understand not."

Verses Proverbs 25:4-5. "Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness." Here too is a comparison. As in order to the production of a beautiful vessel, such as "the refiner" would approve and commend, the material of which the vessel is to be made must be purged of its alloy;-so, in order to the general government of a prince being of a nature to prove conducive to the benefit of his people and to the stability of his throne, the wicked must be removed from his presence and from all intimacy with his life and counsels.-How many princes, themselves well-principled and inclined to what is right, have been misled by the influence of

profligate and artful counsellors,-especially when their own minds, though rightly disposed, are deficient in vigour and decision of character! They are then easily made the dupes of clever but unprincipled men, who can set measures of the worst and most impolitic kind in lights that are imposing and captivating; and who can not only "make the worse appear the better reason," but by the acts of flattery undermine their better principles and gradually assimilate them to themselves, and bring them to do as they will. Nay, even the very best princes may sometimes be thwarted and weakened, and prevented from carrying out their own measures of wise policy, by the too great ascendency of certain individuals, both in the state and in the army. David felt this, when he lamented the fall of the murdered Abner, whose death, which had been perpetrated by Joab, he weakly allowed to pass unvisited by the vengeance which the law of God demanded.* * See 2 Samuel 3:38-39. The sentiment is, as we have before noticed, most false and dangerous, that private or personal character is of little consequence in a prince or in his counsellors;-that what is chiefly to be looked to is, right political principles, with intelligence and firmness to work them consistently and steadily;-that, in a word, public and political character is alone to be minded. Nothing can be plainer than that the principles of private character will infallibly infuse their influence into a man’s official and public conduct. Surely we can repose greater confidence in the counsels and procedure of the man whom we know to be under the influence of sobriety, purity, integrity, and piety, than in him who is destitute of all right moral principle, and under the dominion of profligacy, unrighteousness, incontinence, selfishness, and irreligion! The prevention of the corruption of a monarch’s principles by the "taking away the wicked from before him," tends both to the prosperity of the people and to the stability of the government. The example of the prince contributes to the increase in the community of the "righteousness which exalteth a nation;" and the manifestation of steadfast integrity, and of conscientious solicitude to do all that can be done for the public good, and not for mere personal and selfish ends, attaches the people to the throne. And this attachment is the prince’s best security,-as well as his richest earthly reward.

Let us not forget-since we are not ourselves either the possessors or the heirs of thrones, however interested in the characters of those who occupy them,-that there is a general principle in the sentiment of these verses, which admits of other applications. That which corrupts princes corrupts the occupants of all the different stations in society as well as them. We have here, as exemplified in the high places of the earth, the apostolic maxim-"Evil communications corrupt good manners." If you would have your children "vessels for the finer;" if you would have the dross and the tin of their native corruption effectually purged away; if you would have them "walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father,"-then must you, as far as lieth in you, "take away the wicked from before them;"-you must keep them from the contaminating contact of the unprincipled and ungodly,-from "the counsels of the workers of iniquity." They may counteract and nullify all your efforts for their moral and spiritual benefit,-and by their perverting influence, "pierce you through with many sorrows."

77-Pro_25:8-13

Proverbs 25:8-13

LECTURE LXXVII.

Proverbs 25:8-13.

"Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, and discover not a secret to another; lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away. A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear. As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him; for he refresheth the soul of his masters."

There is a natural enough connection between the first of these verses and the two that precede; in which we have the spirit of vain self-importance and self-sufficiency. "Hastiness to strive" is very often the effect of the same spirit. It is touched instantly and to the quick by the slightest surmise,-the most distant rumour-of insult or opposition. It is on fire in a moment. It takes no leisure to inquire or to deliberate. It assumes its ground with rash precipitancy, and without discrimination, either of persons or of circumstances. To the man of this spirit, it is quite enough that some one has insulted him. He instantly takes the field, before he has distinctly ascertained even the facts, far less considered the tactics it is best, or most consistent with duty, to pursue. The consequence of such haste is often what is here described:-"Lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame."

Allow me, for the sake of illustration, to suppose two or three varieties of this result:-

1. The hasty man meets his supposed adversary,-some word or act of whom has just reached him. He is all full of the fuming pride of offended self-consequence; very big; very wrathful. In this spirit he makes his charge; and finds it is a mere idle unfounded rumour that has come to his ears; that there is actually nothing in it; that nothing of the kind has ever been either said or done; that there is no ground whatever for all his excitement and transport!-How foolish he looks, when his imagined enemy, against whom he has been breathing out the vehemence of passion, all collected and cool, stands wondering at his agitation,-unable to divine what has come over him!-And how is he laughed at for having stirred himself up to all this heat and hurry,-all this violence of emotion-for nothing!

2. It turns out that in the cause between him and his neighbour, which he has so hastily taken up, he is in the wrong;-that, after all his froth and bluster, truth and justice are clearly on the other side, with all the solid and satisfactory argument; while on his there is little or nothing beyond the noisy and vehement protestations of self-sufficiency, and he is quite unable to withstand the proofs against him,-the verdict of all impartial persons being in favour of his opponent. In this case, he must either, after having his pride keenly mortified, cool down, and own himself in the

wrong,-which is the best thing he can do, but far from easy to a man of his temper; or the more he is overpowered by evidence of facts and by sound argument, the more must the sense of conscious defeat, and consequent feeling of inferiority, inflame him to rage; by which he will only render himself the more ridiculous, and give cause of more lasting mortification and shame.

3. The same things are true of a controversial dispute on any subject. Generally speaking, the hastiest and most self-confident is the most likely to fail. Such confidence very often accompanies partial information and superficial and one-sided views. The petulant, consequential disputant "goes forth hastily to strive," in the full assurance that his arguments are such as cannot be resisted, and in the full flush of anticipated triumph,-of victory before the battle. But objections meet him, of which he had never thought. Arguments are arrayed and urged on the opposite side, such as had never occurred to his own mind, and such, therefore, as he did not at all expect, and cannot refute. I can imagine few situations more full of galling mortification. He is abashed, confounded, stupified. Where he looked for certain victory, he finds humiliating defeat. Where his tongue was to be all eloquence, he is downcast and silent; where he anticipated laurels, he reaps briars and thorns. He lies at the mercy of his antagonist. That antagonist may be spiteful, and take his advantage to the uttermost of his confusion, exposing him at every point. If this is not his fate, it is one still worse. He rises in angry loudness as he sinks in sense and argument; he makes up for the weakness of his reasoning by the strength of his lungs, by vociferous and declamatory dogmatism. And this only brings him the lower; sinks him the deeper in shame;-far deeper, than if he had at once, and candidly, owned his ignorance and precipitation, and given in with a good grace.

It is an important lesson,-that a man should know and feel well his ground, before he ventures into the arena of debate. Even when his cause is right, this is necessary. In many cases, it is not the real weakness of the cause, but the haste and superficiality of the advocate, that occasions defeat. While many a time, on the one hand, it has happened, that the pert and forward objector to Christianity has been foiled, and silenced, and put to confusion, (and in such circumstances, the Christian advocate should assuredly improve his advantage, not for self-exultation, not for vain-glorious triumph, not for contemptuous derision and trampling upon the fallen, but with meekness and affectionate tenderness, for pressing home the truth, and recommending it to acceptance,) yet, on the other hand, the friends of Christianity had need to be cautious, and not too hastily and inconsiderately to throw down the gauntlet to the infidel. When one thus enters the lists without due forethought and preparation,-not sufficiently aware of infidel plausibilities and sceptical subtleties-much harm, instead of benefit, may be the result. The believer of the truth may "have the witness in himself" of its being from God. He feels its holy power. In this experience he has solid ground of peace and hope,-there being, at the same time, a clear discernment of the adaptation of the gospel to his own exigencies and to the character of God. But still, this is not enough to bring against a practised sceptic,-a skilful infidel antagonist. Various are the subtleties, which, though refuted a thousand times, the particular advocate may not find himself at the moment in a condition to meet; and a defeat or silencing from this cause, is apt to have a very injurious effect both on his own mind and on that of his adversary-throwing a painful doubt over his own faith, and confirming his adversary’s unbelief and self-sufficient scorn.

Perhaps, however, the principal reference in the verse is to matters of personal injury and personal difference. This appears from next verse:-" Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, and

discover not a secret to another."-You may compare with these verses Matthew 18:15-18. You will observe, that in the two passages the principle is the same. In the latter, however, it is formally laid down as a binding law, in all its successive steps, in the social intercourse of fellow-Christians in the church. Look, then, at the duty-taking both passages together:-

1. An injury is supposed to have been done and sustained, but not to be publicly known-to be confined, in the knowledge of it, to the parties themselves. It is of consequence to mark this, because the rule is often misapprehended, and applied in cases where it has no propriety and no obligation,-to which neither Solomon nor Christ referred,-cases of open and known trespass. In the spirit of it, it ought, I think, to be applied in cases of sin known to us as having been done by another, but known, we have reason to believe, to us only, even although the sin may not be of the nature of personal offence. The chief reference, however, is to offences of the latter description. The rule is a good one in all such cases: and when they occur between brethren in a church of Christ, it is, in every step of the process prescribed by the Church’s Head, of indispensable obligation.

2. When the wrong, then, has been done, the first duty is, to go to our neighbour himself, and when he is by himself;-to lay our grievance calmly and faithfully, and in the spirit of affection, before him; in the same spirit to expostulate with him; to convince him of the wrong he has done; to propose reasonable terms of reconciliation and agreement,-all under the influence of a sincere desire to gain him over by kind and becoming means.

3. It is implied in this, that the "secret," as Solomon terms it, is not to be divulged either before the interview, or if the interview prove successful, after it. Not before; for this, if known to him, will prevent his listening to you in a temper of mind that promises a successful issue; and, should he learn it subsequently, may undo all the benefit:-not after, when you have effected your object; for this too may go far to nullify the favourable result, opening the wound, giving him ground of offence in his turn, and so widening the breach and confirming the distance.

4. Observe the consequence, as stated in the tenth verse, of transgressing the salutary direction:-"Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away." That is, if you do "discover the secret," this comes to the ear of the other party, and "shame" and "infamy" will follow. Even if the representation you have given of the case be a perfectly fair one, and he have no cause, in that respect, for complaint, still you have broken implied faith; you have made an uncalled-for and unfriendly disclosure of what it was understood was to go no further; you have unnecessarily and unkindly made his faults known. And if, on the contrary,-which is much more likely, you have given a representation as favourable as possible to yourselves, and proportionally unfavourable to him,-then you bring upon yourself a double ground of resentment and of odium. Not your adversary alone, but all will disapprove and reprobate; and the blot may adhere to your character all your days; the '"infamy" may never "turn away."

5. The same duty of faithful reticence is strictly applicable to all secrets committed to us by others. They should be held sacred,-the trust inviolable. On this important matter,-a matter too lightly thought of even when right principles are admitted,-allow me to offer a few directions. 1. When you have got a secret committed to you, the temptation is, in some cases, very strong to make it known. You have a feeling of superiority in knowing something of which others are ignorant; and, it may be, of self-importance in having been made its confidential depositaries. There is a vanity in

being able to say-I know something which you don’t. And there is a vanity too of having confidence reposed in you. You would fain have this known. But alas! for the dilemma. If it remains unknown, your vanity remains ungratified; and then, if you tell it, you prove that of the very confidence reposed in you, and of which you were so vain, you have not been worthy: so you put yourself effectually to shame. 2. There is a temptation to reveal a secret in the friendship and intimacy of the person to whom you tell it. You think this friendship requires it of you, and that there is no true friendship where there is secrecy,-that all should be unreserved between bosom friends. But, whatever friendship requires, it can never require this. The obligation of intimacy with one can never be a sufficient reason for violating an obligation under which you have come to another. No friendship, how strong soever its ties and its claims, can be an apology for betraying a third party-for breaking your word. 3. You may sometimes feel tempted to divulge a secret by the idea that making it known, in some particular quarter, may be the means of good to him whose secret it is. By telling it to such a one, you may benefit him. Even this will not do. For, first, "the heart is deceitful;" and you may, unconsciously, be influenced by mingled motives, and be covering the one under the other:-and then, secondly, your clear duty, in every such case, is, to tell him first, and let him judge for himself as to what you propose, and, if he is satisfied, so far release and set you free. 4. The fewer secrets the better. The making of a confidential communication-may of course be occasionally necessary. But where there is no necessity for it, it had better be avoided. Multiplied secrets are only multiplied temptations; and there is a vast deal too much of trifling with what ought to be sacred. Make as few of them as you can; and take as few of them as you can. 5. It is exceedingly criminal in any one to tempt another, and try to persuade him to divulge what has been confidentially committed to him;-to worm it out of him. This is infamous. It is usually done, as might be expected, by assurances of perfect secrecy. No one shall ever get it from them. They will be still as the grave. Now, for my own part, I should always be disposed to be the closer, the greater anxiety was by any one discovered to induce me to make the disclosure. My confidence in his assurances should proportionally be lessened. He who tempts another to do what is wrong, does not give very satisfactory ground for trusting that he will never do the same wrong himself. To tempt another to any sin is the next thing to our own doing it. 6. When you are about to receive a secret from another, and you have in your mind any exceptions from the restriction,-individuals to whom you imagine it will be no violation of your engagement to impart it,-these exceptions ought to be mentioned. You have no right to make them to yourself, while you are supposed by the person who imparts to you the secret to be making none, but to receive his communication as a confidential one with no reservation. This is treachery. It is evidently, in such cases, duty to intimate the particular exceptions you are desirous to make, and to get from your friend special permission respecting them. This should be done, even if the exception were the wife of your bosom. If you cannot get the permission you desire, decline receiving the communication. 7. There is one case however, I think, which must absolve from the obligation of secrecy. It is when the keeping of the secret is to work essential injury to a third party. In this case the secret resembles the taking of a rash oath, such as cannot be fulfilled without doing harm to our fellow-creatures, or violating some express command of God. No one will say that Herod did right in keeping his foolish oath, when the fulfilment of it required the murder of John the Baptist. With regard to ourselves,-when we come to see that the keeping of a secret, like the keeping of an oath, is all but sure to be injurious to us, we may with propriety seek to be released; but if we cannot prevail, I presume the case will come under the description of one of the features in the character of the

good man described by the Psalmist,-who "sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not."

Verse Proverbs 25:11. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."-What is the comparison here? It has been variously understood. The word rendered "pictures" is generally conceived rather to mean net-work or lattice-work:-and the apples to be cither artificial apples represented by the skilful workman in an ornamental basket of silver filigree, or real apples, of golden hue, brought to table in such a basket. The allusion is evidently to some ornamental work of exquisite device and execution, known in those days.* What, then, is the import of the comparison? "A word" may signify a word of counsel, of instruction, of encouraging commendation, and especially (as the following verse suggests) of reproof. But it is not every such word that is meant. It must be "fitly spoken;" as the golden apples are by the artificer duly fitted, so as to appear to the best advantage through the interstices of the silver. In order to a word's being "fitly spoken," it must be well-suited to the occasion and the character; must be welltimed; well-spirited; well-expressed. When a word-especially a word of reproof, the administering of which is so difficult and delicate a task-is, in all the senses mentioned, "fitly spoken," there is blended with our sentiment of approbation the agreeable emotion of surprise and admiration.

* "The idea is that of a garment of precious stuff, on which is embroidered golden apples among picture-work of silver. Costly and precious was such a garment held to be; for besides the ornaments upon it, the material itself was of high value." So Stuart, perhaps rightly. The general sentiment remains the same.

Verse Proverbs 25:12. "As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear."-In tills comparison, as in the preceding, ornament and value are united. And, as the ornament selected is that of the ear, the comparison may be meant to convey the idea that an ear that listens obediently to instruction and reproof, is more valuably adorned than that which is ornamented with the most costly jewels. When a reproof is both administered in wisdom and received in humility and in good part,-then there is a union of two equal rarities. A reproof well-administered is rare; and not less so is a reproof well taken. We may remark, however, that the rareness of the latter arises, to no small extent, out of the rareness of the former. It is because reproof is so seldom well-given, that it is so seldom well-taken.

How becoming-how truly ornamental, and worthy of admiration, the union here supposed! And then, how valuable! how really precious, in the effects resulting! There is first, the prevention, or the correction of evil. There is, secondly, the friendship, begun or confirmed, of the parties themselves; as says the Psalmist-"Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities," Psalms 141:5. And there is, thirdly, the admiring and approving and affectionate attachment of all to both, and the beneficial influence of the good example. The jewel is both a credit to the artificer by whom it was fashioned, and an ornament to the person from whose ear it is suspended. And if our ear, my brethren, should be open and obedient to the reproofs of fellow-creatures, O how much more to those of our divine Master and Lord! He is, indeed, a wise reprover. Grace was poured into his lips. All his instructions are true; all his promises faithful; all his precepts holy and just and good; all his admonitions gracious and kind. Obedience to him will ever be for our good; while to refuse his reproof, and to throw off and spurn away his yoke, is infatuation. For all the various situations of trial and difficulty, of temptation and

perplexity, in which his people can be placed, he has "a word in season." O how fitly spoken!-how good is it! how appropriate! how precious! Where is the child of God who has not experienced this? Let His words be valued by us as jewels of fine gold!

Verse Proverbs 25:13. "As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him; for he refresheth the soul of his masters."-Snow in the time of harvest, and the cold accompanying it, would have been a very unnatural, unwonted, and unwelcome occurrence in Judea. It is to nothing of this kind that the allusion is made in the verse. It was the season of heat, often oppressively great. The comparison is taken from the use then made of snow, which had been preserved from the previous winter, in cooling their wines and other drinks, and thus rendering them deliriously refreshing. Snow was used, in a similar manner as ice is among ourselves. It was thus the means of providing refreshment from what without it could have yielded comparatively little. The meaning of the comparison is plain. The pleasure experienced by him who commissions a messenger to execute a trust, will ever be proportioned, when the message is faithfully, wisely, and successfully fulfilled, to the amount of importance attached to the commission, and the consequent degree of solicitude about the result;-and especially when any measure of despondency existed respecting it. When any business is managed, with such fidelity, sound judgment, and perseverance, as to recover and rectify what had almost been given up as hopeless,-then the heart that was dispirited and faint is revived; even as the overheated and exhausted labourer is refreshed, exhilarated, and animated for renewed toil by the snow-cooled beverage. One thing ought here to be remarked-that we are a great deal too prone to form our judgment of a messenger’s merits simply by his success. But this is often far from fair, whether the commission be one of public or of private business. There may be a large amount of fidelity, and of all the qualities of a disinterested and devoted messenger, where there is little success,-nay, where there is entire failure. All may be done, and done well, that could be done; and yet, through the character of the parties with whom he has to conduct the negotiation, and through circumstances utterly beyond his control, a messenger may not succeed. In some cases, indeed, there may be a much greater degree of praiseworthiness, where there has been failure, than where all has succeeded to a wish. In not a few instances, we should deal most unjustly, and measure out our commendations and rewards in most undue proportions, were success to be our sole criterion. It ought to be,-and with a truly generous and right-hearted master it always will be,-a source of satisfaction and gratification, to contemplate the completeness of the management, and the spirit with which all has been done for his interest, even though the issue be disappointment; and justice will make this the measure of desert.

Thus will God deal with His servants. Jesus was the Father’s messenger to the world. And he was "faithful to Him that appointed him." And in contemplating him, in his person and in his work, He said of him-" Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles," Isaiah 42:1. The Apostles were Christ’s messengers to the world. They were like their divine Master in faithful devotedness. They "refreshed the soul of that Master." He delighted in them and in their work. Through their instrumentality, he saw of the "travail of his soul, and was satisfied." And he sees of it still.

O let us all, in our several spheres, be faithful to Him-"faithful even unto death," and our faithfulness shall have a full and rich reward. How anxious should we all be, to commend ourselves to the Master, to whom we must stand or fall; to act under the influence of principles and

motives which have his sanction; to do our duty well, from "faith working by love;" so that we may hear him say to us-"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

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Proverbs 25:14-20 LECTURE LXXVIII.

Proverbs 25:14-20.

"Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain. By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone. Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it. Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee. A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow. Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint. As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre; so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart." The comparison in the first of these verses is a very obvious and a very apt one. "Clouds and wind" were, in that country, an ordinary presage of "rain." * But there, as with ourselves, appearances might be very promising and prove deceitful-raising expectations, possibly after long, weary, and threatening drought, only to disappoint them, and so to increase vexation and apprehension. Thus it is with the man who boasts mightily of what he can do, and will do,-making large promises either without intention to fulfil them, or without ability.

* See 1 Kings 18:44-45.

Such boasters talk as if all creation were at their disposal. Nothing too hard for them! their resources and their influence are without limits! When you apply to them for a favour, they are full of gasconade about what they have in their power; give you, with not a little exaggeration, instances of what they have done for others; and-O yes; there is no doubt of their ability; and what is there they would not do for you? But it is all words-big words; and the bigger if others besides yourselves are within hearing-but as light and empty as air-bubbles:-"clouds mid wind without rain."

Others, from mere unwillingness to deny you, or to seem unkind, cannot find in their hearts to say No, and make hasty promises in plenty. But they are only to please yon for the time. They have not considered them; and, although it might be too strong to affirm, that they do not at the time mean what they say, yet neither can they be regarded as having any firm purpose of fulfilling it. Their kind words have served their present end;-have saved them the pain of refusing and disobliging you. But in practice they come to nothing. When your time of need arrives, what have you? They are in profession as kind as ever; and as their kindness before vented itself in promises, it is now not less abundant in apologies and regrets. They are so sorry-so very, very sorry;-and then you have a string of unsatisfactory BUTS-an enumeration of preventives:-"clouds and wind without rain."

It may be regarded as a wise and safe rule, to trust the less, in proportion as a man is wide and boastful in his promises. Let your confidence be in the inverse ratio of the boasting. Genuine friendship deals not in such vauntings. Deeds are its characteristics, more than words. It acts

quietly; lets its gifts fall silently and unostentatiously; neither talking much itself, nor ambitious of being talked about. It would infinitely rather come unexpectedly on its object with a seasonable interposition, than raise expectations beforehand by promises that may fail. True friendship-real goodness-may be described by a figure which forms a contrast to the one before us:-"When the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth," Ecclesiastes 11:3. Such clouds aptly represent faithful benefactors;-bountiful, unpretending, unostentatious friends.

Verse Proverbs 25:15. "By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone." "A soft tongue breaketh the bone," is one of those short and pithy expressions of a general sentiment, which is the character of so many proverbs. What is the sentiment? Evidently, that gentle means are the most effectual. The reference is to cases of displeasure, and the means of pacifying it. It is true, that there is a great variety of tempers, and that these require to be dealt with in various ways. But in cases of resentment,-whether reasonable or unreasonable, with or without ground,-the sentiment will be found to hold good to a very great extent. By the pouring on of oil you may smooth the wave, which you would rebuke and lash in vain.

If the displeasure be well-founded,-that is, if we really have provoked and deserved it,-then gentleness, and submission, and apology are a clearly incumbent duty. What right can we have to take high what we have brought upon ourselves? Hard words, in such a case, would obviously be most incongruous and unprincipled; and they would have no other effect than that of exasperating passion. If, on the other hand, it be unreasonable,-when nothing on our part has been said or done to warrant it,-then the consciousness of not deserving it should sustain our minds in a dignified calmness, and restrain us from angry and violent expostulation or reviling. The most consistent frame of spirit, so far as we ourselves are concerned, and the best suited for conciliation and peace,-for disarming and subduing passion and pride, is a gentle and placid firmness. For it ought to be understood, that "a soft tongue" is not the tongue of weakness and silliness, that has not manliness enough to feel or to take its due and proper position:-neither is it a flattering, fawning tongue, that coaxes into conciliation by saying whatever will please, whether there be dignity, and self-respect, and truth in it, or not. The gentleness of temper, deportment, and speech, which the divine word inculcates, is perfectly consistent with firmness and energy of principle. It is not the gentleness of mean sycophantish pliancy, that is reckless of principle and consistency. Yet one almost fears to introduce these qualifications and admissions, lest undue advantage be taken of them to cover and excuse frames of spirit which neither the precepts nor the example of Jesus our Master would justify;-vindicating under the name of becoming manliness what He would condemn as pride,-and unyielding obstinacy under the well-sounding designation of decision of character. O! we need the grace of Christ to enable us to unite the qualities of firmness and gentleness, as they were united in Him. Of the general sentiment we have a particular application in the former part of the verse:-"By long forbearance is a prince persuaded."-From his eminent station, and from being accustomed to obeisance, "a prince" may be supposed more than ordinarily touchy and jealous of his honour and authority,-more apt to stand upon the punctilio of due submission-more difficult than others of persuasion and conciliation. Petulance, forwardness, self-sufficiency, and passion, will only inflame him the more, and expose ourselves to the weight of his wrath. There must be no cringing meanness, no compromise of principle, no apologies for unreal faults,-which would be worse than stooping from the dignity which every man ought to maintain,-a dereliction in part of the claims of conscience: but still, we are bound to be, in all cases, respectful and mild; and

if we are enabled thus to combine meekness and gentleness with adherence to principle, "the prince" may not only be won, but led to admire the consistency, that would not, for any selfish consideration, bend to unworthy compliances, and cringe and fawn for favour.

Verse Proverbs 25:16. "Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it."-This language is evidently to be taken, in the proverbial use of it here, as significant of any worldly enjoyment. The language can hardly be applied to spiritual sweets. We do not meet, in the Bible, with warnings against excess in these. There is little risk of an extreme in that direction. But when the "honey" as here, is the emblem of earthly sweets, of mere temporal enjoyments,-there is great need for the caution,-a caution against excess in the desire, in the pursuit, and in the use of them. Pleasant they are in themselves; and God kindly gives us them to be enjoyed-to be received and used with gratitude and cheerfulness. But they must be enjoyed with a united sense of obligation and of dependence, and in the remembrance that all excess and all abuse involve a violation of the spirit of both.

Verse Proverbs 25:17. "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour’s house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee."-This is another lesson of moderation, though of a very different kind. It relates to the discreet use of the privilege of social and friendly intercourse. There is in this a prudence and a sense of propriety, which is indispensable to its cordial maintenance and its permanent constancy. It is one of those things in which there is no possibility of drawing precise lines,-prescribing the exact degree of frequency with which every relation, and friend, and neighbour should be visited, and the number of minutes each visit should last. All must be regulated by circumstances; and these circumstances may hardly in two cases be in every respect the same. Discretion and good sense must guide. But of these qualities there are some persons who have a very scanty portion. Such persons are to be found in both sexes. They are fond of incessant gossipping. They are ever on their round of calls and visits. Instead of being "keepers at home"-instead of "doing their own business"-they are, day after day, "going from house to house"-each morning planning their circuit. Or, when they are out, and "their neighbour’s house" is in their way, they cannot think of passing the door without just stepping in. They enter. They merely looked in in passing-they cannot sit down. But they are prevailed upon. And when once they are fairly set, they forget their haste. They are very loath to move. They talk of doing so twenty times before it is done; and many precious hours are lounged away in unprofitable idleness. If such persons have any thing in the form of a general invitation, in the common style of courtesy, they are sure to avail themselves of it to the uttermost, how slight and incidental soever it may have been. They never need a second. They continue to come, and come, and come,-consuming the time, disarranging the order, disturbing the enjoyment, and in some cases, living on the substance, of other families. This becomes irksome. Their neighbours weary of them. They fret inwardly, when they make their appearance. Their liking to them cools; and by degrees positive alienation takes its place; and those whom at first they courteously and kindly made welcome, they actually cannot bear. They become, in one short but expressive, though perhaps sufficiently familiar word for this place-a bore. Delicacy, at the same time, forbids this to be plainly said; and such persons, having generally no great portion of such delicacy themselves, are exceedingly slow to discover it:-till at length rudeness becomes a matter of necessity; and hints,-gentle perhaps at first, but broader and broader till understood and taken,-are thrown out, that less frequent visits will be acceptable. Our strongly condemnatory description of these

persons must not drive others to the opposite extreme. For fear of the evil here supposed, some "withdraw their foot" altogether: they do not visit at all. This course is hardly less reprehensible than the former. Among all, and especially among fellow-Christians, it looks distant and dry. It is inconsistent with all the claims of friendship. A mutual exchange of visits, in the way of promoting mutual love and mutual advantage, is desirable, and is a duty. But assuredly, it is better to be blamed for the fewness of our visits, than for their frequency;-better far to be wished back than to be wished away. The persons I have been sketching ought to be discouraged. They are idle; and they encourage others to be idle. They are temptations, moreover, to different evils: to the common practice, for example, of what is called denying one's self, or saying not at home: (which, let it be vindicated, disguised, palliated, apologized for as you will, is neither more nor less than direct and palpable lying) and secondly, to a large amount of hypocrisy-the dissembling of the real state of the feelings and the wishes; so that the scene may at times be presented-so inconsistent with "simplicity and godly sincerity"-of a grumble and a scowl when the unwelcome visitor's knock comes to the door,-the exchange of this for the assumed looks and words of civility when the door opens and he enters;-and the "glad he's gone!" as soon as his back is turned, and the door closes after him. Here then, as in every thing, let us "deal prudently;" and let us look for grace to enable us. Let our visits neither be unseasonably paid, nor unduly prolonged, nor too frequently repeated. And let such intercourse be maintained as shall at once keep alive the feeling and the principle of union. Above all, "let love be without dissimulation." On the following verse, I pause only to make two remarks:-First, the language expresses strongly the mischief done by the "false witness" to him against whom he bears his lying testimony-against whom he swears falsely. He is "a maul,* and a sword, and a sharp arrow." He wounds and injures him by his lying words, as really, and in some respects, it may be, incomparably more seriously and irreparably, than if he were assailing him with the lethal weapons here alluded to. He may inflict wounds that cannot be cured, on his person, his substance, his credit, his character, his happiness, his life.-Secondly, such a man,-the man who has no conscience, no regard to truth, or regard to the well-being of others,-who is capable of swearing away by falsehood the name and interest and life and property of his neighbour-is a man whom all will shun and dread, as they would an armed enemy;-as they would the hand that brandishes in threatening attitude the instruments of mutilation and death.

* A maul is an English word now obsolete, signifying a heavy hammer or club.

Verse Proverbs 25:19. "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint."-Every one feels in a moment the truth and the force of this comparison-this double comparison. There are two obvious points in the similitude:-1. The unfaithful man, equally with the broken tooth and the dislocated foot, fails when put to use. You try your tooth upon your food; but you can make nothing of it:-you try your limb, for support and motion, but it will not serve you. So, you try the man by whose promises you have been encouraged to confide in him, and to look for good at his hand, but your confidence is vain. He fails you. He is the "broken tooth," the "foot out of joint."-2. There is more than failure, there is pain; there is accompanying torture. The broken tooth, when you attempt to use it, and the disjointed foot, when you rest the weight of your body upon it, each causes intolerable agony. And such is the mental distress which is caused by the failure of confidence, in proportion to the degree in which you had cherished it. Especially is this felt "in time of trouble," when help is peculiarly needed, and when a kind of claim, independently of all professions and promises, is felt to exist on sympathy and kindness. Then the

heart is sensitively alive to aught like neglect and disappointment. To trust and be deceived is at any time a bitter trial. To trust in "the time of trouble" and be deceived, is the extreme of mental suffering.

How acutely did Paul feel the truth of the proverb when he wrote to Timothy-"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."-And did not our blessed Master feel it, when he said, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night:" and when, accordingly, in the hour of danger, "all his disciples forsook him and fled?"-and when he who had most solemnly protested his unconquerable adherence denied with oaths and curses that he knew Him?-O let us rejoice, that, whatever may come of our confidence in men, we have one sure, tried, everfaithful Friend, who never has deceived, and never can deceive; on whose word we may rely without fear; who will prove himself "a very present help in time of trouble;" then, in a special manner, when the need of it is most felt, vouchsafing His presence, the light of his countenance, his timely and effective aid.

Verse Proverbs 25:20. "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre; so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart."-We may conceive a kind of suggestive association between this verse and the preceding. In the nineteenth we have the misery of disappointment when we have, "in time of trouble," relied on the promises or the professions of friendship given by a man who then proves unfaithful. There is one description of distress in the time of suffering and trial; here we have another, though of a different kind;-the pain which is inflicted, especially on spirits of delicate sensibility, by the injudicious and incongruous administration of comfort,-both in the matter and in the manner of it. The figure, or comparison, here used to convey the idea of extreme unsuitableness, is a very strong and a very expressive one. I should rather say that both comparisons are so. The "taking away of a garment in cold weather,"-at the very time, that is, when an additional garment would be requisite for comfort,-would involve in it a combination of absurdity and cruelty. It would be exceedingly foolish and exceedingly unkind. In the second comparison, "nitre" does not mean the salt so called by us-saltpetre; but rather an alkaline substance, which was called by the Romans nitrum, and which, in a particular state of preparation, was used in Judea for soap. Vinegar, or any other acid, poured on this substance would, from the want of chemical affinity between them, produce effervescence; and this appears to be the similitude intended;-the want of affinity between the song of mirth and the spirit of heaviness. It is incongruous, disquieting, agitating. To sing merry songs to one whose heart is at the time under the pressure of grief, or even in the presence of the dejected and sorrowful, and especially when the sorrow is recent, and the mind has had no time to recover its tone and balance,-discovers mournful ignorance of human nature. These are extremes which can never meet. The very attempt to introduce all at once the lightness of mirth into a wounded and heavily-burdened heart, produces a revulsion, of which the necessary effect is only to render the sadness the deeper. And this effect arises, not merely from the contrariety between what is sung and the state of the spirit, but by the apparent want of feeling on the part of him who treats our sorrow thus. It is impossible to persuade ourselves that he feels with us or feels for us, when, instead of entering by a sympathetic tenderness into the true state of our minds, he discovers such lightness in his. And this painful apprehension is only a new and additional source of heaviness. Few things can operate more directly in this way, than to see one whose heart we expected to be in harmony with our own, manifesting so opposite a frame of mind. Some people are very

thoughtless and injudicious in this respect. By trying to accomplish too sudden and violent a transition, they effectually frustrate their purpose, and, instead of alleviating, aggravate the evil. Even although not meant as a taunt, it is apt to have the effect of one; the effect so touchingly described in the case of the captives of Judah in Babylon:-"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?" Psalms 137:1-4. No one who has studied the constitution of the human mind, will ever attempt (unless in some peculiar cases of mental derangement) to work upon it by violent transitions. He who does so will generally be even more than disappointed. The likelihood is that he will either augment what he intended to lessen, or give rise to some other effect not less to be deplored than the one meant to be remedied. The same observations apply to all attempts to put down the spirit of melancholy-whether constitutional or induced-by the opposite extreme of merriment,-to banish grief by scenes of joviality. Persons under deep dejection may sometimes, by dint of importunity, be prevailed upon to go into the midst of a gay party, where all is hilarity,-all jest and song. But the very effort to assume an air of cheerfulness,-to join in the buoyant festivity and mirth, has been distressingly painful, and subsequent reflection on the incongruity (as they have felt it to be) between the scene and their circumstances, has sunk them the deeper afterwards,-through dissatisfaction with themselves. With regard to any who can on purpose insult the sorrowing and heavy heart by the song of mirthful gaiety,-they are monsters-not men. They deserve not a place in the society of human beings.-And there is one description of mental distress, with which the world have not-and cannot be expected to have-any sympathy. They frequently indeed deal by it very roughly and cruelly- "Regardless of wringing and breaking a heart Already to sorrow resigned."

I mean spiritual dejection. I will not give it the name of religious melancholy; for that is an unhappy misnomer, expressing what has no existence. There is no description of melancholy which in itself can with truth be called religious,-though there is much that may spring from subjects that bear a close affinity to religion. Melancholy and dejection of spirit arises, not from religion, but from the absence of it, or from defective and erroneous conceptions of it. Rightly understood, it is its only true and effectual cure. It is the light which, introduced into the mind, dissipates its darkness and dreariness. It is the balm that soothes, mollifies, and heals the wounded spirit. It is all restorative, all cheering. Trouble of spirit does arise from conviction of sin, and of exposure, on account of it, to "the wrath to come," and from the secret, deep-felt, irrepressible apprehension of that wrath. But such conviction, such pain, such fear, are not religion. They are the very things which religion is designed and fitted to remove. The truth of the gospel-the message of mercy-understood and received in its divine authority and simplicity, sets all to rights. It dispels the gloom. It introduces the sunshine of joy. It stills the trembling heart. It dries the bitter tear, and sends after it the tear of delight and gratitude,-the drops of genuine penitential tenderness, mingling, as they always do, with those of calm, thankful, thrilling ecstasy. To the spirit that is loaded with a sense of guilt, and bowed to the dust by the apprehension of coming wrath, there is no song but one that can impart relief and joy,-none but one that can harmonize its jarring emotions, and soothe it to permanent peace. It is the song of the angels at the nativity of the Saviour-"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men,"-or of the redeemed multitude before the throne-for the spirit of both is the same-"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain"-"Thou art worthy, for thou hast

redeemed us unto God by thy blood." Let but that blood touch the heart, and all its alarms are hushed. The lips will be tuned to the notes of that song. It will "throw off its sackcloth, and gird itself with gladness."

79-Pro_25:21-28

Proverbs 25:21-28

LECTURE LXXIX.

Proverbs 25:21-28.

"If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread lo eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee. The north wind driveth away rain; so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue. It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman, and in a wide house. As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country. A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring. It is not good to eat much honey; so for men to search their own glory is not glory. He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." The "honour which cometh from men," and which men assert for themselves even at the sword's point, is very diverse from the "honour which cometh from God," and which He has enjoined on His children to covet. The one is the honour of pride,-the other of humility; the one the honour of allowing no injury to be unavenged,-the other of forgiving wrongs and covering the multitude of sins; the one the honour of the mere natural and conventional courage that exposes life for life, rather than allow the slightest or most imaginary affront to pass unavenged,-the other the moral courage that sets at nought the contempt of men rather than incur the displeasure of God.-In His eye, and in the eye of every holy being, a victory gained in the way prescribed by the opening verses of this passage, is incomparably more glorious than even the deepest humiliation of an adversary by an opposite course-by the wrath-breathing retaliations of pride. It is a double victory,-a victory over ourselves as well as over our enemy.* * For further illustration, see Proverbs 24:17-18; Proverbs 24:29 (...). In these remarks, I have taken for granted, what I believe to be the truth, that the words "for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head" have reference, not to the fires of divine vengeance, but to the influence of kindly treatment melting down the enemy to conciliation, as fuel heaped on the ore fuses it from its hardness, and sends it forth in liquid streams, to take the features and impress of the mould.-A certain prince, on leading his generals and his army against an advancing host of invaders, declared his resolution not to leave a single enemy alive. He sent an embassy to treat with them. He made proposals such as subdued and attached them, and rendered them valuable allies. On astonishment being expressed that he should have thus failed in his determination and promise, his ready reply was-"I have not failed: I have kept my word. I engaged not to leave a living enemy; nor have I. They are enemies no longer-they are friends." He had "heaped coals of fire on their head."

Verse Proverbs 25:23. "The north wind driveth away rain; so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue."-You will observe that the marginal rendering just reverses the meaning:-"The north wind bringeth forth rain; so doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance." Some critics insist on this being the true rendering. The latter words of the verse are certainly capable of either arrangement: and if the verb rendered "driveth away" would not bear that meaning, but required

being translated as in the margin, then of course we should have to bow to the force of necessity. That rendering, however, is defended by other critics, as one of which the original word is susceptible. And I confess that if the word will bear it at all, it appears to me decidedly preferable. There is something tame, common-place, and of little practical consequence,-hardly worth forming the subject of a proverb,-in saying that as the north wind brings rain "a backbiting tongue" brings anger. But the verse, as it stands in our translation, inculcates a most important lesson-namely, the way to discourage and repress slander. "Backbiting" is a word which sufficiently conveys its own meaning. It is secretly traducing characters, by telling of them what is false, or even, for malicious purposes, by circulating clandestinely what is true. It is very generally accompanied with a hypocritical simulation of affection or admiration to the person's face, while he is vilified in his absence. Some show much of this spirit of detraction. They never seem easy when they hear any one specially commended. They are ever disposed to throw in some qualifying insinuation,-something or other on the per contra side, to reduce the praise. They even appear to lay hold with delight on every opportunity to depreciate excellence; and particularly if there happens to be any kind of rivalry between the person who is the subject of commendation and themselves. O they do enjoy the bringing down of a rival! They spare no pains for this. And they often effect much in this way without uttering a word. A look, a wink, a shrug, a humph-can be made to convey a vast deal of meaning; and if the meaning be not explicit, so much the better. It is enough if suspicion is raised;-if the impression is made that there is something that is not right,-something which, if the eulogist but knew all, would go far to qualify his commendations. On the other side, how sad the tendency in human nature to lend a ready ear to such! When the artful and practised backbiter, well aware of this, has by degrees got a willing listener, he goes on step by step-one thing after another-undermining and destroying the fair fame of the object of his dislike. He takes great care not to say too much all at once: that might shock and repel. He feigns reluctance. He is exceedingly concerned to be under the necessity of saying so; but truth obliges him. His object is, only to put you on your guard; to prevent your being led to any false course by taking up the representations of others, who happen not to know what he knows. He thinks it right at any rate that you should be made aware of the true state of the case,-that you may feel and act accordingly.

All such vile "backbiting" should he met with "an angry countenance." It should be instantly frowned away; no willing ear being ever lent to the defamer. Were all to act thus, and to stop his mouth with an indignant and resolute rebuke, it would put down the evil, "as the north wind driveth away rain."

O let not this spirit and this practice be so much as named amongst believers. It is utterly adverse to the entire genius of the Gospel, and to the precepts and example of the Lord of Christians. The religion of Jesus is the religion of love,-love even to enemies; the religion too of open day-light, and singleness of heart;-the religion of that charity which "thinketh no evil, which rejoiceth not in iniquity, hut rejoiceth in the truth."*

* For the illustration of the following verse, the reader is referred to Proverbs 19:13; Proverbs 21:9; Proverbs 21:19, &c.

Verse Proverbs 25:25. "As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country." A beautiful similitude! Its full import, no doubt, is best understood and felt in sultry climes. Yet even

we can in some measure appreciate its propriety and force, if in the parching drought of summer we have ever slaked our thirst at the cooling spring, when oppressed by the heat and fatigue of a wearing-out journey. The very sight of such a spring is refreshment. It exhilarates the spirit, and gives new energy to the exhausted frame. The simile is applicable to all "good news,"-especially to such as are more than ordinarily interesting to any of our natural and social affections; and in a peculiar manner, when the tidings are unexpected; more so still, when they come after long delay and corresponding anxiety,-when "hope deferred has made the heart sick;" when day after day,-week after week,-month after month, we have waited and longed, and sighed, and prayed, for favourable accounts, not of mere worldly property, but of lives, in which we feel as if our own were bound up. All! do we not then enter into the full soul of the comparison? And how peculiarly applicable is it to that best news that ever greeted the ears of sinful men!-the news that came from the heaven of heavens to this our apostate world, and of which angels were the first messengers, when they cheered the timid and alarmed spirits of the shepherds of Bethlehem with the proclamation-"Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people,"-and with that song of ravishing harmony, which, in the stillness of midnight, burst from ten thousand seraphic voices,-"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." How can it but be a delightful thing to us, to hear how these good tidings (which alas! to so many are vapid and uninteresting as a tale twice told) are now so extensively published in heathen lands,-lands of spiritual drought and dreariness,-"thirsty lands wherein is no water!"-to hear of the progress of truth-of its victories over error-of its converting, sanctifying, gladdening, civilizing, saving influence! How full of refreshing and cheering effect on our spirits are such tidings! They are, of all others, the richest and sweetest in pleasure to the Christian heart. The highest authority assures us, that "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." Even there, it seems, the truth of this verse is experienced. When the "good news" of the progress of the Redeemer’s kingdom by the conversion of sinners, and the additions thus made to the number of its subjects, reach that "land that is afar off"-that "land of sacred liberty and endless rest,"-it is, to the blessed inhabitants, like a fresh draught from the "pure river of water of life." And the holy joy is shared by the pilgrims below. It reanimates and braces their spirits, in prosecuting their journey heavenward, amidst all the difficulties, temptations, and trials of the way. If we do experience the delight, let us seek in earnest, by increasing liberality and zeal, to procure it more and more for ourselves!-The good tidings are designed to prepare sinners for the glorious country whence the tidings come, and to put them ultimately in happy possession of it. O sinner, prize those tidings. Hear, and believe them, that your soul may live!-Hear, and circulate them, that others may come to the same life;-the spiritual life on earth, introductory to the eternal life in heaven!

Verse Proverbs 25:26. "A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring." Possibly this verse may have been suggested by the preceding in the arrangement, or copying out of the proverbs. There we have the refreshing influence on the soul of "good news" represented by the refreshing influence on the body of a draught of pure and wholesome water. But suppose a thirsty man, in high and longing expectation, comes to a fountain or a spring, and finds the fountain a puddle from agitation, or the spring embittered and poisoned by some nauseous and noxious ingredient-the disappointment is grievous. Such is our dissatisfaction, when "the righteous falls down before the wielded." The language has had different senses attached to it.-1. It has been understood of the righteous paying, whether from fear or from interest, undue homage to the wicked. There is miserable incongruity in this. It is a painful thing to

witness; and it is injurious as well as painful-discovering an unworthy destitution of right principle, such as is fitted to produce very prejudicial effects on the minds of all, especially of the ungodly who witness the unseemly spectacle.-2. It has been understood of the righteous being subjected to the arbitrary and capricious power of the wicked-constrained to bend to his dictation and authority-deprived of his own will and freedom under the power of the unprincipled oppressor. This is the world turned upside down-the inversion of all that is right and seemly. The power should be with the righteous for the restraint of the wicked. The contrary is "like a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring." It fails to produce the salutary effect which power properly lodged is fitted to produce. The fountains and springs of justice being by this means polluted and poisoned, society, instead of receiving benefit, ’is injured accordingly.-But 3. The word in the original signifies to slip or stumble, so as to fall. And, as it bears this sense most naturally, I am inclined to understand the verse with those interpreters by whom it is explained of the righteous falling in a moral sense-falling into sin, in the presence of the wicked. This is, emphatically, "like a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring." It disappoints our pleasing expectations of clear, sweet, refreshing water. From the righteous we look for an example that shall recommend religion-that shall draw others to its pure, and wholesome, and life-giving springs. When the conduct of professors, in presence of the ungodly, is such as to have the opposite tendency;-when its waters are turbid, and foul, and bitter, and, instead of inducing others to come to the fountain, serve to disgust and repel them-how incongruous-and how distressing!-Alas! that the incongruity should be so often seen! The "troubled fountain and the corrupt spring" must send forth polluted, tainted, deadly streams. And so it is here. O! how much evil flows from the sins of God’s people! Look at the falls of David and Solomon themselves. From these "troubled fountains"-from these "corrupt springs"-streams of tainted and bitter waters have continued to flow from that day to this. The "man after God’s own heart," and the " wisest of men," have been the byword of the ungodly and sceptical in every age. How should this put us, and keep us, on our guard!

Verse Proverbs 25:27. "It is not good to eat much honey; so for men to search their own glory is not glory." You will observe, that in the latter clause of this verse, the words "is not" are supplementary,-being printed in Italics. They are evidently indispensable to complete the designed antithesis. The supplement seems to proceed on an admitted idiom in the Hebrew composition, according to which the negative in the former part of a sentence is carried forward and understood in the latter.* Honey is good, in moderation; a surfeit of it is injurious. (See Proverbs 5:16.) In like manner, a regard to character and reputation,-a desire after a virtuous and honourable distinction,-is warrantable and right. It would be wrong for any man to be indifferent to what others think of him. It is not a matter connected with mere feeling. The usefulness of every man depends to a great degree upon the character he sustains. The only description of persons who may be considered as entitled to be regardless about character consists of those who have no character to lose.

* See for illustration Psalms 9:18; Psalms 75:5; Psalms 38:1; Psalms 44:18.-The idiom may be applied for the explanation of a passage otherwise involving a painful and revolting difficulty. It is in the charge of David, when dying, to his son and successor Solomon (1 Kings 2:9). The not should he carried on to the last clause. And accordingly, the charge, so understood, corresponds precisely to the course which Solomon actually pursued. He allowed Shimei his life, under the limitation of his strictly confining himself within the city. To the condition Shimei assented. And it

was not for his conduct to David, hut in consequence of his violating the stipulated terms on which his life had been granted, that he was afterwards put to death. This makes all consistent. The very terms of the change itself, connected with the previous reason or ground of it, requires this interpretation:-verse 1 Kings 2:8.-(Author). Stuart disputes the application of the principle in this verse of Proverbs, and renders, "searching after one's own glory is burdensome," referring the original term in its second occurrence to the primary meaning of the Hebrew verb with which it is connected. But there is an extreme; and to that extreme Solomon here refers. There is such a thing as vain glory. There is such a thing as a person's indulging an insatiable appetite for applause and honour. There is such a thing as "searching it out," looking ever after it, eager to get it, and touchily jealous of every omission to bestow it and every deficiency in its amount; exploring for it in every possible direction; listening with an ear on the alert to catch every breathing of adulation; fishing for praise; throwing out hints to draw it forth; eulogizing others, to tempt a return; saying things in disparagement of oneself, for the sake of having them contradicted,-things which, said by another, would stir the hottest of his blood.-The temper of mind may be put in exercise, in regard to greater and to smaller matters. It may assume the form of a proud ambition, or of a weak-minded vanity. But in either case it may with truth be said that "it is not glory."-A man's honour should rather come to him, than be eagerly solicited and searched for. It should not be made his object. If we follow the example of Jesus,* we shall seek God's glory as our first and constant aim, not our own. And this is the way to true glory; for He says-"him that honoureth me I will honour."

* See John 7:18; John 8:50; John 5:41. The closing verse (Proverbs 25:28) may be regarded as a kind of counterpart to the 32d verse of the sixteenth chapter (Proverbs 16:32). There we have the wise man's commendation of self-control; and here, under a very apt similitude, the evil effects of the want of it. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." Such a city is in a state of complete insecurity and exposure,-open to the assault, and the sure prey, of every invader. And to what can the man be more fitly compared, who is destitute of self-government,-swayed by the uncontrolled mastery of his angry and resentful temper! It is in every one's power to take advantage of such a man; to get the better of him; to make him miserable. Any one knows how to provoke him. It is as easy as marching into a city whose defences are prostrate, whose walls are broken down. Thus any one who has a spite at the passionate man may satiate his malice to the full by touching the spring that is sure to throw him off his guard. He will then more surely expose himself, than his enemy, by all he had it in his power to say, could possibly do.

Further, Satan takes advantage of such a character. He is easy of access, and easy of capture. He can, with all facility, by touching his passions-by throwing a spark amidst the inflammable and fiery material within, lead him, or rather drive him, to sin,-making him the unconscious instrument of his evil purposes. By the indulgence of an angry spirit a man "gives place" to the devil. He opens to him the garrison of his heart. His spiritual state is in continual and imminent danger. His soul is exposed to every assault of every enemy and in hourly peril of being sacked and plundered of all that is dear to its feelings and its hopes:-"even like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

One thing more. The temper described here is adverse to all prayer-a kind of interdict on fellowship with God. How can that fellowship be regularly maintained by a spirit that is ever liable

to such perturbing excitation? We are commanded to "lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." We are commanded, "when we stand praying, to 'forgive' if we have ought against any one." O how many barriers, then, must come between the man of pride and passion and "the throne of grace!" How often must the intercourse be interrupted!-how often must he be unable to bend the knee or to open the lip, in the presence of his God! And what a motive is this to seek divine aid to subdue the spirit of pride and anger, and to acquire that of calm and steady self-command!

80-Pro_26:1-11

Proverbs 26:1-11

LECTURE LXXX.

Proverbs 26:1-11.

"As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest; so honour is not seemly for a fool. As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying; so the curse causeless shall not come. A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit. He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage. The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools. As he that bindeth a stone in a sling; so is he that giveth honour to a fool. As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard; so is a parable in the mouth of fools. The great God, that formed all things, both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors. As a dog returneth to his vomit; so a fool returneth to his folly." The two leading ideas in the comparison in the first of these verses are incongruity and mischief. "Snow" and "rain," in the times of the year mentioned, were very unseasonable, and apt to prove very injurious to the prospects of the husbandman and of the country. Such cold in summer, when warmth was specially necessary for filling and ripening the fruits of the ground; and such wet weather in autumn, when drought was so desirable for in-gathering in proper condition, were alike unsuitable to their respective seasons, and at once ominous and effective of evil.-"So honour is not seemly for a fool." The incongruity and the mischief are alike predicable, whether the fool be regarded as meaning the weak man or the wicked man. "Honour"-that is any situation of power, authority, and influence-is out of place when in his hands. The weak man will abuse such a position from incapacity; and he may thus oven, without any evil intention, be the instrument of very serious and extensive harm. The harm may arise either from his own obstinacy in the refusal of suitable counsel,-for such obstinacy, alas! is no infrequent associate of imbecility;-or from his being made the dupe and tool of the artful and ambitious, the selfish and the cruel. But the elevation of wicked men to such a position, is still more unseemly, and still more prejudicial, as all history might be cited to prove. When wickedness is set in high places, and endowed with resources at its own disposal for weal or for woe,-well may a nation tremble! In the land of Israel, "snow in summer and rain in harvest" would have been regarded as indications of the displeasure of Jehovah.* Such appearances were fitted to fill them with the fear that God was about to visit them with famine and "cleanness of teeth in their borders."-So the advancement to honour and authority of wicked men--men devoid of principle-would have been with them, and is indeed with all, a presage of impending calamities.

* See 1 Samuel 12:17-18.

Verse Proverbs 26:2. "As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying; so the curse causeless shall not come." There is difficulty here in settling the precise point in the comparison. The ordinary

interpretation explains it with reference to curses pronounced by men without cause-imprecations, anathemas, that are unmerited:-and the meaning is understood to be-as the bird or sparrow, by wandering, and as the swallow, or wood-pigeon, by flying, shall not come,-that is, shall not reach us or come upon us in the way of injury; so is it with the causeless curse. It will "do no more harm than the bird that flies over head, than Goliath's curses did to David."* And it might be added, that, as these birds return to their own place,-to the nests whence they came, so will such gratuitous maledictions come back upon the persons by whom they are uttered. Thus God turned the curses into a blessing which Balak the son of Zippor lured Balaam to pronounce against Israel. Thus the malicious and hard-hearted curses of Shimei against David came not upon him, but fell upon the head of their unprincipled author.

* Henry.

I am not sure, though this interpretation has its difficulties, that a better can be given of the words. They may, however, refer, not to curses uttered by men, but to curses or judgments sent by God. The meaning then will be that as the bird in flying has an object, and by flying gains that object, so the curse, or judgment of God, never comes without a cause. For every visitation of His there is a reason; and an end to be answered by it. It comes, in every case, in testimony of the divine displeasure, and for punitive warning and correction. Thus it was when "snow" came "in summer," or "rain in harvest:" and thus it was when "the basest of men" were, in God's providence, raised to power:-it was that they might be the scourges of His people, for their sins, and for their good.

According to the former view, the great lesson taught is that when exposed to the malice of men and their unmerited imprecations we should put our trust in God. According to the latter, that if we would shun "the curse," or-judicial infliction of the Lord, we must beware of everything that would provoke His displeasure: and that when His heavy dispensations do come, it behoves us to inquire what is their cause, and for what end they are sent; to ask, each one of us-"Why am I thus?"-"What meaneth the heat of this great anger?"-and to "humble ourselves under His mighty hand," and sigh and pray for the attainment of the end He has in view. This second sense of the proverb appears to derive some countenance from the verse which follows:-

Verse Proverbs 26:3. "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back." The obvious import is-that correction suits "the fool," even as the whip does the horse, and the bridle the ass. He requires the rod. Nothing else will do for him; nothing else bring him to his senses, or drive his folly from his heart; if even that proves effectual-"for a reproof entereth more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool." I give the following, as the pointed application of the proverb to various characters by a judicious expositor:-"Are you," then, "the unhappy fathers of foolish children! You must make use of the rod and reproof to give them wisdom. Are you authorized to bear rule in the church? the rod of church discipline must be applied to offenders, that they may be reclaimed, and others warned. Are you magistrates? the rod which God has put into your hands may be a means of preserving young malefactors from the gibbet at a more advanced period of life. Are you wise? beware of turning aside unto folly, that you may never need the rod. Are you fools? learn wisdom, or do not blame those whom duty and charity will oblige to use the rod for your correction. Is it not better, that you should be treated by your superiors with love and in the spirit of meekness, than to be beaten with the rod? Are you obliged, for your faults, to bear the pains of church censure, or criminal law? Kiss the rod, and "sin no more, lest a worse

thing come unto you." Have you formerly endured the rod? Let the impressions and effects of it abide with you for life, lest the sword of divine vengeance be unsheathed against you, because you refused to hear the voice of the rod and Him that hath appointed it."*

* Dr. Lawson.

Verses Proverbs 26:4-5. "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." In these two verses, there is the appearance of contradiction. But it is the appearance only. The principle of harmony seems to lie in the different senses of which the words "according to his folly" are susceptible. The case is obvious. There may be folly both in the matter and the manner of the fool's talk. In neither must he be imitated. We must not bring ourselves down to his level. We must not debate with him in his own style-allowing him to get the better of our temper and self-possession. The evil of answering the fool according to his folly in this sense, is stated in the end of the verse-"Lest thou also be like unto him:"-lest, that is, thou pass for a fool like him, sharing in the contempt that attaches to his character;-which is especially apt to be the case, when, in presence of those who do not know him, a man enters into the foolish, frothy, absurd, contemptible talk of the silly, the vain, the worthless,-chiming in with, encouraging and countenancing their folly, and seeming to relish and enjoy it:-or lest thou, in point of fact, really contract resemblance to him;-for by thus descending beneath the proper level, and conforming to such folly, there is a risk of contracting a littleness and silliness of mind; and, along with it, a trifling, talkative, contentious, wrangling spirit, and a manner destitute of all becoming dignity and respectability; producing the scorn of all who do, and the regret and pity of all who do not, know us.

Then, on the other hand, "Answer a fool according to his folly," means answer him as his folly deserves. And this may be in various ways.-There may be occasions not a few on which entire silence is the most suitable of all replies. The fool's cavils and questions may really not be at all deserving of notice. As the danger mentioned, however, is "lest he be wise in his own conceit"-the silence in such cases requires to be accompanied with marked and manifest indications of its intention; otherwise, the very evil deprecated will be incurred. The fool will impute it to inability, and take credit to himself accordingly. This will give him a triumph, and settle him in his self-conceit. The same remark applies to irony, which may frequently be a sufficiently suitable kind of answer to the folly of the fool. It is a species of reply which has the appearance of conformity to the folly; but in reality is the reverse. Great care must be taken that the irony be such as to be perceived. If the fool himself does not see it, but takes the irony for earnest, it will then have all the effect of rendering him the more "wise in his own conceit:"-and if others do not see it it will have the effect stated in the former, of making us appear, in their eyes, "like unto him." Again, a petulant, captious caviller is not entitled to the respectful treatment due to a sincere and modest inquirer or objector. It is well to be able, in such cases, so to point an answer, as at once to expose the ignorance or the malice of the caviller, and to put a reply out of his power;-thus setting him fast-making him feel his folly, and bringing down his self-estimation. This, however, we should be sure, is not done in any such way as would cherish in ourselves the very principle which we seek to repress in him-of petulance and self-conceit. That were to answer him "according to his folly" in the sense of the fourth verse, and "to be like him." All our answers should be in meekness as well as firmness; and more in the spirit of pity than of scorn. This ought especially to be attended to on serious subjects. There is a way which some have, when a person starts any objection on points of a religious

nature,-bearing for instance on the truth of Christianity or the principles of the gospel,-of half angrily and half sneeringly, with a stern or a taunting rebuff, putting him down, by roundly telling him that what he says is nonsense, and unworthy of an answer. This, in general, is fitted to have one or other or all of three effects:-the excitement to resentful passions; the gratification of self-sufficiency and self-conceit instead of their repression; (for this kind of knock-down way of treating an argument or objection will of course be interpreted as indicating the consciousness of inability to meet it calmly and fairly;)-and the confirmation of scepticism and infidelity. Serious subjects should be treated seriously in all cases,-even with the fool. The best way to reply, is, not by a disdainful, jeering exclamation of "absurd nonsense!"-nor, by anything of the nature of buffoonery, trying to turn the laugh against the caviller: but to endeavour, in our reply, to unite such gravity and seriousness, as to show our deep impression of the importance of the subject, as one never to be trifled with or treated with lightness;-such force of argument as shall settle the question:-such determined firmness, as to rebuke and repress the spirit of self-conceit:-and such gentleness and kindliness, as shall conciliate attention and candid consideration, and contribute to win the heart. This last great object Christians are at times too prone to forget. Never should we imagine it sufficient merely to gain a victory on a disputed point. Our aim should above all things be, to gain the foolish, and even the conceited and impertinent, caviller himself-to draw him to a conviction of God’s truth and a choice of God’s ways. We should seek to make him sensible, by our whole manner, that we are in earnest,-that we are concerned for him, and anxious to convince him, for his own good, of his error and his danger.* O! what is it, in the comparison-to have the credit of silencing an adversary, or to have the satisfaction of winning and saving a soul-saving a soul from death, and covering the multitude of sins!

* This is beautifully exemplified on many occasions, in our Lord’s interviews with his enemies:-See Matthew 12:24, &c; Matthew 15:1, &c.; Luke 13:14-17; John 8:7, &c.

Verse Proverbs 26:6. "He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage." The general meaning of this proverb is too obvious to be mistaken by any one. Here again "a fool" may signify either a weak and incompetent man,-who has not capacity for the discharge of the trust committed to him, or one who is unprincipled,-on whose integrity and honour little reliance can be placed;-either the senseless man, or the worthless man, or a combination of both. He who commits any "message" to such a one "cutteth off the feet;"-is guilty of the same anomalous absurdity as if he were purposely to lame himself with a view to expedite his journey! The consequence which might be anticipated is expressed by Solomon in the words-"and drinketh damage:" he reaps, that is, as the reward of his absurdity and recklessness, disappointment, vexation, shame, injury, just in proportion to the magnitude and importance of the business.

Mark the general lesson. It evidently is-that we be careful, in all cases, to select suitable agents for the undertaking on which they are to be commissioned. It is an important lesson for governments, in the selection of ambassadors, diplomatists, and provincial and colonial magistrates;-to see that they be, in all respects, men competent for the trusts committed to them,-likely to execute them successfully, and in a manner that shall secure the honour and the interests of their country. It is a lesson to ourselves as the inhabitants of a free country,-to look well to it that we use conscientiously, considerately, and wisely, our elective franchise, and beware of committing the representative administration of our national affairs to men without principle or without capacity,-or holding such maxims of public policy as are, in our apprehension, at variance with the civil and

religious liberties of the realm, or any of its other interests. It is a lesson to churches, in the choice of those to whom they commit the instruction and rule of the house of God;-to see to it, that they be men, in knowledge, in character, in temper, in prudence, and in energy, competent, as far as attainable, for "rightly dividing the word of truth,"-watching for souls,"-"taking care of the church of God." It is a lesson to both pastors and churches, in cases of discipline, or in any matters of general interest requiring the agency of individuals;-to see to it that persons be appointed, suitable in both disposition, and freedom from partiality and prejudice, and possessing the description of knowledge, whether sacred or secular, which fits them for the charge of the particular case. It is a lesson to all, in the ordinary affairs of domestic life, of secular business, of benevolent exertion;-to see to it, that according to the nature of what is to be done, they engage right heads, right hearts, and right hands.

Verse Proverbs 26:7. "The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools." This verse has by different critics been differently interpreted. One has it, "Lift up the legs of the lame"-"make the legs of the lame to dance;"-"so is a parable in the mouth of a fool." "A wise saying doth as ill become a fool, as dancing doth a cripple;-for, as his lameness never so much appears as when he would seem nimble, so the other's folly is never so ridiculous as when he would seem wise." The force of the comparison is, on this interpretation, sufficiently striking.

Another, from a different application of the same etymology, has the meaning-"the legs of the lame are wasted-emaciated-so is a parable in the mouth of fools." But this view seems unnatural and tame. The legs of the lame are not always wasted and slender. The meaning he attaches to the proverb is, that as the legs of the lame are slender and have lost their natural strength, so a parable in the mouth of a fool is deprived of its force. The explanation seems to rob the saying of much of its force. The idea certainly that is most readily and naturally suggested by the legs of the lame is that of inequality, and consequent inaptitude for sprightly or graceful movement. And in this sense the comparison is a very apt and expressive one. As the lame man, whose legs are not equal,-a short and a long, a straight and a crooked,-when he attempts to be nimble, is at once ludicrously awkward, and always in danger of falling; so is a fool awkward in the use of wise sayings, and is constantly in danger of stumbling into what is either ridiculous or mischievous, by his misapplication and abuse of them. "As therefore," says Henry, "it is best for a lame man to keep his seat, so is it best for a silly or a bad man to hold his tongue." *

* Stuart renders-"Take away the legs of a lame man; and so," &c. He explains thus-"The legs of a lame man are useless and may as well be taken away as respects any good from them. So a proverb in the mouth of fools is useless. It is a lame proverb." For the sake of the close resemblance of the sentiment, we shall take in here verse ninth,-"As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard; so is a parable in the mouth of fools." The meaning is precisely similar to that of the sixth verse. A fool handling the maxims of wisdom is like a drunken man handling thorns. The drunkard, not knowing what he is about, lays hold of them rashly and recklessly, and thus wounds himself:-so the fool wounds himself by his manner of using the sayings of the wise. He confirms his reputation for folly; he exposes himself to pity or scorn; or even, inadvertently, from not at all perceiving how the use he is making of some one of them recoils upon himself, he pronounces his own verdict of culpability and condemnation; or still further, when attempting to bring a proverbial or pithy saying to bear on the support of his own cause, he blunders, by the misapplication of it, into a conclusion the very opposite of what he intended. He lays down

principles that, in the eyes of every one who hears him, go to condemn himself, without his being in the least degree sensible of it. The thorn, ere he is aware, has "gone up into his hand," and the pain and the blood discover to him his folly.

Verse Proverbs 26:8. "As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool." This verse also has been variously rendered. In the margin-"As he that putteth a precious stone in a heap of stones, so is he that giveth honour to a fool." It seems to be generally agreed that the word translated a sling means more properly a heap of stones.* And the word rendered stone is one frequently used to denote a precious stone.

* Parkhurst, Sohultens, Stock.

It is not denied, that our English version gives a good sense. The man who "binds a stone in a sling" maybe considered as preparing mischief. And so, the honour,-the power and influence,-that are bestowed upon a fool, only fit their possessor for doing hurt, either to himself, or to the person who has conferred it, or to others.*1 But the proper meaning appears to be-"giving honour to a fool is like hiding a precious stone in the midst of a heap of stones;"-or like "fixing a precious stone in the midst of a heap."-One critic renders-"As a spark of precious stone in the midst of a heap of stones, so is giving honour to a fool." The ideas then conveyed are-that the honour does not accord well with the other parts of the character,-and that to all really useful purposes it is lost. To the expression of incongruity thus brought out some make an addition, by supposing the heap of stones to be such an heap as was usually reared or thrown over notorious offenders, who were stoned, or otherwise ignominiously put to death.*2 This does certainly impart additional point and poignancy to the comparison. Giving honour to a fool is like inserting a diamond in a monument of infamy. The honour is thus worse than thrown away and lost. It is, in every view, where it ought not to be.

*1 Stuart retains the rendering of the English version, and explains, not inaptly, "It would be absurd to bind a stone in a sling and then expect it to do execution. Equally so is it to bestow honour on a fool, and expect any good consequences from it."

*2 S3e Joshua 7:25-26; Joshua 8:29: 2 Samuel 18:17, &c.

Verse Proverbs 26:10. "The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors." This verse so rendered, it cannot be questioned, contains an all important and solemn truth. The fool and the transgressor shall come to punishment in the end,-shall "receive the due reward of their deeds,"-at the hand of God himself-"the great God who formed all things;" and who has power to punish as well as to save: "He can create, and he destroy." But God is a supplement; and in such circumstances the absence of the name of God, and the need of supplying it is very unusual. Here too you may look at the translation in the margin:-"A great man grieveth all; he both hireth the fool and hireth transgressors." The Septuagint is hardly intelligible. The French translation is substantially the same as our marginal:-"Great men cause offence, or grief, to all, and take into their service the foolish and the wicked." The Latin Vulgate gives a sense entirely different, which it is not easy to draw from the original-"Judgment settles causes; and he who imposes silence on the fool, allays contentions-or wraths." The meaning is probably that given in the margin. When a prince takes into his service ministers without capacity and without principle-"the fool and the transgressor,"-it is to his subjects matter of

universal concern and trouble;-both because it is a sad indication of his own character; and because the administration of such men ensures to the country so many and so grievous evils. The sentiment, in this view of it, quite harmonizes with those in preceding and following verses. And the lesson has application from the throne downwards through all the descriptions of subsidiary trusts. Extensive proprietors who employ overseers of their tenants, or of those engaged in their manufactories, or mines, or whatever else be the description of their property, should see to the character of these overseers. Their power may be abused, and multitudes of workmen suffer, when the owner-the master-knows nothing of what is going on. But he ought to know. Many complainings and strikes, well or ill-founded, have their origin here.*

* Stuart renders the verse, "An arrow which woundeth every one is he who hireth a fool and he who hireth vagrants:" and explains, "The man who employs fools and vagrants to do his work, and pays them wages, will injure himself."

Verse Proverbs 26:11. "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly." The proverb is quoted by the Apostle Peter.* The emblem is a loathsome and sickening one. It is meant to be so. It would not have been appropriate, had it been anything else. There are two ideas conveyed by the comparison. The disposition or tendency, on the part of the fool or vicious man, to return to his folly; and the loathsomeness-the vileness-of the thing itself, when it does take place. There are persons of great pretensions to refinement, who affect great disgust at the comparison. They wonder how any body of ordinary delicacy can utter it. They would think their lips polluted by the very words. It were well for such persons to remember, that there is no comparison so odious as the thing itself which is represented by it. It were well if such persons would transfer their disgust and loathing at the figure to that which the figure represents:-if they would cherish a proper loathing of sin. That is what God holds in abhorrence:-that is what should be abhorred by us. Persons may affect to sicken at the comparison here used, and yet be themselves exemplifying the very conduct it so aptly represents. Folly and sin are incomparably more polluting and debasing to the nature of man, than the vilest and most disgusting practices in the physical nature of any of the inferior animals. O! to have the due impression of this!-such an impression as will produce a careful practical avoidance of those moral evils which are so offensive in the sight of God!

* 2 Peter 2:22. The proverb has a more especial reference to those sinners, who have been warned,-who have smarted for their folly,-who have, when thus made to feel its effects, professed their consciousness of its evil, and their sense of danger as well as guilt,-and who possibly, for a time, have refrained from it,-have vowed their favourite sins away from them, and seemed as if they were resolved not on confessing only but forsaking:-but who have shaken off their temporary convictions, and have returned, more eagerly than ever, to their former ways. Strongly are such characters depicted in some parts of Scripture; and terrible is the warning which the description of them involves.* Beware, O sinner, of this fearful and fatal tendency. And let the professed people of God keep themselves aloof from all temptations to sin,-the sin especially to which they may before their conversion have been addicted. Let not the cup again touch their lips, lest the liking to it return, and they exemplify, as too many, alas! have done, the proverb before us!

* See Matthew 12:43-45; 2 Peter 2:20-22.

81-Pro_26:12-23

Proverbs 26:12-23

LECTURE LXXXI.

Proverbs 26:12-23.

"Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him. The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. As the door turneth upon his hinges; so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason. He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears. As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith. Am not I in sport? Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him: when he speaketh fair, believe him not; for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fail therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him. A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin."

How strong the expression in the first of these verses of the utter hopelessness of the self-conceited man! From what Solomon had just said of the fool,-and especially of his attachment to his folly and his proneness to return to it, we can hardly imagine a stronger:-"there is more hope of a fool"-yes, of a fool,-even of the man who returns to his folly like the dog to his vomit-"than of him." The man who is thoroughly possessed with a high notion of his own superiority in wisdom and excellence,-will listen to nothing.

He is so encased in his self-sufficiency and self-esteem, that no advice, no reproof, no counsel, can reach him. He follows his own way, with a headstrong impetuosity, and a sovereign contempt of all who would presume to offer him any direction. All the wisdom of the wise goes past him, like the idle wind. The simile in the fourteenth verse may mean, either that in the very way in which the sluggard turns himself there is indolence,-that he does even that lazily-in the way that requires least exertion:-or, that by his indolence everything like progress is precluded. In every employment, if employment he can be said to have, his indolence makes him stationary. The only motion he is able to bear, is the motion from one side to another upon his bed. And as even that cannot be made without some effort, he indulges in it as seldom as possible; and when on one side he has become uneasy, lies long thinking of turning, before he can bring himself to make the movement!

Even the exertion of eating is too much for him* (Proverbs 26:15). Having brought his hand from his mouth to the dish, he "hides" it there,-there lets it lie;-though hungry, and fond enough of his meat, "it grieveth him"-it is irksome, it is a weariness to him, to raise it again to his mouth! Thus the sluggard is lazy on his bed, lazy at his meat, and lazy at his work,-if he can ever be said to work. And yet-"The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason." Ease is his chief good. There is nothing he can imagine better, than just to be let alone, and allowed to do nothing! He has his theory on the subject; and he holds it of all theories the best,-by far the most rational. The only exercise of his mental faculties with which he can be troubled is in behalf of the repose of his bodily powers;-to vindicate the propriety of ease and comfort-that is, according to his vocabulary, of idleness. Arguing implies perhaps rather more effort than he can be supposed to muster. Solomon does not say of him that he will be at the pains to argue. A man may tenaciously hold his point, and hug himself in the full conviction of what his sweet experience-the experience of the delights of lassitude and quiescence,-tells him is right, without being at the pains to reason, or to attempt for a moment to answer the reasons of others. The sluggard sees men bestirring and troubling and fatiguing and vexing themselves,-and he hears them "rendering reasons" why they should be thus busy; reasons, to show the advantages of industry to the individual, to the domestic circle, and to society. The sluggard blesses himself; thinks his own way better; and with inward self-gratulation, turns him on his bed, and lies still. He is ingenious in finding reasons for his not doing what others bring reasons to show him he ought to do: and his own reasons are always the strongest. "Seven men"-that is, any number of the soundest thinkers and the wisest and ablest reasoners will argue in vain. He only thus exemplifies what discovers itself in multitudes of other cases, the extra weight that is given to arguments by their being on the side of inclination.

* Comp. Proverbs 19:24.

Verse Proverbs 26:17. "He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears." The man who ventures to "take a dog by the ears," will, in proportion to the fierceness of the animal’s temper, be in danger. When ho has once seized him, his difficulty will be to get quit of him in safety. If he keeps his hold, he increases the dog’s fury, and the consequent risk of letting him go: so that he is at a loss what to do; and it is still the longer the worse. Thus the man who, hastily and intemperately, interferes in a quarrel, gets into a hazardous dilemma. He immediately discovers that it is something in which he had no business to intermeddle; he repents his rashness;-but once in, it is not so easy getting out again. Twenty to one if both parties do not turn upon him,-suspending for the moment their combat with one another, to assail the unbidden and unwelcome intruder as the object of their common resentment; as in the case of two quarrelling dogs and the man who injudiciously and in ignorance of the animals, attempts their separation. If the intermeddler takes the side of one of the parties he may provoke both; the one against whom he sets himself for a reason too obvious to need mentioning,-and the one in whose favour he intrudes, from the feeling of pride; because by such help thus impertinently given, he is robbed of the honour of the victory, or even of the credit of having at least enough of pluck in him to stand it out to the last. These are feelings of human nature; and may be alike experienced, whether the "strife" be one of blows or one of words-one of body or of mind-a fight or a controversy. Few men like either opposition or aid in such cases: and a man of spirit would rather have the former than the latter. Are we never then to meddle?-Are we, in all cases, just to let strife go on?-to let the combatants fight it out, come what will? Assuredly not.

There is no proverbial saying that has not exceptions. We must take the general lesson without pushing it to extremes. That lesson is sufficiently plain-that we should beware of taking part in quarrels with which we have nothing to do,-of thrusting ourselves in between angry disputants; of officiously and zealously interfering between those who have expressed no wish for an umpire in their strifes,-for advice or mediation. And it does not seem to be so much the case of the person who interferes for the purpose of separating the combatants that Solomon here means, as the person who, from his love to strife, is not satisfied with any quarrels he may chance to have, or choose to pick, of his own, but who cannot pass by a fray between others without having a hand in it.* * See Proverbs 18:6-7; Proverbs 20:3.

Verses Proverbs 26:18-19. "As a mad man, who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?" We take the character first; then the simile. It is the character of the man who imposes upon his neighbour by false or distorted representations,-leads him, by this means, into practical mistakes,-involving him in contentions, embarrassments, awkward scrapes, or even trouble and loss:-and then excuses himself by saying it was all in diversion,-he meant no harm-only a joke. This includes all that among ourselves passes under the cant term-hoaxing. The evil may of course vary in degree, according to the trivial or the momentous character of the deception. In some cases the aim and the result may be merely laughable; at other times they may be of a nature to render the agent culpable in the extreme,-being no joke to the sufferer, whatever they may be to him.

It is to the latter of these two cases that Solomon here refers. The comparison shows this by the "mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death," much harm may be done,-harm to property, to health to comfort, to life: and all is sport to the poor maniac. But in his case we have our apology ready. He knows no better. His disordered mind frees him from accountableness. We do not-we cannot blame him. But he who "deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, I am in sport," does the maniac’s mischief without the maniac’s apology:-he acts like a man devoid of reason, but without the excuse of having lost it.

1. The moral evil of such conduct must be in proportion to the degree in which truth is violated, and in which a malicious spirit is indulged:-in proportion not merely to the mischief actually done, but to the mischief intended, and the amount of deception and falsehood practised to effect it.-2. Even in diversion truth should be held sacred. In no case should it be sported with. It is a serious mistake for people to imagine that they do no harm when they indulge in this kind of truthless jesting, either to amuse others or make them stare.-3. The sport is always hazardous; inasmuch as no man can ever have a previous certainty as to the precise length to which the results of this and the other of his practical jokes may go.-4. The evil and guilt are not a little aggravated when the deception is practised, and the mischievous tricks are played off upon the weak and the simple; when advantage is taken of their imbecility to turn the laugh against them, and to join in the laugh at their expense; and still more when they are exposed not to laughter only, but to serious inconvenience and privation. There is meanness in this; and there is wickedness. It ought to be reprobated by every rightly-thinking mind and every rightly-feeling heart, with indignant severity. We pity and confine the maniac. We should scorn, condemn, and punish the unprincipled deceiver.

Verses Proverbs 26:20-21. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious

man to kindle strife." In these verses we have two characters of frequent occurrence-the "talebearer" and the "contentious man." The two are often united; talebearing being just one of the ways of indulging and gratifying the love of contention.* Observe-1. They "kindle the fires of strife." The effect of a tale of malice-of an insinuation of slander,-of even a single whisper of evil, is at times as amazing as it is annoying and injurious. When the little sting of some insignificant insect, of which the point is so small as to require a microscope to see it, has fairly pierced the skin, and lodged its virus in a puncture that is hardly discernible,-we marvel at the suddenness and extent of the effect produced, the inflammation and swelling that ensue in the surrounding parts, and the feverishness that is infused into the whole mass of circulating blood. Such is the effect of the secretly lodged venom of the talebearer's whisper!-Or, to keep by the figure before us:-it is like the striking of a single spark into the materials laid for kindling the largest fire.

* Comp. Proverbs 16:28; Proverbs 18:8; Proverbs 20:19; Proverbs 22:10.

2. They maintain the fires of strife. They kindle where there is no fire; they supply fuel where there is. They heap it on. They do their best to keep up the fire. And O! what delight it gives them if they succeed! Does the fire get low? Do the flame and the heat of mutual passion abate? They are alarmed:-it will never do to let the fire go out altogether. So they are at their post. Down they stoop, and quietly apply their breath. They blow, at first very softly, the glowing embers, and carefully lay on fuel,-little at a time, lest they should frustrate their purpose, and smother instead of inflaming; and when there is a fresh out-burst they inwardly exult, "walking in the light of their fire and of the sparks which they have kindled."-There were some of God's ministers of old, whose duty it was to keep the sacred fire always burning upon His altar:-these are ministers of Satan; and their unenviable office is, to keep up the accursed fire on the devil's altar.

It is added of the same characters (Proverbs 26:22.) "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." The word in this verse rendered wounds is by not a few critics and translators understood as signifying what is soft, gentle, sweet, and is interpreted of the insinuating and flattering character of the talebearer's words,-which, like dainties, there is a readiness to swallow.* But they do their work-"they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." Soft as they are,-sweet and gentle and the very opposite of injurious as they seem, they are pernicious. Like many poisons, they are tempting to the taste; but they are deadly. They destroy the mental peace and enjoyment of him to whom they are uttered: they destroy the reputation and the interest of him of whom they are uttered; and they destroy the friendship and the social happiness of both.

* The Septuagint, Vulgate, and some other versions, agree in this rendering of the word.

Verses Proverbs 26:23-26. "Burning lips, and a wicked heart, are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him: When he speaketh fair, believe him not; for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation." These verses all relate to one subject.-"Burning lips"-that is, lips burning with affection and officious warmth of zeal for your service, concealing malicious and wicked intentions:-such lips are as "a potsherd covered with silver dross." A potsherd thus lacquered over is in reality as worthless as ever; although for the purpose of imposition, it is made to wear a deceitful exterior:-it is silver to the eye; but it is earthenware of the coarsest kind after all. So the heart of such a man is worthless, while

his "lips burn." The exterior and the interior do not correspond. And such men are only, on this account, the more dangerous. When a man honestly utters his mind, we know him, and are on our guard. But in the other case, we fancy we have got a friend when we have taken a serpent into our bosom,-when we have got only a worthless deceiver; a silver vessel in appearance, but a potsherd in reality;-lips of honey, but a heart of gall; or rather lips glowing with love, and a heart burning with enmity. In the latter verse it is either assumed that we have some previous ground to suspect the man’s sincerity; or it signifies that in his very manner-in his very style of "fair speaking" there is something which should make us suspicious and jealous of him,-his parasitical fawning and flattering being overdone and out of nature:-though it is not always so,-there being some dissemblers who have studied nature to the very life. At all events, in proportion as he becomes increasingly fulsome, let our suspicions correspondingly rise:-"There are seven abominations in his heart." This may be understood, either as a very strong expression of the detestable odiousness of the character; (and in truth there is no character more deserving of entire abhorrence;)-the number seven being often used, both as to evil and good, with the sense of fulness, completeness, perfection; or, as every one of the deceitful and wicked devices of which his heart is the secret manufactory and storehouse, is an abomination-hateful to God, as opposed to the whole spirit of His law and character, and hateful in the eyes of all holy beings in creation,-the expression may mean that his heart is full of such unprincipled devices-plans and purposes of evil, concealed under the guise of friendship and love!

When, then, we have such cause for suspicion and jealousy, what is duty? Evidently, not to commit oneself to him,-to keep on the reserve-to say little-to have patience-to wait and watch. For (Proverbs 26:26) "Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation."-His falsehood and hypocrisy will come to light. His sin will find him out. He will by and by betray himself. Circumstances will occur to detect and expose him, and render him the object of public and merited infamy. The very circumstance of his finding you incredulous and distant, and not immediately yielding to him, may, through the very power of chagrin and irritation, provoke the disclosure of what has been within. And when this disclosure comes, with what shame is the deceiver covered! Not Christian morality, merely, but even the conventional virtue of the world, agree to banish such a man from society with indignant reprobation, whether his devices have succeeded or failed. And more than shame will be his portion:-Verse Proverbs 26:27. "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him."-"Digging a pit" for another is planning schemes of evil against him. The providence of God not seldom makes these schemes ultimately productive of mischief to the schemer. The figure in the verse evidently means that as there is a constant tendency in the stone that is rolled up to return and come down upon him that rolls it-so is there a tendency in the devices of deceit-in the secret plans of mischief-to bring evil in the end to the wicked author of them. In both cases, there is constant effort and constant risk. The framer of evil must keep his hand vigilantly and unremittingly to it; else in some unguarded moment it will come back with disgrace and ruin upon himself.* * Psalms 7:14-16; Psalms 9:15; Psalms 57:6; Ecclesiastes 10:8. In the next verse we have still the same subject. The "lying tongue" corresponds with "the flattering mouth," for hypocrisy, slander, and flattery are very common associates.* The falsehood and calumny are produced by hatred, and are the manifestations and expressions of it:-but there is in them, at the same time, a tendency to increase and confirm it:-"The lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it."

* See Proverbs 20:19.

1. There is the inward self-reproach, arising from the workings of conscience, from which arises a secret irritability and fretfulness and unhappiness:-and this produces dislike of the innocent occasion of it; instead of terminating (as it always ought to do) on self. This of course is only more injustice. True; but it is in human nature to hate with a bitter hatred the object of our own crime; as if it were a fault in that object to exist, and so to be the object on which our sin terminates.

2. The evil passions, like the good, are strengthened and increased by their exercise. If the utterance of the feelings of love serves further to inflame love,-the utterance, in like manner, of the feelings of hatred tend to inflame hatred. The passion gives birth to the word and the action; and, reciprocally, the word and the action strengthen the passion.

3. The fretful uneasiness produced by the unceasing apprehension of detection and exposure, already alluded to, and of the weight of his vengeance who is the object of the lying tongue’s assaults, gives rise also to the same feeling of rankling dislike to him who is the source of it. Thus the slanderer, instead of feeling pity for the man whom his slander wounds, hates him still the more. This appears to have had a very striking exemplification in the case of our blessed Lord and his Jewish unbelieving adversaries. They "hated him without a cause." They uttered their spiteful reproaches; and the very utterance of them irritated and confirmed their malignity. They were angry that they could not find a cause to justify their hatred. The more they reproached and maligned him, the more were their reproaches belied by the unimpeachable purity of his whole conduct. And they hated him with the keener dislike, that they could not tempt him to give them the slightest ground for their reproaches. Their "lying tongue" thus "hated him that was afflicted by it." For he was afflicted by it. This was part of his sufferings. In prophecy be is represented as saying-"Reproach hath broken my heart." He "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself." And the greater portion of venom they discharged upon him, there was the more abundant secretion of it within. As to the "flatterer"-he is the most dangerous of characters. He attacks at points where men are naturally most successfully assailable; where they are most in danger of being thrown off their guard and giving him admission. And when by his flatteries he has thus got the mastery, then follows the execution of the end for which they were employed-"working ruin." The expression is strong; but not stronger than experience fully justifies. It often works ruin to the most interesting characters-characters admired and worthy of the admiration,-by infusing a principle that spoils the whole-the principle of vanity and self-conceit. They thus lose their loveliest and most engaging attraction. And whatever be the selfish object of the flatterer, his selfishness obtains its gratification by the ruin of him whom his flatteries have deceived.

82-Pro_27:1-7

Proverbs 27:1-7

LECTURE LXXXII.

Proverbs 27:1-7.

"Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips. A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool’s wrath is heavier than them both. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy? Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend: but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. The full soul loatheth an honey-comb: but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."

There is often a marked and melancholy inconsistency between the admissions which men make and the course of conduct which they pursue. The uncertainty of life, and the uncertainty of the events of its successive days, who can possibly question? It is necessarily and universally granted. It has been the settled and traditionary maxim of all generations. Who contradicts the assertion-"Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth?" Yet, admitted as this is,-unquestioned since "by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin,"-men have, ever from that day, been "boasting themselves of to-morrow"-thinking confidently, talking confidently, and acting confidently, on the credit of to-morrow!-ay, and not seldom of much longer periods than to-morrow! Of the uncertainty of life and of its enjoyments, how many solemn and touching lessons we receive! Among the first tidings I heard on my return home two days ago, was the sudden and affecting death of one of our number, who left his wife, the partner for twenty years of his joys and sorrows, in good health and cheerful spirits, to walk, and to bathe in the river; and, after but an hour or two of agonizing suspense beyond the wonted time of his return, the sad intelligence was borne to her that herself was a widow and her children fatherless! Distressing, but apt illustration of the words before us! O learn from them, and from such sad events, the fully of trusting to the certain continuance, even for a day, of life and of life’s blessings, and let the admonition be taken home, in reference to life’s duties. Let nothing be left till "to-morrow" that can be done and ought to be done, to-day,-"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest," Ecclesiastes 9:10. Thus let us "redeem the time,"-jealous of allowing one moment of it to slip, remembering especially that in matters which pertain to the well-being of others, there is unrighteousness as well as folly in such delay, and that in those which are connected with the glory of God and the interests of his cause there is impiety. And I would anew press on all an earnest and affectionate caution against the most ruinous of all descriptions of procrastinating confidence in "to-morrow,"-the delay of attention to the concerns of the soul and a coming eternity. Not now, but by and by-is the prevailing maxim here;-a maxim which few pretend to justify, but on which the vast majority persist in acting;-a maxim, of which all grant the folly in words, and by the admission condemn their own practice. Alas! my friends, how many souls has this procrastination ruined! Many a time are the sad

consequences of delay exemplified and felt in regard to the affairs of this world. And O that men would but apply the salutary principles on which such affairs ought to be conducted to the interests of the world to come! Yet how frequently may you hear a diligent, active, prudent man of business warn the young against the evil of procrastination, and address to them most admirable lessons for their conduct in life, yet himself acting on the very principle he condemns, respecting interests incomparably more momentous;-the very solicitude about the secular, one of the causes of procrastination as to the spiritual and eternal! How often may you see such a man-while he would not, in any one instance if he could help it, leave the value of a farthing to the contingencies of "to-morrow," putting off to all the uncertainty of days and years to come, and leaving to "the mercies of a moment" the happiness of an endless existence! Strange infatuation!-and the impiety is not less than the infatuation. With peril to men’s selves, there is insult to God. It may be true, that many yesterdays are gone by, which were once "to-morrows"-and it has, in divine providence, so turned out, that your anticipations of them have not been disappointed. You have "boasted" of many of these "to-morrows," and they have still successively come;-and the very coming of one has tempted you to trust still more confidently for another. And yet you know-you know perfectly-that the past is no security for the future. You know, that, in multitudes of instances, the to-morrow to which others trusted has never arrived, and that in their case the trust has proved a delusion. You know, that in your own case, the "to-morrow" must come that is to be your last, and that is to close your mortal life. You know that the God of your life has an imperative claim upon you every successive day-a claim as imperative on your heart and your time and your powers to-day as it will be "to-morrow;" and that every to-day and every to-morrow which you allow to pass and to become a yesterday without having given it to Him, or done in it what He commands you to do-accepted His mercy and entered on His service,-carries with it a charge against you to the judgment-seat, and waits your arrival there as a witness against you. You know that delay only hardens evil principle, and gives the world the faster hold of you! You know all this-O then "be wise TO-DAY!"

Verse Proverbs 27:2. "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips." "Self-commendation," it has been said, "is the prerogative of Deity." When God reveals himself to His creatures, it cannot be otherwise, if the discovery be according to truth, than as the infinite concentration of all excellence-of all that is great and all that is good. And it must, at the same time, be, as the source to His creatures of all their joys, and to each one of His intelligent offspring the chief good. The language before us implies that we should seek to possess the excellences that are fitted to commend us to favour, and so to draw forth the approbation of others; we ought to seek these qualities, not, as is too apt to be the case, for the sake of the praise they are likely to secure, but for their own sakes, and for the sake of what the apostle calls "commending ourselves unto God."

It must never be forgotten that all such passages imply the sincere and earnest cultivation of a real and divinely approved principle. The principle called for in this verse is that of true, self-diffident modesty. Considerations entirely different, and even opposite, may induce the suppression of self-praise:-even the very desire of praise from others. From this arises the danger of holding out-to the young especially-the motive or inducement of getting a character for modesty. This may produce artifice, affectation, simulation, hypocrisy. That which is wanted,-that which God approves and requires,-is honest simplicity, which neither, on the one hand, courts praise, nor, on the other,

affects to disdain and undervalue it,-which neither blusters out its own commendation, nor whines and simpers, and depreciates, and makes light of what it is or of what it has done, merely for the purpose of making others say more. The affectation of despising the commendation of others is worse than the self-commendation that is reprehended. It is, in truth, the very same spirit showing itself under another aspect.

There may be occasions when a man not only may with propriety, but must in duty speak in self-commendation. He may be falsely accused,-reproached and vilified. Men may "say all manner of evil against him falsely," and "lay to his charge things that he knows not." The self-vindication which, in such circumstances, becomes incumbent upon him, for the sake of his profession and of his usefulness, must to a certain extent include self-commendation. But in these cases, the manner of it will show the motive and principle by which it is dictated.

Verse Proverbs 27:3. "A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool’s wrath is heavier than them both." Of the unprincipled or irreligious man, who is, at the same time, weak and not governed by reason or discretion, "the wrath" may be expected to be disproportionate, ungovernable, furious, destructive. The figure may be differently understood. It may be taken from the weight of a burden,-or, so far as the stone at least is concerned, from its coming down with mischievous violence on its hapless object. The anger even of a good man may at times go beyond due bounds, in degree and in its working and results;-as when David, in his rage against Nabal, threatened the destruction of all that pertained to him. But in general, the passions of the wise and good will be restrained and moderated by the operation of right principle,-by conscience towards God, and by the influence of God’s truth. But "a fool’s wrath!"-there is no telling to what extremes it may carry him, while the storm rages; or what mischief it may effect in its sudden and frantic transports. The mischief will be in proportion to his power of doing it.

Yet as the next verse indicates, there is a passion which, in Solomon’s estimate, was still worse than uncontrolled anger. That-"cruel," "outrageous," and productive of serious damage, though it be, lasts not long. Like the violent tempest, it speedily spends itself; and by prudent, patient, conciliatory treatment it may be softened. "But who is able to stand before envy?" Envy is one of the most malignant principles in our apostate nature. It is the principle that grudges at the well-being of others. It is a stranger to all generosity of feeling. It differs, in this respect, from virtuous emulation. The latter is satisfied that others should keep, in the scale of prosperity or of honour, the point they have attained, while it strives to surpass and to rise above them. It indulges not the mean desire of gaining equality by the degradation of its rival, or seeks to bring that rival down to its own level by low and insidious arts. But envy is a stranger to honour. Let but the hated distinction be done away, it matters not to envy how,-whether by its own rise or by its rival’s fall. Nay, it sighs for the latter quite as earnestly as it aspires at the former. It only "consults to cast down the object of it from his excellency;" and will condescend to the most despicable devices for the accomplishment of its purpose. The very considerations that would soften anger and resentment, tend to the increase of envy; because they procure for its object the greater share of approval and commendation. Even at the excellences by which these are obtained envy grudges; so that by the very means which would disarm wrath of its propensity to cruelty and outrage, you infuse fresh venom into the stings of envy; you promote the secretion of its virulent and deadly poison. It maybe remarked too that "anger" and "wrath," with their cruelty and outrageous violence, arc open as well as transient. We see them, and we can shun them. But envy mines in secret. It is

ever sapping and working under ground. It perseveres in its perfidious occupation with a patience and assiduity worthy of a better principle and a better cause. And the mine may burst upon you, with destructive violence, ere ever you are aware of what it has been busily and darkly doing; and involve you in ruin without a moment's warning. This is envy's highest, sweetest, richest gratification. It gloats in delight over the successful result of its deeply laid and secretly prosecuted schemes. And yet, well is it designated "the rottenness of the bones." It is its own tormentor. It brings down its rival; but its very gratification is its misery. The very sympathy which that rival meets with torments it:-and itself becomes the object of contempt, desertion and loathing, and brings upon it the curses of mankind. "As the devil," it has been well remarked, "fell by his pride, so he wrought the fall of man by his envy:-and when envy takes possession of a man, it makes him a devil to his neighbours." The devil had no provocation from man:-and so the envious man works without provocation. The object of it does nothing to excite it,-and often has no suspicion of it till the effects of its hellish working come upon him. Who, therefore, can "stand before it?"-It was envy that murdered Abel, and dyed the earth with the first blood of innocence. It was envy that plotted against Joseph,-consulted to put him to death,-sold him into bondage,-dipped his hated vest in blood, and presented it to the eyes of his distracted parent,-thus slaying at once the fraternal and the filial affections in the bosoms of its subjects. It was envy that delivered up to condemnation and death the Lord of glory, the prince of life, the pattern of benevolence, and purity, and every divine and human excellence.-O! if we cannot help being its objects, let us beware of being its subjects. Let us cultivate every sentiment that is opposed to it; and, instead of grudging at the happiness, or the honour, or the excellence of others, delight in that generosity of heart which makes every stream of others' joy tributary to the river of our own pleasures!

Verse Proverbs 27:5. "Open rebuke is better than secret love." Our first enquiry here is,-What is the contrast, or antithesis, which Solomon, in this verse, intends?

It is not, I apprehend, between "open reproof" and love that is not real but only affected, and, assuming the garb and manner of what is real, flatters and imposes upon its object This could not, with propriety, be called "secret love." It is not love at all. It is professed love, but secret enmity, or at least secret indifference, making professions for ends of its own. "Secret love" is love which is indeed real, but which fails to speak out faithfully when it ought-when the good of its object calls for such fidelity; which shrinks from doing so because it is unwilling to inflict present pain; which thus connives at existing evils,-silently allowing them to pass, when they are such as ought to be noticed and reprehended. This is that false love, which really injures its object; and which, on this account,-that is, from its injurious tendency, how little soever designed, gets in the Scriptures the designation of hatred: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him," Leviticus 19:17. This is far worse than of no service. It is eminently prejudicial. It can never be a favour-unless under a fearful misapprehension of the term,-to have sin allowed to remain in us. Surely it is far better to be without the sin, than to be without the "rebuke." To remove sin ought to be regarded by every child of God as the highest aim, and the most desirable influence, of love. It is the highest aim of divine love. It is the end of that love in the whole mediation of Christ; and its end too in the entire administration of providence,-especially in all afflictive dispensations. These are divine rebukes; and they are every one of them corrective,-intended to make God's people "partakers of his holiness." "By this also shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged;" and "this is all the fruit, to take away sin."

It is to be feared, that there is often not a little of selfishness in the "secret love" which is here condemned. We shrink from rebuke, more on account of the unpleasantness and trouble of it to ourselves, than on account only of the pain to which it may put our neighbours. Two things are pre-supposed, however, in the verse; that the rebuke is really deserved; and that it be invariably administered in the right spirit-the spirit of love. The rebuke required must not only be open and faithful, but affectionate and humble, in order to its being effectual, and thus proving itself "better than secret love:"-for it is better not to rebuke at all, than to rebuke in a bad spirit.

Verse Proverbs 27:6. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend: but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." The sentiment in this verse, though analogous to that in the fifth, is not the same.-By the process of probing and searching a wound or a sore, and by the subsequent process of cutting, a surgeon may subject a patient to great pain. But it is not because he has pleasure in putting to pain that he inflicts it; but because the health and strength of his patient, his qualifications both for action and enjoyment, perhaps his very life, depends upon his proceeding as he does. Thus his wounds are "faithful"-professionally faithful. Their design is not to inflict suffering, but to prevent and remove it. In the same way, friendly fidelity and reproof may give mental pain,-acute, severe pain. But the wounds, like those of the surgeon, are necessary, for spiritual health and strength and life,-or, it may be, according to the nature of the case, for temporal comfort and benefit. We have already remarked, that such is the design of our heavenly Father’s corrections. His wounds are faithful. They are all in perfect harmony with the promises of His covenant, which are assurances of love. Faithfulness is an attribute of love, and love is an attribute of faithfulness. We can neither be faithful without loving; nor can we love without being faithful. And if we would be affectionately and truly faithful, we must at times wound;-always when there is sin to be reproved. The antithesis to the faithful wounds of a friend is-"But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." These are the kisses of one who feigns friendship. We had the character drawn at length in the preceding chapter:-verses Proverbs 26:23-26.

Seek you an evidence of the wounds of a friend? You have it in Nathan’s faithful execution of his commission to David, when, after his sin in the matter of Uriah, he delivered to him the parable of the ewe-lamb, and then came home upon his slumbering conscience with the emphatic and pointed charge, "Thou art the man!" Would you know how deep and painful the wound which was thus inflicted? Read the fifty-first Psalm. See him there offering to the God whom he had offended the sacrifice of a broken spirit;-and hear him pleading for mercy, and deprecating divine rejection. Ah! the wound went deep. It inflamed and rankled. But how salutary! It was the faithful wounds of the Lord and his prophet that restored his soul, and brought him back to God and to the "joy of his salvation." And for the kisses of an enemy, look at the conduct of Joab and of Judas-of Joab, when, taking Amasa by the beard to kiss him, he said, "Art thou in health, my brother?"-and "smote him under the fifth rib:"-of Judas, when he said to Jesus, "Hail, Master! and kissed him;" and with the same breath of faithless treachery, turning to the ruffian band-"Take him, and lead him away safely!"

Verse Proverbs 27:7. "The full soul loatheth an honey-comb: but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." Who has not experienced the truth of these words? When the appetite is fully satisfied, that which otherwise would be most relished, becomes nauseous, and is ordered away. An appetite too that has been pampered,-vitiated and cloyed by luxury and delicacy,-is seldom a good one. It has no taste for plain, wholesome, nourishing food; and even the dainties and

factitious stimulants to which it has been accustomed lose their effect and leave it craving for something new.-Hunger, on the contrary, gives relish to every thing,-to the plainest, the most homely, and even the most unpleasant fare. What the nice and dainty epicure,-or the man of self-indulgence, would turn away from with disgust, is to the poor toil-worn labourer a meal of high enjoyment. The manna in the wilderness was sweet; "like wafers mixed with honey:"-but the Israelites had plenty of it, and they got dissatisfied with it, and longed for variety,-"Our soul," said they, "loatheth this light bread-who will give us flesh to eat?" How different the feelings of the poor, starving prodigal, when "no man gave unto him," and "he was fain to fill his belly with the husks which the swine did eat!"

There is a general principle evidently involved in the proverb. It is this:-that value will be set upon any object, in proportion as the want of it is felt. And this principle applies, with full force, to spiritual as well as to temporal concerns. The proud and self-sufficient, who are full of themselves, and who feed on their self-flatteries, and feel no want, loathe even the rich provision of the gospel feast,-"the feast of fat things and wines on the lees, of wines on the lees well refined." They turn away from this heaven furnished table. There is no spiritual appetite. But when a poor sinner comes to be sensible of his own emptiness-his utter destitution of all that is good, of all that can satisfy his conscience and recommend him to God,-and begins to "hunger and thirst after righteousness," a righteousness which he has not in himself,-then nothing but the provision made by the gospel can satisfy his longing soul. And when he has accepted the free invitation to that feast,-to that open table,-he finds there the fulfilment of the assurance-"he shall be filled." And yet he comes to the experience that the viands there provided are such as never cloy the appetite; but only, the more abundantly they are taken, whet it the more. The fuller, the hungrier. At the same time, in another sense, abundance is apt to engender nicety. We are in danger of thinking lightly of our spiritual enjoyments, and spiritual privileges, because we have them in so great plenty and variety,-and of becoming very particular and very nice as to the manner of their being prepared and served up to us. O the difference between this state of things and the eagerness with which little portions of the word of God are received, and occasional passing opportunities of hearing it valued, by those whose means are more stinted than ours! The man who has long fasted, and is starving of hunger, will not think much about the cooking, the seasoning, the dish, or the garnish. Let us "take heed to ourselves," that we do not cherish any such squeamish nicety,-any such spiritual epicurism,-as would blunt our relish for the plain and wholesome truths of the simple gospel. It is on this, after all, that the soul, in its spiritual powers and affections, must become strong; and by these must its vigour be maintained, and its growth in the divine life advanced.

83-Pro_27:8-10

Proverbs 27:8-10 LECTURE LXXXIII.

Proverbs 27:8-10.

"As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel. Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off." On the first reading of the eighth verse it appears a mere truism. Here are two wanderers. The bird is a wanderer; the man is a wanderer. But surely this cannot be all that is meant. Whatever be understood as meant by a man’s "place"-the comparison cannot, most assuredly, consist in the mere fact of wandering. There is a manifestly intended reference to the pernicious results in the two cases respectively;-of the straying of the bird "from its nest," and the absence of the man "from his place." And again:-the "nest" might be regarded as, to the bird itself, the place of rest, repose, tranquillity, comfort, safety. But, although, in this view, there might be points of comparison instituted perfectly just and sufficiently appropriate; it is not, I apprehend, to considerations of this description-considerations of personal ease and convenience and security to the man himself, that the comparison is intended to apply. The nest is, no doubt, a place of warmth, and retirement, of comfort, and safety to the bird, yet it should be borne in mind that these are not the ends for which the nest is built. No bird sets about constructing a nest, as a mere dwelling for itself,-to which it may retire, when fatigued by flight, and lie upon down, and enjoy itself in peaceful and luxurious ease. The nest is built, on the impulse of the wonderful instincts of nature,-instincts implanted by Him, of whom the simple bird knows nothing, but whom those instincts should teach us to adore,-for very different purposes. The nest is the place where the eggs are to be laid; where they are to be warmed and quickened into life; and where the young unfledged progeny are to be lodged, and fed, and protected, and trained to their maturity. Now, in such a comparison as this, we cannot but suppose there is a reference to the purposes for which the nest is constructed. The allusion is doubtless to the period of incubation-to the hatching of the eggs, and the rearing of the young. If the bird "wanders from her nest" during that period, what is the consequence? Why, that the process is frustrated:-the eggs lose their vital warmth; they become cold, addled, and unproductive. Absence, even for a very short time, will produce this effect; and produce it to such a degree, that no subsequent sitting, however constant and prolonged, can ever vivify again the extinct principle of vitality. And then, during the period of early training, when the young are dependent on the brooding breast and wing of the parent bird for their warmth, and on the active quickness of the parent bird, as their purveyor, for their sustenance,-desertion is death. If the mother then "wanders from her nest," forsaking for any length of time her callow brood-they perish, the hapless victims of a mother’s neglect. They are starved of cold, or they are starved of hunger; or, it may be, their secret retreat is found out by some devouring foe.

Such appears to be the apt allusion. Let us now consider to what cases it may with truth and profit be applied.

1. In the first place then, I apply it to a man's Home. Home may surely be regarded as most appropriately designated "his place." It is there he ought to be; not merely enjoying comfort, but imparting it;-not the place of selfish ease and indulgence, but of dutiful and useful occupation. He has a charge there,-committed to him, not by the instincts of nature merely, but by the law of God. His family demand his first interest and his first attention. His fond caresses and endearing smiles are to teach them the reciprocations of love; his counsels, instructions, admonitions, and encouragements, are to form their minds for the usefulness of future life; his example is to confirm what his precepts inculcate; and Ids active industry is to provide for their wants and their comfort. The man who is never easy at home; never settled in the very place of which settlement is the characteristic distinction; who is ever restless, and eager to roam; who is abroad only at home, and at home only abroad, and fancying he will be better elsewhere;-that man is a poor miserable creature himself; it is not in the nature of things that he can carry happiness with him anywhere. And alas! for the rising family of such a wanderer,-so unnatural an absentee from the place which of all others has a title to his presence. Nothing can go well at home, when the heads of the family do not find it the place of mutual rest and comfort, of social delight and useful occupation, and fond attachment, and common cares and common joys. Their rising offspring are neglected-neglected not only in what regards their external provision and comfort, but especially in the most important of all points-the early culture of their minds and hearts. If others than their restless, home-sick, wandering parents care not for them, it is a poor time they have of it, and a poor prospect in looking forward. I have said the heads of the family:-for although the text speaks of "the man that wandereth from his place," the spirit of the proverb applies, alike truly and alike forcibly, to both. An idle, roaming, gadding, gossipping mother, is indeed, in respect of the mischief produced by such a course to her family, fitly compared to the hen bird that leaves its nest,-its eggs to addle, its offspring to starve! The mother who is a stranger at home was never meant by nature to be a mother. She is an anomaly in the animal creation. And they who give her any encouragement and countenance in her restless rovings, give her encouragement and countenance in what the word of God, in the very severest terms, censures and reprobates. Do not push my similitude too far, and suppose that I am condemning under it all going from home. It would be foolish to say that a man must never choose a calling that requires his occasional absence from the domestic circle. But such absence on business may be aptly likened to the short but necessary absences of the parent-bird from its nest, when her object is the provision of food for her young. Her leaving the nest becomes, after a certain period, as indispensable as her keeping it. Were she to remain always in it her brood would starve, as effectually as if she remained always out of it. But in such absences, her flight is rapid, and her return quick;-the absence no longer than is absolutely necessary for effecting her purpose, providing sustenance for the nurslings of her instinctive care. The nest is still her home. So should it be with every parent; and so will it be with every dutiful parent, to the utmost extent attainable.

2. I apply the proverb to the SITUATION IN LIFE which has been assigned to a man by Providence. A change may, in some cases, be not only warrantable but imperative. It may be so constrained by circumstances as to be itself as really an act of obedience to providential intimation, as it had been to enter on the situation relinquished. The words of our text are intended

to repress a fickle, mutable, roving tendency of mind in regard to a man's employment. The disposition to such change should not be indulged. There are men who are ever after something new. They enter on a situation with all the eagerness of sanguine anticipation, and with the full assurance and purpose of its being permanent. But they quickly tire of it. They find it does not suit them. There is that about it they don't quite like. They get dull and disheartened, and wish a change. They make the change; and O how pleased they are! But it is still only for a time. The same weariness, and itching for change recurs. Now the man who is thus fitful and unsettled, ever dissatisfied, and ever "wandering from his place," is not very likely to prosper. How can he? No business gets a fair trial. He quits it before there bas been time for it to assume a matured form, or to work itself into a course of steady prosperity. He is like the bird that gets impatient of her incubation, and gives not the time required by nature for the eggs to quicken and mature,-or for her brood, when hatched, to arrive at the time when they may shift for themselves: or like a bird (could we fancy such a thing) that should spend her spring and summer, in going about from place to place, building nests, and leaving them as soon as built!-We may, with equal propriety and force, apply the proverb to fits and starts of labour in the situation a man continues to fill. He ought to keep steadily to his occupation while he is in it. No man's business can prosper otherwise. It will be as unproductive as the incubation of the wandering bird. And allow me especially to observe, that this steadfast application is indispensable in the case of the man whose occupation is in the service of another. In such a case, it is required by faithfulness and integrity. He who is thus engaged is not at liberty to leave his engagements at his own option. It is his incumbent duty to be at his post. His time is not his own. It is a sad thing when any Christian gives his employer occasion to say of him that he "wanders from his place,"-that he does not mind his proper business; that he is never sure of being found where he ought to be. As the brooding bird should be found upon her eggs, or with her young, so should every servant, in every department, be found in his own place, and at his own occupation. It should be the aim of every man to have it said of him with truth-tell me where he ought to be, and I will tell you where he is.

3. I wish to apply the words to the SANCTUARY OF GOD. I think they may be so applied with perfect appropriateness. Every Christian must delight in God's sanctuary. It is to him, as a worshipper of God, "his place;"-the place where, at stated times, he ought to be, and where he chooses, and desires, and loves to be. How frequently, how strongly, how beautifully, does the Psalmist express this feeling!-and on one occasion with an exquisitely touching allusion to those birds of the air, that built their nests in the vicinity of the temple; and which,-when banished from Jerusalem and kept at a distance from the sacred precincts,-he represents himself as envying-coveting their proximity to the altars of Jehovah.* When he thus "wandered from his place," it was not by his own choice. His heart was there. All his desires, all his affections were there. Thither they ever pointed, like the disturbed needle, still, in all its vibrations, settling towards the pole. That is the point of its magnetic attraction; and so is the sanctuary to the soul of the child of God. On the hallowed day of sacred rest, this is "his place." Here will he be found, "beholding the beauty of the Lord and inquiring in his temple." The business of religion,-the concerns of the soul, will not thrive, if a man be ever "wandering from his place," any more than the business of the world and the concerns of this life.

* Psalms 84:1-4.

Now, brethren, to speak plainly, I wish to be understood at present as meaning, not merely that you should, on the Lord’s day, be in the sanctuary-that is, in some place of worship; but that you should, as regularly as possible, be in your own place of worship. Every member of a Christian church has his own place; and there, generally speaking, he ought to be found. This is seemly. The practice of wandering from place to place indicates a want of stayedness of mind,-a kind of spiritual gossipping,-fondness for variety, and novelty, and change-"itching ears." It looks like treating the house of God rather as a place of intellectual or spiritual entertainment, than of serious devotion and divine instruction.

"Were the system of wandering really a profitable one, I should grant that the text did not admit of a just application to it; for the wandering of which the text speaks is one that is prejudicial and destructive. But in this respect the application is strong. A desultory and ever-changing system of hearing,-one sermon here and another there,-one minister this Sabbath and another the next,-will never be at all so profitable as a regular continuous course of sabbatical instruction. Besides, those who have chosen their own "pastors and teachers," should feel it their duty to encourage them. Few things, you must be well aware, can be more discouraging to a pastor than when hearers, and more especially any of his own flock, are thus unsteady. It unavoidably gives him the impression of dissatisfaction on the part of these absentees-these wandering spirits. He sighs over the apprehension,-not that he fails to please merely-that were little-but that he fails to interest and to edify. And it may not seldom happen, that, when he has been at special pains with a particular subject, which he has conceived to be needful for a particular class of his hearers,-he sees, to his mortification and regret, that the very individuals perhaps to whose character, or case, or circumstances, the discourse was peculiarly adapted, are not present! They have "wandered from their place:"-and thus the double evil is produced, of their losing the benefit, and his losing the satisfaction of imparting it, and one of the objects that stimulated his mind in study, and animated him in the prospect of the Lord’s day service. His affectionate faithfulness misses its principal aim.

Some of you may probably have been thinking with yourselves, that while I have been speaking of the duty of the Christian people, there is no individual to whom, in the churches of Christ, the words of the text are more directly and strongly applicable, than the pastor himself. I grant it. It is unquestionably the duty of those who have the stated instruction of the brethren intrusted to them, not to be wanderers from their respective places. Their own charges ought to be their constant care. Yet the people should beware of unreasonable extremes. "While it cannot but be a gratification and an encouragement to a pastor to know that his people do not wish him away,-still they should remember that, while their own churches are their primary charges, pastors still may have duties beyond them,-duties connected with. the general interests and prosperity of the denomination of Christians to which they belong, and, what is still more important, of the cause of Christ in general. On this account, he should not be regarded as "wandering from his place," when ends of this description are connected in any way with his absence. He is in his place; just where he ought to be:-and his brethren, instead of murmuring, should approve and encourage. There is another consideration which may be pleaded; that an occasional absence may prove conducive to that health and vigour that are necessary to the efficient fulfilment of their home labours,-and that the sight and intercourse of other pastors, and other churches, tends to impart not only a pleasing and profitable spiritual excitement, but also information, and experience, and enlargement of mind and heart, that are eminently conducive to the same end; and thus good for their people as well as

for themselves. They should not, therefore, on every occasion of absence, be compared to the "bird that wanders from her nest" in brooding time; but rather to the same bird, when it wings its way, fleetly and briefly, to cater for its own. If the pastor is, in body and mind, the better for his absence, so are his people proportionally benefited. In serving others, he serves them.

Allow me here to put in a word in behalf of young preachers of the gospel. Nothing ought to be a source of greater pleasure to the hearts of the people of God, than to see youthful piety consecrating itself to the service of the sanctuary, and of the truth and kingdom of the Redeemer;-the Timothys,-the rising hopes of the church and cause of God. Under this impression, it should be their anxiety to hail their appearance, to encourage them, to cheer them on in their course, making every allowance for early imperfections, receiving their instructions with affectionate candour, and showing them all the countenance in their power. I cannot but look upon it as unkind, selfish, and sinful, to discourage the hearts and weaken the hands of youthful ministers and preachers, by "wandering from your place" when they are expected to officiate. Tell me not of the duty of attending to your own edification. I grant the duty. But if there is an humble frame, and a real, spiritual, lowly desire to be edified, you will rarely miss it, in some degree or other. And should the degree at times be small, forget nut that the wrong you do to others by your absence may be much greater than the negative wrong you do to yourselves by your presence:-and, having myself, in my day, known by experience the feelings of a young beginner in the service, I cherish for them a kindly sympathy, and plead for them with a corresponding earnestness.

Besides, brethren, you must not forget, that it is not merely to hear sermon that you come to God’s house,-your place on His holy day. You come to hold fellowship with His people in all the social exercises of devotion. You come to remember and celebrate along with them the dying love and the triumphant resurrection of the "Lord of glory." It is becoming and desirable, that you should be found, as regularly as possible, doing this in company with those in whose communion you have, from principle, felt it your duty to unite.

I may be permitted to make a special reference to the ordinance of the Lord’s supper. O why should any, on that interesting occasion, be found "wandering from their place." That it is where they ought to be the authority of the New Testament determines, and their own professions admit. Truly, when they thus absent themselves, may they be likened to the "bird that wandereth from her nest." They lose benefit to themselves, and they inflict injury upon others. They deprive their fellow-believers of a part of the benefit as well as delight of the social commemoration of their common Lord, and the united and cheering anticipation of his second coming; and they thus so far contribute to dishearten and weaken them by depressing in their bosoms that "joy of the Lord which is their strength;" as well as distract their minds by painful misgivings and fears. Like the swallows or the ring-doves, then, that found their nest at the altars of God, be you there from Sabbath to Sabbath, duly as the day returns, unless when necessarily prevented. Eat and drink there of the provision made for you; and assure your own and each other’s hearts before your Lord, in the joint remembrance and celebration of His love. "Wander not from your place."

Brethren, there is one place to which you have come for safety and for happiness. That place is Calvary. It is your place, as believing sinners. O wander not thence. You will then indeed be "as a bird wandering from its nest." Beyond the sacred precincts of that holy mount,-the mount on which

"the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world,"-all is danger, all is ruin.

Verse Proverbs 27:9. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel."-This verse does not seem to be very happily rendered, although the sense may be considered as substantially given. The Vulgate Latin has it-" The heart is refreshed by ointments and perfumes; and the soul is soothed by the good counsels of a friend." Another version has-"Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the counsel of a man's friend sweeten the soul." The comparison is, plainly, that of the influence of good counsel, kindly administered, upon the mind, to the refreshing and cheering effect of the fragrance of rich perfumes upon the sense and upon the spirit. This is especially felt in times of trouble and in seasons of difficulty and perplexity. When the heart is heavy and depressed, and the mind troubled with conflicting and distracting thoughts,-how soothing is the salutary counsel of a judicious and affectionate friend!-how does it sweeten the embittered, and settle the agitated spirit! Such was the effect of the sound and divinely approved counsel of Jethro upon the spirit of Moses, when overburdened and oppressed with the multitudinous cares of his office as judge of Israel:-and such the effect of the counsel of Jonathan to David,-the counsel of a friend that "loved him as his own soul,"-when he was harassed and kept in dread of his life by the persecuting malice and envy of the frantic Saul:-he "strengthened his hands in God," and set his heart at rest, O! that friendship and its hearty counsel were sweet indeed, amid the bitterness of David's outcast condition!

Surely, we may apply the comparison, in all its emphasis, to the counsel that directs the awakened and alarmed sinner,-whose spirit is pricked and embittered by a sense of sin, and whose heart sinks within him under the apprehension of impending wrath,-to the grace of the gospel-to the cross,-to the way of salvation,-to the rich and free mercy of a covenant God in Christ! What ointment and perfume can diffuse so sweet and soothing a fragrance, as that counsel diffuses, through the believing soul! O my friends, this is truly of all counsel the best. The counsel that brings the troubled sinner to Christ and to God,-that introduces into his heart a sense of pardoning mercy and paternal love, is indeed "as ointment poured forth!" It imparts to the soul an unceasing source of comfort and joy.-And such too is the counsel that sends the desponding believer back to the same simple and blessed truth that gave him peace and joy at first. Not, indeed, if his despondency is the effect of indulged sin, and that sin unrepented of and unforsaken. To speak of grace to such a man would only be to add to his delusion, and ultimately to augment the bitterness and oppression of his spirit. It is false friendship indeed; as false as the pretended friendship of the father of lies, when, under promise of an increase of blessing, he tempted to the deed which brought the curse.

We take the two parts of the following verse distinctly-"Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not." Forsake not, that is, a friend that has "shown himself friendly" both to thy father and to thyself for his sake:-a steadfast, unswerving friend; one who maintains his affection to the living, as he did to the dead. This is parallel to the "friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Such a friend, principled, steady, and self-denying, is indeed a treasure,-not to be parted with on trifling grounds, but to be kept with care as we would guard a precious jewel. In the designation there is a double bond of attachment:-"Thy own-and thy father's friend." There is the twofold appeal to gratitude and to filial affection. And when that affection has been enshrined and hallowed by the death of the parent, all the sacredness that attaches to a parent's dust and a parent's memory

comes to be associated with the friendship of which he was the object when living. To forsake such a friend becomes thus a kind of sacrilegious violation of the claims of filial devotedness and duty.

"Forsake him not." Forsake him not in his time of need. To forsake him then would justly stamp your character with an indelible stigma of ungrateful baseness. Forsake him not, by neglecting and undervaluing his counsel; and forsake him not by declining his kind offices. To a truly generous spirit, there are not many things more hurting-more deeply and tenderly wounding, than this. Even if we should see good cause for declining to accept what we are not satisfied would be really beneficial-even then, the intended kindness should be declined with grateful acknowledgments, and gentle unwillingness to offend. And to refuse the proffered services of such a friend, when he is desirous to serve us as he did our fathers,-to tell him in effect that we can do without him and will dispense with his interference,-is to inflict a wound that may go deep and rankle long,-not, it may be, resentfully, but in the spirit of mortified kindness, that has intended and attempted good, but has been slighted. And forsake him not, on your rising yourselves in life;-on your mounting, it may be, to a higher level in society, than that which he and your father before you occupied. It may not be in your power to raise him with you. But it were sadly wrong, and unworthy of correct principle and right feeling, so to leave him beneath you, as to forget him and let him feel that he is forgotten,-to allow his kindnesses to slip from memory, and to decline recognizing him, as now below your status in life.

"Neither go into thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity." This has certainly the appearance of a very strange advice. "Whither, in the day of our calamity, should we go, if not to the house of a brother? Where are we to expect a kind reception, and the comfort we require, if not there? But the proverb, like all others, must be understood generally, and applied in the circumstances and the sense obviously and mainly designed. The meaning seems to be-either:-1. Do not choose "the day of thy calamity" for making thy visit, if thou hast not shown the same inclination to court and cultivate intimacy before, in the day of thy success and prosperity. This unavoidably looks not like the impulse of affection, but of felt necessity, or convenience and self-interest:-"Ay, ay," your brother will be naturally apt to say, "I saw little of you before: you are fain to come to me now, when you feel your need of me, and fancy I may be of some service to you." Or-2. Let not sympathy be forced and extorted. "In the day of thy calamity," if thy brother has the heart of a brother, and really feels for thee, he will come to thee; he will seek and find thee. If he does not,-then do not press yourself upon his notice, as if you would constrain and oblige him to be kind. This may, and probably will, have the effect of disgusting and alienating him, rather than gaining his love. Love and sympathy must be unconstrained as well as unbought. When they are either got by a bribe, or got by dint of urgent solicitation, they are alike heartless, and alike worthless. The reason is-

"For better is a. neighbour that is near, than a brother far off." The antithetical phrases "at hand" and "far off"-have evident reference here, not to locality, but to disposition. A friendly and kindly disposed neighbour, who bears no relation to us save that of neighbourhood, is greatly preferable to a brother,-to any near relation whatever that is cold, distant, and alienated.

Even natural affection requires to be exercised with discretion. When appealed to injudiciously-at improper times-in improper circumstances, and with improper frequency-it may be cooled-it may

be lost-it may be turned to dislike. On the other hand, however, there is a danger of a selfish exclusion of a brother "in the day of his calamity," as well as of a selfish solicitation on such a brother’s part;-and against that tendency we have reason to be guarded, as well its against thp other.

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LECTURE LXXXIV.

Proverbs 27:11-20.

"My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished. Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him. A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself. Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof; so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured. As in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man. Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied." The oft-repeated admonition in the first of these verses, "My son, be wise, and make my heart glad,"* is here enforced by a new consideration:-"That I may answer him that reproacheth me." O how happy a thing it is to a Christian parent, when, with delighted though humble confidence, he can point to his children, as a silent but convincing testimony to his faithfulness in the fulfilment of his trust, and a refutation of every malicious insinuation and charge to the contrary! True, indeed, every parent will be disposed, in lowliness of spirit, to acknowledge that in this, as in all other things, he has "failed and come short of the glory of God." Yet no satisfaction can be more exquisite to a parent’s heart than that which arises from the practical proof, of diligence, fidelity, affection, and prayer, in a family growing up "in the fear of God;" and proving a credit to him in the eyes of others;-"The father honoured in the honoured son."

* See Proverbs 10:1; Proverbs 15:20; Proverbs 23:15-16; Proverbs 24:25. The principle of the verse may be applied to spiritual fathers and spiritual children; and to the relation of a pastor and his people. It cannot fail, on the one hand, to he a source of delight to him, when he can point to his spiritual children and to the people of his charge, maintaining full consistency of Christian deportment,-"abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good,"-as the most convincing evidence of the purity of his doctrine and the faithfulness of his ministrations;-and a sad unhappiness to him, on the other, when the enemy finds occasion for "reproach" in their many inconsistencies, and deflections from the way of God’s commandments.-It may even be applied to the case of Heavenly Wisdom herself, teaching by the word. She is "justified of her children;"-and the most satisfactory reply to all insinuations against the doctrines there taught, as leading to licentiousness, should ever be, a simple appeal to the lives of those who believe them. The two following verses are an exact repetition of the third verse of chap. 22d (Proverbs 22:3), and the sixteenth verse of chap. 20th (Proverbs 20:16); to which the reader is referred. In verse fourteenth (Proverbs 27:14), the words, "it shall be counted a curse unto him," do not mean that his "friend" will be apt to curse him for it; but rather, he shall be reckoned as if he cursed his friend. The

character intended is evidently that of the man given to flattering and laudatory adulation. The reference is to public, extravagant, unceasing, unseasonable, commendation. The man is supposed to make it his business to praise another,-day after day, and all the day long-proclaiming his excellences to all, and taking precious care, at the same time, that he himself shall hear! To a man of any real modesty this will be painfully irksome,-insufferably offensive. It is putting him on the rack,-torturing his spirit. And further, such conduct is sure to produce either ridicule and laughter at the expense of the object of such overdone commendation; or envy and jealousy, with the inevitable results;-a system of detraction to counteract the praise; or a leering insinuation that the parasite is secretly encouraged and in pay for his flattery; or too high expectations from him who is thus lauded to the skies, and consequent disappointment;-it being, on this account, a serious disadvantage to any one, to be held up as a public prodigy by the extreme of eulogy. A wise man will prefer reviling and reproach to the disgrace of being thus befooled with flattery. And the flatterer, instead of being liked and encouraged, will be disliked, and held at a due distance, as one who is to be suspected of unworthy motives,-one who in bepraising others is only looking after his own interests. The subject of next verse has also come repeatedly before us; and it certainly has no such attractions as to tempt one to repetition: "A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike:" but the sixteenth verse presents a new view of the same topic;-"Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself." A prudent man, who has regard to his own and his family’s respectability, as well as his wife’s reputation, will be anxious to cover, as far as possible, her temper and behaviour, and the unpleasant differences and outbreakings thence arising. But alas! the attempt is vain. The utmost meekness, discretion, and caution, will not do. Her own unruly and wayward temper will, in spite of all, bewray itself. The attempts will be like endeavours to hold the wind, or to retain in the hand the smell of a fragrant and volatile ointment. The more closely the hand is pressed, the more will its warmth disengage the odour. So, the efforts of gentleness and calmness to mollify and to conceal may have the very opposite effect,-provoking all the more to openness, from resentful disdain, and the very love of contradiction-exposing herself, for the express purpose of disappointing and fretting, and mortifying him!

O far be all such scenes as these from the firesides of professedly Christian families! Heaven is the home of love and peace. And there must be love and peace here among those who are looking forward to that home;-where the blessed inhabitants "neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

Verse Proverbs 27:17. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."-It would be wrong to say that this verse, as it stands in our translation, conveys no distinct idea. "Sharpening the countenance" does convey an idea. We immediately think of a man’s face being enlivened and emboldened; and we infer that the enlivening and emboldening of the countenance arises from the enlivening and emboldening of the spirit,-and that this has been the effect of the man’s standing by his friend-supporting and encouraging him. Still, the words appear much more natural and emphatic, when rendered-"So doth a man’s countenance sharpen his friend." By a very common figure, we use the word countenance for encouraging approbation, support, incitement. When a man is left to think and determine and work alone,-especially when it so happens that he has no firm confidence in the scheme itself about which he is engaged, or in the method by which he is prosecuting it, or in his ability and resources for carrying it through,-he

gets flat and spiritless. His wits are blunted. They lose their keen edge and efficient energy; so that they do not serve him with their wonted acuteness and promptitude. In these circumstances, let a friend step forward, and take him by the hand; let him approve and smile on his undertaking, and offer his co-operation in forwarding it;-what a change! He is like another man. His spirits revive. His wits are sharpened. He proceeds with eager assiduity and cheerfulness, putting forth all his powers, and making corresponding progress toward a successful issue.

There is a general principle here. It is-that all individual and solitary application has a tendency to languish: whereas social exertion keeps up its life and spirit, by the influence of mutual excitement. This appears in childhood and youth-in the effect of a well-directed emulation: and on the same principle are founded all the institutions of social religion, in which the truth of the maxim is signally experienced.

Verse Proverbs 27:18. "Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof; so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured." There is here encouragement to servants,-to all who, in whatever department or way, are in the employ of others. The comparison is a sufficiently obvious one. The sweet and luscious fruit of the fig-tree is the reward of the pains and labour bestowed upon its cultivation. He who plants and waters, who prunes and dresses it, will in due time eat of the fruit:-so honour, confidence, reward, advancement, will be the result of a servant’s diligent and faithful attendance upon his master; while, if he acts otherwise-neglects his master’s business, follows his own inclinations, wastes his time, loiters on his errands, does his work indolently and inefficiently, to the prejudice of his master’s reputation and interest, he must look in vain for such "honour." Then nothing is his due but disgrace and dismissal. See to it then, ye servants, that with the encouragement, you bear in mind the duty. And ye masters, be sure that ye overlook not the lesson to you, (which, if not so directly expressed, is so manifestly implied,) and, while you look for the duty, forget not the encouragement:-by which I mean, not merely the payment of wages punctually and fully when they are due;-but the smile, and look, and expression of approbation, and the occasional bestowment, when work has been done in an exemplary manner, of some little more substantial token of satisfaction,-some little extra reward. And let us not forget the application of the words to ourselves as the servants of Christ. He is, both to servants and masters, a perfect example. In discharging his trust, in the former relation, as the voluntary SERVANT OF HIS FATHER, he was faithful to Him that appointed him. His language was,-language in perfect harmony with truth, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work"-"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." And in his relation to his people as a Master, he "sends no one a warfare on his own charges." He demands no work but what is rightfully due. He is large in his promises. He smiles graciously upon active fidelity; and He will prove himself generous and liberal as well as just, in fulfilling his engagements. "Hath he said, and will he not do? hath he spoken, and will he not make it good?"

Verse Proverbs 27:19. "As in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man."-Calm bright water is here considered as a mirror. The countenance reflected from it is the counterpart,-the exact image of the reality:-"so the heart of man to man." What means this? 1. There are certain principles and feelings in our nature common to all mankind. Not it may be in the same degree; but still so universal as that every man may, to a certain extent, judge of others by himself. If there are exceptions, they are so rare as only to confirm the rule. These principles and

feelings remain the same, amidst all varieties of situation and character. Take for example parental affection. When God says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him," He proceeds on the assumption of fond and strong affection being the generic character of the paternal relation. Hence, one father may know from what his own heart feels what the hearts of other fathers feel. The same holds true, in a special manner, of self-love, in all its various modifications. It has certain universal likings and dislikings, desires and aversions. Every man prefers being loved to being hated,-being well-spoken of to being slandered,-being honourably dealt with to being cheated,-being the object of respect and kindness to being the object of disrespect and unkindness. This may not strike you as of so much importance as it really is. Remember the great "golden rule," or " royal law," is based upon it. Were there no such general correspondence of feeling and desire, how could this rule be possibly applied? This golden rule of equity and love, then, is founded on the fact that "as in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man."

2. In regard to the character of the unrenewed,-it maybe, and it is, greatly modified by constitutional temperament, by peculiarities of education, and by the diversity of circumstances in which they are placed;-yet, in the great staminal principles and essential features, their characters are very much alike. The substantial sameness, or identity, is discernible amidst all the diversity. Their likings and dislikings, their desires and aversions, their passions and propensities, are all closely akin to each other. So that, by observing in what manner corruption, in certain circumstances, operates in one, you may shrewdly and pretty surely estimate its operation in all. While the ambitious man loves power, the avaricious man wealth, the licentious man pleasure, and the one may not enter into the estimates and desires of the other in the precise particular on which the heart of each is set,-still, there is in them all one element of character, in which "there is no difference." They are all "of the earth, earthy." They are all "after the flesh;" and "minding the things of the flesh." "They are all going astray," under the influence of a common principle of rebellion and ungodliness, although each goes astray "in his own way." They all understand one another, and sympathise with one another, in the general feelings which they cherish. All cast in the same common mould, their features have undergone different descriptions of modification and distortion. There is the family sameness, and the individual varieties.

3. In like manner with regard to the new nature-the spiritual nature of the regenerate,-the children of God. It too is the same; so that "as in water face answereth to face," so doth the heart of one child of God to another. There is much variety, no doubt; yet there is a great deal of general, and even of minute and exact correspondence, in their views and their feelings. Their experience may be diversified in its details; but it is the same in its general principles. The spiritual conflict, though subject to many varieties, is, in its essential nature, alike in them all. It is the "flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh;"-"the law in the members warring against the law of the mind." They all know this; they all feel this. Bring them to their knees together; and let any one of them be the mouth of the company in prayer to their common God and Father,-what a sympathy is immediately felt! In the confessions, the deprecations, the intercessions, the petitions, the thanksgivings, they are "of one heart and of one soul." They adore a common God; they love a common Saviour; they live by a common Spirit; they own a common unworthiness and guilt; they trust in a common atonement and a common mercy; they draw their supplies from a common fountain; and on a common ground anticipate a common heaven.

"Their fears, their hopes, their aims are one, Their comforts and their cares.'' In the sentiments of humble self-renunciation, and "glorying in the cross,"-in gratitude for the Lamb's redeeming love,-in love to all that are His,-in zeal for God's glory,-in joy in the conversion of sinners to Him,-in delight in His word, His day, His ordinances, His worship,-in the feeling and acknowledgment of their constant proneness to "depart from the fountain of living water," and in their entire and incessant dependence on grace and obligations to it,-where is the individual dissentient? "When one believer breaks out into the song, "O to grace how great a debtor!" where is the other believer, whose emotions do not correspond,-whose pulses do not beat in unison? The Christian, then, who watches his own heart, and attends closely to its secret movements, will, generally speaking, be no great stranger to the hearts of his fellow-christians. From this cause it arises, that men, in hearing particular sermons, take fancies, as they many a time do, that the preacher has been hearing something about them; that some one has been giving him information. He has only been sketching from nature; and the sketch has met their consciousness. He has been describing a genus; and the description has been found to suit the individual. This has especially been the case, when the workings and tendencies,-the inward thoughts and desires of our common corruption have been faithfully and vividly delineated. It has then not seldom been very difficult to convince particular hearers, that a sermon has not specially been aimed at them.

There is one point in which the verse cannot hold true. There is a wide and essential difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate. The latter are altogether incapable of entering into the views and feelings of the former. Hence the unrenewed man is startled and astonished at the terms of self-annihilation and self-loathing in which the renewed man bemoans himself before God. He can neither understand it nor sympathise with it. He thinks if all that his godly neighbour says of himself be true, he must be bad enough with a vengeance. The reason is, that he is an entire stranger to the standard by which the renewed man estimates his character. He has never brought himself to the test of the holy heart-trying law of a holy heart-trying God; and has never seen himself in the light of the cross. Let him only be convinced of sin, and renewed in the spirit of his mind-and all will be plain. Then he will see clearly what puzzled and perplexed him before. Then he will enter into feelings which before he could not even imagine. Having received the vital principle of the new nature,-all its peculiar sentiments and emotions, its regrets and its sorrows, its estimates of self and its estimates of God, of sin and holiness, of this world and the next, its love and its hatred, its fear and its hope, its aversions, its aspirations, its longings,-all will immediately become his own:-and his only wonder now will be, that he should ever have thought and felt otherwise than he does,-otherwise than they did whom before he could not comprehend. Now, "as in water face answereth to face," so does his heart to theirs!

Verse Proverbs 27:20. "Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied." "Hell" or Sheol, means the place of the dead: and having this general meaning, it has come to be used with different particular meanings according to the connexion in which it occurs:-sometimes for the separate state-the invisible world; sometimes for the grave; sometimes for the place of torment.-"Destruction" may here be considered as signifying-by a species of personification-all the variety of ways taken together by which men are removed out of the world,-or as meaning "the second death"-the pit of woe. It is sadly true of both the grave and hell, that they are never "full;"-the word is the same as that translated, in the other clause of the verse, "satisfied," and might, in both occurrences, be well rendered sated. Generation after generation are swept into the

grave; and of each successive generation the vast majority, alas! goes down to hell,-the vast majority living and dying without God. Thus the tomb and the pit are never sated. And "so the eyes of man are never sated." The eyes, by a very natural figure, are put for the desires. Upon that which is the object of our desire, we fix our eyes; and that with an intensity of settled eagerness proportioned to the degree of the desire.*1 The meaning, then, is not merely that the sense of sight never has enough of its own peculiar enjoyments, but that the desire that is by the eye expressed is never satisfied by any amount of present gratification.*2 The desires of men are insatiable. They set their hearts on some particular object, and long for its attainment. They fix in their mind some point of advancement in the acquisition of the world,-some measure of wealth, or of power which they think, if once realized, would satisfy them to the full. They get what they want; but they still long as before. There is ever something unattained. Having gained the summit of one eminence, they see another above it; and as they mount, their views widen and their conceptions and wishes amplify, and still more is required to fill them.

*1 See for example-Proverbs 23:5. rr *2 Compare, for a similar sentiment-Ecclesiastes 1:8; Ecclesiastes 2:10-11.

There is one thing and one only that can fill and satisfy-really and permanently satisfy-the amplest desires of an immortal mind. They possess it who can say, "the Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup;" and who can continue to sing, even amid the desolation of all that is earthly in their lot- "Should I this spacious earth possess, And all the spreading skies, They never could my thirst appease, Or yield me full supplies.

Without my God, with all this store, I should be wretched still; With thirst insatiate, crave for more, My empty mind to fill! But when my soul’s of God possessed, What can I wish for more?

Here let me ever fix my rest, And give all wandering o’er! When the affections are "set on the things that are above;" when the chosen treasure is in heaven, and the heart is there also; when the eye of delighted contemplation is fixed on the glories and beauties of the "better country, even the heavenly"-the "inheritance that is incorruptible and that fadeth not away,"-this moderates the desire of earthly things. The eye ceases to fasten on them with its former avidity, having found a more powerful attraction-being drawn and fixed by something better. And then, when riches "make to themselves wings and fly away," instead of the sight being strained in gazing wistfully and painfully after them in their flight, it is directed to the "better and more enduring substance:" it "enters through the gates into the heavenly city," and settles on the fulness of its glory and joy.

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Proverbs 27:21-27

LECTURE LXXXV.

Proverbs 27:21-27.

"As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise. Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him. Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds: for riches are not for ever; and doth the crown endure to every generation? The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered; the lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field. And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens." The ordinary interpretation of the words in the first of these verses makes the praise try the man. But the words in our translation, and in the original. make the man try the praise:-and this appears to be the correct interpretation. Of the comparison two views may be taken:-

1. It may express what every man, with reference to the praise bestowed upon him, ought to do:-that is, he ought to do with it what the "fining pot" does to the "silver," and the "furnace to the gold." He should try it well. There is a deal of dross frequently in it; and men are apt to be fonder of the dross, in some of its appearances, than of the sterling metal. Let the following rules, then, be attended to:-First, reject as dross all flattery: it is worthless: it springs from false and selfish motives.-Further, use the "fining-pot" for all praise that is bestowed by persons who are in the habit of talking extravagantly, of using complimentary words without being very nice or considerate in weighing their amount of meaning. If you don't, you are sure to take them at a great deal more than they are worth.-Again, be very cautious in receiving without abatement all that is dictated by the known partiality of friendship. It may all be sincere, and all well meant, but it requires refining. It will not all pass with others, though the partial friend thinks it genuine.-Reject, too, entirely and at once, all commendation that is bestowed for qualities or for actions that conscience tells you have not the clear sanction of the word of God, how much soever they may be admired in the world. When this is tried in the crucible of truth and rectitude, it turns out all dross. None of it-no, not an atom, should be received and kept; all should be thrown away.-Finally, be jealous of those particular descriptions of commendation for which you are conscious of a special liking, and which are most apt to puff you up with undue self-elation, and to make you "think of yourself more highly than you ought to think." There ought to be the most careful scrutiny here-a sensitive apprehension of receiving more than enough,-of allowing that to pass for gold which has the glitter and the colour of it merely, without the solid value. The process of refining should in this case be very cautiously pursued: just as a chemist, if anxious for the correct result of an experiment with the crucible, will be the more careful in making it, in proportion as he is conscious of any leaning towards a particular theory,-lest this should bias his mind and put him off his guard.

2. "A man is to his praise what the fining-pot is to silver, and the furnace is to gold," because a man's conduct actually does put to the test the commendation bestowed upon him. That conduct is like "the fining-pot" and "the furnace" to it, in regard to the estimate formed of it by others. His behaviour detects whether it be or be not just and merited. Commendation naturally excites notice. All eyes are on the man who elicits applause, to ascertain if the applause be well founded. In this way the commendation is put to the test; and the man himself is the tester;-proving or disproving the justice of the character given him. The principle here, you will at once perceive, is applicable to the character of societies as well as of individuals,-of families, of communities, of churches. Suppose a family has got high commendation bestowed upon it by one who professes to know it from long-continued intimacy, for mutual domestic affection, concord, sympathy, and practical kindness amongst its members,-anything of an opposite nature discovered among them, tests the praise, brings out the refuse, and operates as a deduction from the character, showing the eulogy not to be all genuine, but to have had in it so much at least of alloy-of baser material. So, when a church has been praised for purity, for love, for liberality, that church becomes its own "fining-pot." It must act up to the character, if it would prove the commendation deserved. And so as to communities, when they have been commended for education, for morality, for religion. Scotland has had a high character for these,-much higher, it is to be feared, than now at least is merited. A stranger comes. He has great expectations. But he begins to find a much larger number than he anticipated uneducated, and without the morality and the religion for which the community had been so eulogized;-much of vice and crime; much of worldliness, and of the form of godliness without the power:-what he actually witnesses will operate upon the praise as "the fining-pot" does upon the silver. The actual character tries the reported character. The twofold lesson, then, is-that we be self-jealous and humble in testing all commendation bestowed upon us to our face: and that we strive to maintain such a character as will prove the truth of what is bestowed upon us to others. They are both important lessons. Yet there is another still with which they ought to be associated. We should ever remember that there is a still higher test of commendation and of character than either our own judgment of ourselves or that of our fellowmen concerning us. Paul felt the necessity of bearing this in mind, when he said respecting the opposite of commendation-the false insinuations and charges of his enemies-"I am conscious to myself of nothing; yet am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord." The same principle applies equally to praise. There is a tribunal even above conscience itself, which is liable, as Paul had before experienced, to various biassing and perverting influences;-so, that while amid the applause of our fellow-men, we may be "conscious to ourselves" of no flattery, of no undue partiality or extravagance in their praise,-and fancy it all no more than really belongs to us,-we do well to remember, that "he that judgeth us is the Lord."-O what is to become of the man, who receives the praise of his fellows, and is encouraged by it to flatter himself that he stands well with God,-when, upon his character being subjected to "the lining pot" of the divine law, and to "the furnace" of the divine omniscience, it all comes out as dross, mere worthless dross-the praise found to be "of men but not of God?"

Verse Proverbs 27:22. "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."-To analyse this figure would be to render ludicrous what is most significant and impressive. It is a strong proverbial expression for what is superlatively difficult or impossible. You may separate the straw and the chaff by thrashing,-you may take off the husk by rubbing and trituration,-you may turn the grain to meal or flour by

grinding,-but to drive folly from the human heart, is more than man can do. By the fool here might with truth be understood the weak and senseless man,-of little mind, and at the same time (as not seldom happens), of no little self-conceit; who is ever obstinate and headstrong,-tenacious of his own opinions and his own ways; ever saying and doing absurd and preposterous things, and still stoutly and with mulish stubbornness maintaining their propriety, to the annoyance and vexation of all about him or connected with him; and whom no instructions, no expostulations, no reproofs, and no fatal consequences of his errors, how much soever experienced by both himself and others, will mend. His folly is engrained; and the very next thing he does will be as absurd and preposterous as before. But here, as in most other places in this book, the "fool" is the unprincipled man. And the sentiment is, that the native corruption of the human heart, especially when it has acquired the additional force of habit, is such that no mere means whatever, applied with even the largest amount of persevering diligence, will effectually overcome and remove it. And though means of all descriptions may be included, those most naturally suggested by the figure are correction and suffering. The meaning will then be,-that no parental admonitions and chastisements,-no pains and penalties of human infliction,-no divine judgments,-will radically and permanently change the heart. Its corruption is not like a husk, which envelopes the grain, and does not enter into its substance, and which an external application of a little skilful force will remove. The corruption is in the heart itself-penetrates and pervades its entire substance, even to the very core, and vitiates all that proceeds from it.

Mistake not. There is no assertion made at variance with the universally admitted tendency of means, and the duty and necessity of using them. But the power of "the old man" is too strong for them, and successfully resists them all. Temporary impressions may be made,-such as appear promising; and external and partial reformations may manifest themselves. Thus it was with Herod under the faithful ministry of the Baptist. He "feared John, because he was a just man and holy; and when he heard him he did many things, and heard him gladly." Yet he set at nought and insulted Him of whom John testified-" He that cometh after me is mightier than I; the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose;" and he lived and died in impenitence and wickedness. Where the impression and the reformation are the effects of the operation of means alone, working on the natural principles of reason and conscience, they will, in like manner, prove superficial and evanescent:- "Can aught beneath a power divine The stubborn will subdue?

'Tis thine, Eternal Spirit, thine To form the heart anew." The sentiment here so strongly expressed, and in such harmony with other statements of Scripture, should he seriously weighed by those who entertain the idea that the punishments of a future world are to operate correctively, and to work an ultimate reformation upon the offenders who, having died impenitent, are their unhappy subjects. Suffering may and must produce regret-bitter, agonizing regret: and this, indeed, is an ingredient in the suffering,-the agony of regret, when known and felt to be too late and to be of no avail. But suffering can never subdue enmity,-can never generate love. Regret is not repentance. It cannot turn the heart to God. It will rather turn it against Him, embittering the virulence of its hatred and its tormenting but impotent vindictiveness. The Spirit of God, it is true, can and does make use of judicial inflictions in this life, amongst the means of awakening, convicting, and converting sinners. But of themselves they will never work the change. It is not till God himself touches the heart that Ephraim is heard thus to bemoan himself-"Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for

thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth," Jeremiah 31:18-19. And beyond the present world, the divine influence by which true penitence is produced, and the heart changed from enmity to love, does not extend. Hell will make no penitents--no converts. "He that is unjust shall be unjust still; and he that is filthy shall be filthy still." The verses which follow to the close of the chapter relate evidently to one subject. There are two different views taken of them.

1. By some the verses have been considered as the wise man’s recommendation of the simplicity, the comforts, the general enjoyment and happiness of a country life,-a life of rural retirement, and labour, and competency; and as designed for the purpose of repressing, in the bosom of the man of privacy and rustic seclusion, the rising envy of the wealth and the honours of a city life,-or a life of greater eclat and publicity:-the natural effect of such envy being indolence and inaction, arising from dissatisfaction with the occupations of his own sphere.

According to this interpretation, the "riches which are not for ever," and "the crown"-or honours of this world-that "endure not to all generations," must be understood of the riches and the honours by which envious desires have been engendered. These riches and honours are proverbially insecure.* Royal dignity itself may soon pass from one to another. Even "the crown" sits not firm upon any brow. Instead, therefore, of repining in envious dissatisfaction-apply thyself, says the wise man, assiduously and cheerfully, to thy rural occupations. "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds."

* Proverbs 23:5. The further motive to this course is-the personal and social comfort which such a life was fitted to yield. Here is a picturesque exhibition, as such commentators understand the passage, of the attractions of a rural life. i. We have, in the first place, the cheerful loveliness of nature, rising before the eye, in all its freshness, luxuriance, and beauty: "The hay appeareth, and the tender grass showeth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered." There is something in the scene itself that is interesting and attractive to a mind of which the natural tastes have not been perverted, independently of all idea of profit and personal advantage. How charming is the green and glittering freshness of a dewy summer morning,-when every blade of grass is decked with diamonds, sparkling in the light of the rising sun,-when the mower plies his task, and the fragrance of the new-mown hay scents the air; and the cornfields wave in promise of the coming autumn, and the hills are clothed with their appropriate trees, and shrubs and herbage! How preferable such a scene to the dingy smoke and manifold pollutions of the crowded city! Custom and habit, it is true, and diverse associations of ideas, both form and change men’s tastes. But surely nature is on the side of the country:- "God made the country, and man made the town." ii. We have here too before us, in association although not in expression, the simplicity and comparative harndess innocence of rural life. I speak only comparatively:-and comparatively, it must, I think, be admitted. Great towns necessarily become scenes of concentrated profligacy, of mental contamination and progress in vice. Many a youth that comes from the country, with all the simplicity and unsuspiciousness of rural habits, is ruined by this fatal contagion, for which his experience has not prepared him, when he enters on a town life. As evil is much more readily and effectually learned than good, wherever there is the crowding and intermixture of a dense population, there will be the rapid spread of its infection,-there will be the accumulation of immorality. We must, however, be on our guard against sentimentalism and romance. Some

appear almost to forget that the corruption of our nature extends to the country at all. But the country alas!-and that even in its most retired seclusiveness, has its irreligion and ungodliness, its vices, its sins and crimes, as well as the city;-the glories and the beauties of nature too frequently presenting a mournful contrast to the moral and spiritual desolation and deformity prevalent among the inhabitants who live in the midst of them. God makes himself known in all around; yet even in the midst of all the manifestations of Him that are fitted to elevate the soul to the adoration of His perfections, He is by multitudes forgotten and disregarded. But we speak now of what the country is in its native tendencies, not of what man is in his compliance with or resistance of those tendencies. iii. We have next the profit and comfort which are the fruit of rural occupations, when attended to with diligent and patient industry: "The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field. And thou shalt have goats milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance of thy maidens." The fleece of the lambs, when they come to maturity, furnishes the means of comfortable clothing and protection from the cold:-the goats assist in producing payment for the rent of the laud,-or in yielding interest and profit upon "the price" of it, and the outlay upon it;-and the family is maintained and served, with decency and comfort, in the homely and simple, but wholesome and happy style of rural economy:-not the less happy for being free of the luxury which advancing prosperity and the emulation of refinement and show arising from it, ever introduce into great towns and cities.-The farmer, then,-even with all his cares and solicitudes, and all his peculiar difficulties and trials, need not envy the city merchant, even in his highest prosperity and honour.-

2. It is quite as likely, if not more so, that Solomon here, under one description of earthly property,-intends to include all,-and while inculcating duty, to recommend mindfulness of the uncertainty of the possessions of this world in general, and the moderation of desire and pursuit of them which that should produce. In this view, we have- i. The duty of industry and diligent application to our temporal affairs: "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds." The duty is very frequently enjoined in this Book, and throughout the Bible. Neither in rural nor in city occupations, are men to expect success without the prudent and active employment of means. And the duty is enjoined on the people of God as well as others. Nowhere does He teach them to beware of having any thing more to do with secular business,-to be entirely absorbed in their spiritual concerns, and leave the world to shift as it may-the men of the world to mind the world’s affairs. No. It is theirs to set an example of industry with moderation, of active application without undue solicitude, and without undue regret in case the industry should fail of success; of the compatibility of "diligence" in worldly matters with true spirituality of mind,-of doing earthly work with having "the heart in heaven,"-of being "not slothful in business," whilst "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Then we have- ii. The precariousness and transitory character of all that pertains to time and the world, is adduced as a motive to the diligence enjoined. "For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?" The riches and honours of this world are not acquired in perpetuity,-no, not even with the security of a day. It is necessary to look well after them, to give diligence to keep as well as to get, inasmuch as, even with all attention and care, "riches make themselves wings and fly away." With it they may; and without it they must. And the time being not only uncertain, but short at the longest, it is the dictate of prudence,-Use them while you can. Take the moderate and the comfortable enjoyment of them, so long as God may be pleased to continue your possession of them. It is a pleasing view of the kindness of Him whose "tender mercies are over all his works," to be assured, that what He bestows it is his design

that we enjoy:-that we "use without abusing,"-that we take the benefit, and apply it for the comfort of ourselves and families, in the first instance, with decency and respectability, but without extravagance and waste. He does not give, and with the gift issue an order not to use it. There is nothing to be found in the Bible of that kind of self-denial which consists in the penance of self inflicted privation,-in the practice of voluntary mortification and abandonment of all the innocent enjoyments of life. If God gives "flocks and herds "-they are for "food and for clothing," and for the comfortable maintenance of the household establishment:-"If any man provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." But then- iii. Whenever we make admissions of this kind, they are in danger of being perverted. When we tell men of God’s kind, indulgences,-they are ever prone to take advantage of them, and to forget the restrictions under which those indulgences are placed. The different parts of the divine word are to be viewed in their connexion. A passage like this must not be taken by itself, and the inference drawn from it that while we are expending what God gives on the food and clothing and comfort and enjoyment of our families, we are doing what God requires and all that God requires. We should then be forgetting other requirements not less obligatory than these, and showing in the latitude with which we interpret what is most to our mind, the amount there is remaining in us of personal and domestic selfishness. On the contrary, we ought to be most on our guard on the side of self-most on our guard where we are most in danger of erring. We should be jealous of ourselves; and, aware of the deceitfulness of our hearts, to keep our ear the more open, and our heart the more open, and our purse the more open, to the claims of the poor, and to the claims of God and of a perishing world, in proportion as self and family put in their plea with earnestness.

Finally, while we are all abundantly sensible of the value, and eager for the acquisition, of the comforts and the wealth of the present world, O let us remember and feel the infinitely superior value of the "treasure in the heaven that faileth not." On this, above all, let our hearts be set,-as the gift of God, "without money and without price,"-which "cannot be gotten for gold, neither can silver be weighed for the price thereof." "Where our treasure is, there let our hearts be also."

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Proverbs 28:1-13

LECTURE LXXXVI.

Proverbs 28:1-13.

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion. For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged. A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain, which leaveth no food. They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them. Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord understand all things. Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich. Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father. He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor. He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination. Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in possession. The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out. When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." The sentiment in the first of these verses is one which, in all ages and all countries, has been more or less proverbial. It is-the timidity of conscious guilt. We can trace it to an early origin,-even to the immediate effect of the first sin on the mind of the first man. Then it was that "the voice of the Lord God," which before possessed all the sweetest melody and most delightful and irresistible attraction, filled Adam with alarm, driving him to a hiding-place, instead of drawing him to the divine presence. And ever since-"'Tis conscience has made cowards of us all."

Yet-would that there wore now more of this timidity in regard to God! The thoughtless inconsideration of men, respecting their guilt in His sight,-and the hazard of His wrath thence arising, is utterly confounding. And what an amount of hardihood often springs from this! Timidity and alarm are, alas! much more frequent, and much more operative, in regard to detection and punishment by men:-"The murderer, rising with the light, killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me; and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death," Job 24:14-17. How vivid and powerful this description! And yet all the while, another eye-the eye of God-is upon them; for "there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." "The sound of a shaking leaf" will frighten and scare them; yet are they unmoved and undismayed amid "the terrors of the Almighty." But it is not always thus. Whilst the fear of man makes the wicked fancy every noise the sound of the foot of vengeance behind him, and "flee when there is

no one" there-no witness, no pursuer, even in regard to God they cannot always hold out. When the Bible, or the preacher from the Bible, "reasons of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," the conscience is awakened; the spirit trembles; the poor convicted sinner becomes all nerve; every thing startles him; he is timidity itself; his name "Magormissabib," fear round about,-haunted by suspicion of every person and of every thing. Hell opens before him. And this is no mere imagination; but he trembles as if he were already at the very entrance, and hosts of devils behind him, urging him forward to perdition. On the contrary-"the righteous are bold as a lion." Conscious innocence inspires confidence, just as conscious guilt engenders fear. This was felt fully in paradise. There was no fear there. It is true of the people of God now, when they keep His way and put their trust in Him. Then they can exultingly exclaim-" God is for us; who can be against us?" But it is then only that all fear vanishes. When there is an inward consciousness that we have not God on our side, all is shrinking apprehensiveness; we tremble at every shadow. Our eye, then, instead of being lifted up in confidence to Him, is cast down in timid shame, and our spirit quails and sinks and trembles. In the language of the second verse there is necessarily involved the supposition of an overruling Providence;-and, since nations cannot be dealt with as such in the future world, the further assumption that they are dealt with to a certain extent, judicially and retributively, in this. These principles were, in a special manner, acted upon in the case of the Jewish people. They were under a peculiar dispensation of their own,-a theocracy, as it has been appropriately called,-a government of immediate and often miraculous interposition. Yet still, in that history, so far as retribution was concerned,-or the visiting with prosperity or adversity, success or calamity, according as good or evil, obedience or wickedness prevailed,-their history, as it appears in connexion with that of the surrounding nations, may be regarded truly and with advantage, as a specimen of the principles on which God’s general administration over the kingdoms of the world is conducted all along. Of the ways in which He can make nations feel his displeasure for their crimes, here is one:-"For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof."

1. This may be interpreted of the case of rival princes;-when there are a number of them,-branches, it may be, of the same lineage, or members of old and new dynasties, with their discordant claims and their separate adherents. By these the country is divided, split into factions, embroiled in party contentions and civil wars, filled from end to end with mutual jealousies, suspicions, and fears;-ultimately covering it with desolation, and, by dividing it against itself, threatening and endangering its existence.

2. It may be understood of a rapid succession of princes. This includes frequent and sudden changes of men and measures; by which means nothing has time to mature and to get a settled establishment. There is incessant confliction, and counteraction, and revolution,-every fresh ruler undoing and reversing the plans and purposes of his predecessor,-traitor after traitor, usurper after usurper, rising, and conspiring, and cutting off the one before him, and thus keeping the land in incessant convulsion and change.-If you wish to have before you such a contrast as may illustrate Solomon’s position,-read the history in the Old Testament of the revolted tribes under Jeroboam, and that of Judah under the long administration of David.* * See especially 1 Kings 15; and 2 Kings 15.

It is added, as an antithesis to the first part of the verse, "But by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged." The first remark which presents itself here is-that

the contrast in the verse is not between the long reign of one and the contentions and short successive reigns of many, irrespective of character. It is obvious that the prolongation of the reign of a foolish and unprincipled monarch might be as really a scourge to a nation as either rivalry or rapid succession. The prolongation of such a reign might be to a land the heaviest of curses, and the termination of it the greatest of blessings. But when the reigning prince is a "man of understanding and wisdom,"-a man of sound moral and sound political principles, and a man of intelligence and vigour to put those principles forth in beneficial operation, the prolongation of it is a blessing indeed. In that case the prolongation of personal life is the prolongation of national prosperity.

"Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." The kingdom to which they belong has one King; and a king whose reign is permanent as well as unparticipated. There are no rival powers there. If the princes of this world, in the plenitude of their presumption, take upon them to in trade themselves within the precincts of His sole jurisdiction, and to intermeddle with what does not belong to them, the subjects of the King of Zion must stand by His prerogative, resist the encroachment, and, at all risks as to this world, refuse obedience. In the spiritual kingdom of which they are subjects, Christ is the only Head; and His word the only authoritative Rule. And there is no succession here. He reigns over the house of Jacob for ever; "and of his kingdom there is no end." Blessed be God for this! The sceptre of our King can never, even to the end, be wrested out of his hands; and He never dies. He must reign, till all his people are saved with an everlasting salvation, and all his enemies are put under his feet.

Verse Proverbs 28:3. "A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain, which leaveth no food." The oppression of the poor is bad in all. In this verse, we have one description especially of the evil. There are aggravations of it on the part of the rich; and there are aggravations of it on the part of the poor. When done by the rich, it is a palpable and flagrant perversion of the purposes of providence. It is the manifest intention of God in the constitution of human society,-in the variety in it of rank and station, of wealth and want, that the rich should be the guardians of the poor, that they should care for them, and supply their need. When it is otherwise,-when this duty is neglected,-they become like clouds full of rain, and giving promise of refreshing showers to bless and fructify the parched wastes, which burst in destructive lightning and tempest. There can be no greater or guiltier abuse of their superiority,-of their riches and their influence. But the case before us is that of the poor oppressing the poor;-not that of a man who was poor, but has risen, and by whom, from the recollection of his own sufferings and his own feelings under them, sympathy should be cherished and manifested,-but that of the man who is himself actually needy, only having acquired by his situation a certain power over others. Such cases as the following may be exemplifications of it. There are extravagant spendthrifts, who have run themselves out; who have reduced themselves to straits; who are in debt; but who have got themselves into some situation of authority; and whose object, in the exercise of their power, is to recruit their broken and exhausted fortunes. Woe to all that are under them! All their powers of exaction are strained to the uttermost. Wherever there is aught seen or suspected which it is in the power of pressure to squeeze out, that pressure is applied with the force of a vice.-There are indigent governors,-in personal poverty and with empty exchequers;-and the extortion of such characters as well as of the former, is the worst of any-all-grasping and rapacious. It is, as here represented, like an inundation, sweeping all before it. The poor oppressor descends to such pitiful exactions as the rich oppressor would think

beneath him,-not leaving behind a single ear to glean,-a single berry in the uttermost bough. And what, to a province, must be a succession of indigent rulers, each of them eager to make the most for himself and his family of his temporary incumbency?-We might descend lower. The principle of the verse applies to every case down to the needy overseer of workmen, whose living depends on the amount of the proceeds of their labour. There is nothing, in the form of despicable and severe oppression, to which such men, if they are not men of principle, will not stoop to accomplish their selfish ends. In the preceding chapter, (Proverbs 27:17) we have a proverb respecting the animating influence of a man's countenance or favour on the activity of his friend. But alas! there is a countenancing of others in evil as well as in good:-verse Proverbs 28:4. "They that forsake the law praise the wicked." The two characters are the same:-the wicked praise the wicked. Wicked men like to be kept in countenance. They encourage and sharpen each other in evil. And from the same cause arises their hatred of the good. They cannot bear their example. It puts them to shame. It is ever condemning them; ever conveying to them a practical reproof, and stirring up conscience when it would rather slumber in peace. The all-perfect Son of God in our nature expresses what He saw and experienced of this principle when He sojourned amongst men:-"The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." And He forewarns his followers to expect the same experience in proportion as they resembled Him in character and in separation from the world:-"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

It is obvious that from the very same source arises their praise of one another here mentioned by Solomon. This is very far from meaning that in conscience they approve of what they praise. It is only that in heart they like it. And liking the evil, they like encouragement and countenance in it. This is, in a special manner, the case with regard to the particular sins in which they are respectively fond of indulging. They do love so well to have some one who makes light of these; suggests plausible palliations of them; and joins them in their perpetration. Hence it is that men are so prone to the applause of what may be called feats of evil, of extraordinary displays of dexterity and cleverness, or of uncommon courage and determined boldness in the commission of it. They like the association. They cover up the wickedness under their admiration of the cleverness and the courage:-just as men so often overlook the immorality of a work of genius, for the sake of the genius with which it is invested; and, instead of visiting it on that very account, with the severer condemnation, seem as if they would fall in love with the evil for the sake of its dress.

There is another principle that sometimes leads to the praise of the wicked-the principle of self-interest. When a wicked man has it in his power to do us a service, we are tempted to ingratiate ourselves into his favour by covering over his vices, and heaping on him hypocritical commendation. Look at the case of Herod's fulsome, parasitical, and selfish flatterers.*1 Look again at Tertullus-the orator hired by the Jews to criminate Paul.*2 What a contrast between his style and the conduct of the Apostle, when he had the most favourable opportunity of gaining the good graces of his judge! "Seeing," said the fawning orator, "that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds art done to this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix." "Paul," with intrepid soul, "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," till "Felix trembled." Of the same spirit of faithful reprehension of wickedness, many instances might be gathered from the history of the prophets

and apostles: and we have the most striking of all in the person of Jesus himself. In this, as in every other excellence, he "left us an example that we should follow his steps." Whatever be the rank or circumstances of the parties, and how much soever our own interests may be at stake, we must never smile when we ought to frown; never maintain a timid silence, when we ought to speak; never purchase for ourselves exemption from any evil, or the attainment of any benefit by the slightest accommodation, or compliance, or tampering with iniquity. Every fair opportunity should be embraced of kind expostulation and reproof. "Contending with them" implies not angry violence, but the zeal at once of piety and of benevolence. What would have become of the Jews, after the restoration from Babylon, but for the firm and resolute contentions of Nehemiah?-And what would have become of the Reformation, but for the indomitable courage and unbending severity of Luther and of Knox?-They were the men who, instead of "praising the wicked," "contended with them,"-and wrestled hard to overcome all the monstrous abuses and abominations, which, under the name and sanction of religion, were practised with greediness.

*1 See Acts 12:20-23. rr

2 Acts 24:2-4. In the following verse we are reminded afresh of the tendency of evil in the disposition and character to obscure the mental vision, and prevent the clear apprehension of spiritual and divine truth. The principles and convictions of "evil men" become more and more perverted, and their moral sensibilities more and more blunted and deadened, by the power of habit. Thus they "understand not judgment." Their "minds are blinded,"-their intellect darkened and besotted. They lose their discernment between right and wrong. Their conscience becomes less and less discriminative and impressible. They cannot-that is, in effect, they will not see, what a good and upright man discerns with an almost intuitive certainty. On the contrary, "They that seek the Lord"-they who, under the influence of a spirit of humble self-diffidence, look out of themselves to God; trust in Him for divine illumination, and do His will to the full extent of their discovery and knowledge of it-they are enlightened from above. They "understand all things." All things are plain to them; both the truths and precepts of God,-what they are to believe and what they are to do. * Psalms 25:9; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16.

Verse Proverbs 28:6. "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich."* The sentiment may be understood of the "poor man" who remains poor because he will not have recourse to any improper means for bettering his condition, and to the "rich man" who by such means has made his wealth. "Who will hesitate in pronouncing, in such a case, the one better than the other-the man who forfeits wealth for principle, or the man who sacrifices principle for wealth?-the man who barters his conscience for the world, or the man who, in comparison with a good conscience, holds the world as less than nothing and vanity?-But the sentiment may be taken generally, and was probably so meant by Solomon, as referring to the poor good man and the rich ungodly man. The former is "better" than the latter, in every view. He is better, in real excellence and estimableness of character. He is better in regard to his influence in society. He is better, in regard to present happiness and to true respectability and honour. He is better, infinitely better, in regard to future prospects.

* Comp. Proverbs 16:8; Proverbs 19:1; Proverbs 19:22.

Verse Proverbs 28:7. "Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father"-"The law" here, I need hardly say, is-not the law of the land-though that

too it is duty to keep, as far as it is in harmony with the will of the supreme Legislator:-it is the law of God. The sentiment is one of those which pervade this Book, again and again recurring under different forms. "He who keepeth the law," is the same character with him that fears God; the one being the practical counterpart of the other; the fear of God being the keeping of the law in principle, and the keeping of the law the fear of God in practice. And as this fear of God is wisdom, the possessor of it is the "wise son."

"He who is a companion of riotous men," is on the margin-"he that feedeth gluttons;" feasting, sumptuously and jovially, the choice spirits-the bons vivans whom he has made his companions; who are never in their element but when carousing, drowning care in festivity; whose sovereign maxim is, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" He who chooses such associates, chooses his own disgrace and ruin: nor is this all the evil-"he shameth his father." * * Compare Proverbs 1:10; Proverbs 4:14-15; Proverbs 23:20-25.

Verse Proverbs 28:8. "He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor."-This verse may be fitly compared and taken in connexion with verse sixth. "Usury" is here to be understood of every description of oppressive, unrighteous, and rigorous exaction. The providence of a just and merciful God is evidently here referred to. That providence transfers wealth from the hand of grasping and griping selfishness to that of humanity and generous kindness-to that of the man who "pities the poor." Men may not mark the divine hand in occurrences of this kind; and it is always a delicate matter for us-one to which we are hardly equal-to interpret providence judicially. But there are cases at times, in which the transference is so striking, that it would be impiety not to see and to own God in it. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things,-even he shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." The sentiment of the ninth verse has more than once occurred, but the pointedly antithetical form in which it is there stated, deserves special notice. It is this:-that if a man turn away his ear from God, God will turn away His ear from him.-The prayer of the sinner, who has in time past "turned away his ear," but who is now coming back to God, in faith and penitence, with the broken and contrite heart which He never despises,-that sinner God will hear,-ay, will delight to hear. How long soever he may have turned away his ear from both the law and the gospel,-God will "receive him graciously, and love him freely." His whole word gives the chief of sinners the assurance of this. When the prodigal son,-who had "turned away his ear from the law" both of his father and of his God,-came back with the confession, "I have sinned before heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son,"-was his father’s ear then turned away from him? Was not his ear all interest, and his eye all mercy, and his heart all tenderness, and his house and table all welcome, and all bountifulness, to the youth who was "dead and alive again, who was lost and found?" Yes. It is to the sinner who goes on in his rebellion that the words before us refer. That sinner God will not hear. The tenth verse (Proverbs 28:10) presents just another operation of the same principle as that in verse fourth (Proverbs 28:4). We saw on that verse, that the same state of mind which produces the praise of the wicked produces the hatred of the righteous:-and here is one of the ways in which the hatred discovers itself-"causing the righteous to go astray in an evil way,"-enticing him to sin,-tempting to an act or to a course of evil. Whether this be done from hatred, assuming the form of spiteful envy, and dislike of the goodness which condemns the conduct of the tempter; or from the wish to have the example of such a man to plead, whether seriously or in jest, in behalf of the sin in which he himself delights; or in order to have an occasion

for the derision of true godliness,-of making it, in the person of the fallen professor, the theme of scoffing and sarcastic merriment-how wicked,-how deeply criminal, the man who does it! "He shall fall himself into his own pit:"-the effect of his treacherous and profane conduct shall be evil to himself,-evil from a just and holy God. That God will preserve the righteous from yielding to the temptation, or will "restore his soul and make him to walk again in the paths of righteousness,"-while on the head of the tempter he will bring down heavy vengeance-so that the pit which he digged for the godly shall prove his own destruction.-"But the upright shall have good things in possession:" literally, "shall inherit good." They shall have from God all that is truly good for them of this world's possessions and enjoyments,-all that infinite wisdom sees to be really for their benefit. And they shall receive and possess for ever all the blessings in the promises of the covenant of grace,-"all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,"-and "all the fulness of God" in the world to come.

Verse Proverbs 28:11. "The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out."-There are many rich men who are humble and self-diffident, and many poor men who have a very high conceit of themselves. But, in the natural course of things, the possession of wealth gives weight, influence, and importance. The word of the rich man comes to have consequence attached to it. This arises greatly from the selfishness of our nature,-from the knowledge of what riches enable a man to do for such as are in favour with the owner. "The rich hath many friends." And the power he acquires arises, at the same time, from his having so great a stake in the community. From the influence of the self-interest just referred to, he gets accustomed to being flattered, and honoured, and having everything his own way. This all tends to render him dictatorial; to make him fancy his word law. Not being disposed to think that others flatter his judgment for the sake of his purse, he comes to think highly of that which is so nattered and yielded to. And he utters his mind oracularly in the spirit of one whom no man will venture to gainsay. Often and strongly is the tendency manifested in those who have risen to the possession of wealth from a low condition. The effect of riches in puffing up with selfconceit,-especially if the rise has been sudden, and there is no great firmness and natural vigour of mind to hear it,-is often ludicrously apparent in such cases. The man becomes at once purse-proud and overweeningly vain; and puts the weight of his purse into every word he utters.

"But the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out." Many a man who is not in providence blessed with riches, is blessed with what is higher and better,-a large amount of sagacity and shrewdness and sound judgment and penetration;-and still more, with genuine principle. The phrase, "searcheth him out" may be variously understood. He discerns his true character. He sees that wisdom and wealth do not always go together; that a full purse is quite compatible with an empty head. He sees too that a man's wisdom is not to be estimated by his opinion of himself. He sees shallowness where the man himself fancies depth, and folly in what elates him with a vain consciousness of his own wisdom. He sees abundant reason for not making the rich man his oracle, or setting him up as his idol, or making his example the pattern for his imitation, merely for the number of his acres, or for the gold and silver in his coffers. He sees how prone men in general are to allow weight to counsel in proportion to the wealth of the counsellor. But the "understanding" which God has given him shows him the absurdity of this. He "searches out" the fallacy, and detects and exposes the imprudence and folly of sentiments and proposals, that are propounded and recommended by the wealthiest of the wealthy. And still further, taking "understanding" in its

higher sense, as it is used in this Book, as including a mind divinely enlightened and under the influence of the fear of God and all the principles of true religion:-the poor man who has this, sees and knows that "a little with the fear of the Lord is better than the riches of many wicked;"-that "a good understanding have all they who do his commandments;"-that no folly can be more palpable and flagrant than the folly of "trusting in uncertain riches,"-"setting the eyes upon that which is not," and neglecting provision for the soul and for eternity,-forfeiting the "unsearchable riches" provided by the mercy of God for sinners,-all the blessings, unspeakably precious, summed up in "life everlasting;"-spuming away the counsel that would put these in possession;-greedily coveting the treasures of the world that perish in the using, and rejecting the divine offer of the treasures of immortality. The poor man who hath understanding-I can hardly say "searches out" the folly of this,-he discerns it by a kind of spiritual intuition. And, while he pities, he is free from every emotion of envy.

Verse Proverbs 28:12. "When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden."-"Rejoicing" evidently means prospering,-being in favour,-advanced to honour and influence and rule. It corresponds, in the antithesis, with the word "rise"-which is used for elevation to places of power.*-When the ruler is himself a man of principle, and prefers men of like principle to all the offices of authority under him,-chooses them for his counsellors, and sets them around his throne-this is indicative of good times, and is to a community a ground of exultation. Then the good come forward; they show themselves; they exert their salutary influence; they promote the country’s welfare. They are not afraid. They are in favour with the prince, and find favour with the people. The kingdom flourishes. "There is great glory."

* See Proverbs 11:10.

"But when the wicked rise, a man is hidden."-The words have been variously understood. The Vulgate has it-"When the ungodly reign, it is the ruin of men." But our own and the French rendering seem to give the true sense. The latter is-" every one disguises or conceals himself." It is, to the good-to those whose services would prove for the real benefit of the country, the reign of fear. They are discouraged, intimidated, and obliged, for life and safety, to keep out of the way. Such a state of things is sadly ominous of all that is evil. There have been such seasons in our own land;-seasons, when the "excellent of the earth,"-God’s own people, have been constrained to "run into corners to hide themselves;" when unrighteousness and intolerance have "hunted them like partridges on the mountains," and have driven them into the "dens and caves of the earth." Happily we live in other times; when, whatever we may say of the piety of our rulers, both religious liberties and civil rights are better understood and more fully and practically recognized:-when there is perfect freedom and full scope for whatever efforts the good may be disposed to put forth; and when we may be said to "sit under our vines and fig-trees, no one making us afraid." We have exemplifications of both parts of the verse in the history of Israel and Judah. There was "glorying" among all the truly good in Israel when David assembled them to bring up to its place the ark of the covenant; when Solomon dedicated the temple; when Hezekiah restored the passover; when Jehoshaphat dispersed the Levites through all the cities to teach the law and the fear of the Lord; and when young Josiah wept and humbled himself at the contents of the long-neglected and hidden book of God’s covenant. So was it in the days of Mordecai, when deliverance came through him to his people, and they had "light and joy, and gladness and honour," and "a good day." There was, on the contrary, fear and "hiding," when, in Saul’s time,

David was hunted to death; when in Ahab’s, Elijah-even the intrepid Elijah-fled for his life, and when good Obadiah, at the risk of his own head, hid fifty of the Lord’s prophets in a cave and fed them with bread and water;-and when Micaiah, "faithful among the faithless," had to be sought and sent for, and for the fidelity of his words, was ordered to prison, while the hundreds of the prophets of Baal were in favour and triumphed. "What hiding and fear there were when the wicked Haman "rose"-and what exultation when he fell and the righteous came in his room!

Verse Proverbs 28:13. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." The saying may be taken in reference to men, and in reference to God. To "cover" sin-is to conceal, to deny, to justify, to palliate. This is not the way to forgiveness with men. High-minded pride, and obstinate impenitence, and persisting in trespass and self-vindication, will never obtain mercy;-and ought not. Humble confession is becoming, and is duty:-for the supposition is, that sin has actually been committed. It behoves that the offender should be brought to a right spirit,-that he should confess, with contrition, his fault. The rule laid down by our Lord for His disciples is:-"If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.-And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him," Luke 17:3-4. The words can hardly have reference to the repetition of the very same offence:-for in the verse before us, forsaking is added to confessing as required in order to mercy. Now on the supposition of the indefinite repetition of the same offence, there is no forsaking; nor is there, therefore, the necessary evidence of sincerity in the "I repent." The lesson is obviously that we should never be weary of forgiving. To the utmost extent to which there remains the possibility of sincerity, there should still be the readiness to extend mercy. How sad were it for us, were God to weary of pardoning. And yet with Him there must, in order to pardon, be sincerity in the confession. The sinner who "covers his sins" by hypocrisy, or, while he confesses, continues to practise the evil-must remain in condemnation. He is not a subject of mercy. He is unpardoned. He has the witness of this in himself.-The "confessing" implies of course a right view, and a right impression, of the sin confessed, and the sincere exercise of a "broken and contrite heart." It implies, according to the gospel, the exercise of faith in the revealed ground of mercy, or way of divine forgiveness. And it implies the manifestation of sincerity in the forsaking of the sin. Without this, all is sheer hypocrisy, and can never be pleasing to that God who "desireth truth in the inward parts."

One remark more. It is not for our confessing that we "find mercy." Neither is it for our faith from which the confession arises. The faith and the confession are necessary to our finding mercy; but the ground on which mercy is obtained is the propitiatory sacrifice of the " Mediator between God and men."*-The Bible is full of the gracious and interesting lesson of this verse. Cain, the first murderer, could not have mercy, because he neither confessed his sin with penitence, nor trusted in the propitiation:-but to the question of Jehovah, "Where is Abel thy brother?" replied with sullen falsehood, "I know not; am I my brother’s keeper?" Mark the terms prescribed by Jehovah to his ancient people, in order to their "finding mercy:" they are in full harmony with the verse before us-"If their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they accept of the punishment of their iniquity; then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember," Leviticus 26:41-42. And mark how David joins confession with forgiveness-"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin,"

Psalms 32:5. Beautifully and most encouragingly is the same thing represented in the parable of the prodigal son-the confession of the son, and the ready forgiveness of the father. Let the sinner but say in sincerity-"I have sinned, and am no more worthy," and the divine arms are open to receive him.

* Comp. 1 John 1:6; 1 John 1:10.

87-Pro_28:14-28

Proverbs 28:14-28 LECTURE LXXXVII.

Proverbs 28:14-28.

"Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief. As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people. The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days. A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him. Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once. He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough. A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent. To have respect of persons is not good; for, for a piece of bread that man will transgress. He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him. He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue. Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer. He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered. He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse. When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase."

There are, in Scripture, two kinds of fear. In this verse, fear is associated with happiness:-elsewhere we find it associated with torment.* Such passages are in perfect harmony. The more, indeed, there is of the "love" that "casteth out fear"-the fear that "hath torment," the more there will be of the fear in the verse before us. The fear of a child, and the fear of a slave, are two very different principles. The former is the product of love, and is ever proportionate to love. It is affectionate fear. We fear to displease one whose love is the spring to us of our purest and sweetest enjoyment. The child loves his father, and delights in his father’s love to him. He cannot bear his frown. The very thought of his displeasure brings the tear to his eye.-This is the kind of fear which the child of God feels and cherishes toward his heavenly Father. He loves Him, he venerates Him. He finds his happiness in His smile. He dreads to offend Him. His frown is the death of his joy. This is the fear of God which His word inculcates-the religious principle. It is here contrasted with "hardening the heart." It is therefore the gracious fear of a subdued and softened spirit,-the fear of love,-reverence for God,-fear of even His fatherly rebukes and corrections. It is self-distrust. It is tenderness of conscience. It is vigilance against temptation. It is the fear which inspiration opposes to highmindedness, in the admonition-"Be not high-minded, but fear." It is "taking heed lest we fall." It is a constant apprehension of the deceitfulness of the heart, and of the insidiousness and power of inward corruption. It is the caution and circumspection that timidly shrinks from whatever would offend and dishonour God and the Saviour. And these the child of God will feel and exercise the more, the more he rises above the enfeebling, disheartening,

distressing influence of the "fear which hath torment."

* 1 John 4:18. To "harden the heart" is to put away the fear of God; to be self-confident and presumptuous-unawed by threatenings-unsoftened by entreaties;-neither breaking under the one nor melting under the other. Of the man who thus "hardens" himself, final and irretrievable " mischief" must be the inevitable portion. On the contrary-"Happy is the man that feareth alway." Wherein consists his happiness? This fear keeps him from sin; produces simplicity of dependence upon God; imparts the stability of peace,-"a peace that passeth all understanding;" maintains consistency of conduct; and thus gives growing evidence of grace in the heart and of the hope being well-founded-a hope that "maketh not ashamed,"-of "glory and honour and immortality."

Verse Proverbs 28:15. "As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." The "wicked ruler" is the ruler who, intoxicated with power, has aimed at it and obtained it for selfish purposes; who, instead of considering himself in his official capacity, as made for his people, fancies his people made for him,-tyrannizes over them,-selfish, avaricious, rapacious, turning everything, no matter by what means, to his own account. Such a man, instead of using all possible efforts to raise his subjects from a lower to a higher condition,-encouraging and animating them to industry, in order to their elevation and social prosperity,-rages at their poverty, because it does not furnish enough to himself,-does not fill his own treasures. He grinds, oppresses, and wastes them. He practises every exaction; his sole aim being to make the most of them for the time. He is the object of terror to his subjects. He is like a wild beast invading the herd or the flock,-tearing and devouring; a brutal monster without principle, and without heart.

Such a man may not be without ability. He may have talent enough for the invention and practice of any schemes of evil. But sometimes the absence of principle is united with the lack of mental capacity-wickedness with weakness:-(v. Proverbs 28:16). "The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor,"-and thus a source of terror, an object of hatred, and exposed to sudden destruction from popular fury. "But he that hateth covetousness"-who establishes himself in the affections and confidence of his people by justice and mercy, and by every liberal and generous endeavour to promote their best interests,-identifying himself with them,-making their honour and their happiness his own;-he "shall prolong his days." The maxims here are, in the spirit of them, applicable to all power and influence, and especially to authority over the poor and the dependent. A man’s honour, happiness, and safety are intimately associated with using that authority with moderation, with gentleness, with benevolent liberality, with upright and generous principle. Next to the security which lies in the protection of God, is that which arises from possessing the grateful lore of fellow-men, attached by a feeling of thankful obligation. And, in the present instance, the two go together. God and men alike surround such an one with their favour as with a shield.

Verse Proverbs 28:17. "A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him." This verse might be taken in connection with the preceding-as presenting a further description of the same character there depicted. The cruelty of an oppressive ruler frequently incurs bloodguiltiness. Thus it was with Ahab in the case of Naboth; thus has it been in thousands of instances. Whatever be the high station of him who acts the murderer’s part-how independent and irresponsible soever he may imagine himself to be,-vengeance shall pursue him:-his sin will find him out. Even his crown and sceptre shall not protect him from righteous retribution. There is a higher than he-the "righteous Lord who loveth righteousness." Both on Ahab

and Jezebel came the blood of Naboth. But the words may be taken more comprehensively,-in reference to murder by whomsoever committed. For the comparatively innocent-the unintending manslayer,-the cities of refuge were of old appointed; to protect him from the avenger of blood who might rise against him when his spirit was hot, and slay him without a trial. But for the murderer there was no refuge, and no atonement. For him no blood could avail; no sanctuary could protect him. From the very altar of God, if he betook himself to it, he was to be dragged to death.

Such seems the force of the somewhat remarkable language here employed. He shall "flee to the pit;" that is, he shall in vain attempt to escape. He may flee; but his very flight shall be "to the pit,"-to the very destruction he is seeking to shun. "The pit" does not appear to signify here, directly and literally, the bottomless pit, the pit of final woe; but rather, according to a figurative sense of it, covert and unexpected mischief and ruin. The very means he takes to effect his escape shall betray him to punishment. It is in this sense that the prophet uses the term when he says-" fear, and the pit, and the snare are upon thee, O inhabitant of the land." * * Comp. Isaiah 24:17-18.

God’s jealous regard for the life of man was strongly expressed at the second outset of our world’s history; and expressed in terms of evident allusion to the early and awful violation of its sacredness in the antediluvian period:-"And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man. "Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man," Genesis 9:5-6. For my own part, having examined the various principles of interpretation by which those who are for doing away all capital punishments have explained these words, I have not been able to satisfy myself with any one of them. They seem to be all forced and unnatural,-and, on different critical grounds, inadmissible. I cannot but regard the language as bearing no fair and natural interpretation but that which makes it a divine requisition, on the part of man, of blood for blood,-that is, of life for life; and as thus affording more than a sanction, as laying down a requirement. Though I am far from conceiving that we are bound by Jewish criminal law, yet in the law regarding murder there is so evident an allusion to this original and universal injunction,-and the language withal is so very pointed and emphatically reiterated-that I cannot go the length of those who would include murder among crimes to be punished with infliction short of death.* When set beside the original and universal law, it serves, by its very emphasis and peremptoriness, to confirm the ordinary interpretation of that charge to the second progenitors of our race as the just one, and to show, therefore, the universality of its obligation.

* See Numbers 35:31-33.

Those things which have become proverbial have generally a large amount of truth. It is a remark that has been so often made,-that we cannot account for it otherwise than by admitting it to be founded in fact, and verified by the frequency with which the fact has been observed to happen,-that murder seldom escapes detection, and the murderer seldom ultimately eludes punishment. The detection is often after the lapse of a long interval,-an interval that has rendered the case hopeless, and has thrown over it the shade of oblivion. And in not a few instances it has been effected by means of the most extraordinary, and, at times, of apparently the most accidental and trivial kind. Providence pursues the blood-guilty, even when man has given up the search, and brings him to light, and conviction, and his merited recompense, in ways of which man could never

have imagined. The instances of this are such as to stamp the seal of truth on the divine assurance-"Surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man."

One observation more. It can never, in these circumstances, be a duty to protect or screen a murderer. It must, on the contrary, be an incumbent duty to deliver him up. "Let no one stay him" says the wise man. It is incumbent on every patriotic citizen, who would not expose the land to God's "inquisition for blood," to hunt out the murderer, and bring him to justice. It is a duty to God, and a duty to our country. It is a duty, though the criminal were "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh." The only effort we can make on his behalf,-and that we ought to make with all solicitude, is-to save him from the second death, by bringing him to "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let no one pronounce the effort vain. The perpetrators of the most fearful murder ever committed on the face of the earth,-obtained forgiveness and life. They obtained it through the virtue of the very blood which, "with wicked hands," they shed. It "cleanseth from all sin." There is no sin so aggravated in its guilt, as that the blood of Christ is not a sufficient propitiation for it. O! it is a comfort to be assured of this. The least guilty cannot be pardoned-cannot be saved without it; and, blessed be God! the most guilty may! But let us not forget what incompetent judges we are of the amount of guilt in any. We are ever estimating guilt by the actions with which we are chargeable towards men, and the principles and the passions from which these actions proceed. We are apt to think there can be no malignity more criminal and deadly than that which imbrues its hand in a fellowcreature's blood. And yet-is hatred of man to be compared in guiltiness with enmity against God? If we are to form our estimate by the worthiness of the objects, and the claims they respectively have on our love,-there can be no comparison. It is true they are inseparable,-and the one springs from the other. But alas! how many there are who would be filled with horror, or with indignation, were any such thing imputed to them as the malice that prompts to murder, who would hear without the slightest stirring of emotion of any kind, the charge of enmity against God. And yet this is the sin of sins; the germ of all sin; and that which, entering essentially into all sin, makes it "exceeding sinful." This enmity must be pardoned, else the essence of all guilt remains; and this enmity must be slain, and supplanted by love, else the essence of all moral pravity remains. The sentiments of most if not all of the verses which follow, to the close of the chapter, have been, with various modifications, repeatedly before us.

We are afresh reminded, in the first place, of the advantage, both as regards the present life and the life to come, of stern integrity of principle, and of the ruinous consequences both to temporal and eternal interests of that headstrong, rebellious self-will that resists the authority and grace of God (Proverbs 28:18.) "Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once."

Then we have anew, under a simple but expressive illustration, the tendency and results of steady perseverance on the one hand, and of idleness and profligacy on the other, (Proverbs 28:19.) "He that tilleth his land shall have bread enough, and he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough;" or, the one shall have plenty of bread and the other plenty of want. The expression in both clauses is the same in the original. With the renewed commendation of diligence, the warning is again sounded (Proverbs 28:20.) against "hasting to be rich" and

forgetting that rigid and unswerving fidelity which so secures alike the favour of fellow-creatures and of God himself, that "the faithful man shall abound with blessings." And of him who "hasteth to be rich"-the man whose insatiable appetite is set on the world’s wealth,-mark the peculiar characteristic here mentioned, (Proverbs 28:22.) "He hath an evil eye," that is, especially, an envious and covetous eye. He covets all he sees. He grudges at the success of others; frets when another man makes more of a bargain than himself; cannot endure to see anything go past him; regards every one with the sullenness of discontent, and counts him as an enemy, that gets faster on than himself. "When this passion takes full possession of the soul, it is a most unhappy one. It eats out the vitals of contentment and peace; and it contains a thousand temptations to evil practices for the more speedy attainment of its end;-the "evil eye" producing the evil act; the look that covets being akin to the hand that steals. The following verse, viewed in connexion with the preceding, suggests forcibly the thought that the avaricious man is in imminent danger of being guided and influenced in every thing by a regard to his own interest; and will be ever disposed to decide in causes that may come before him, according as this is likely to be affected; while the verse itself assures us, in striking terms, that there is hardly anything that can come before a judge or an arbitrator, in which there may not be some consideration fitted to sway him, if he do not set himself, with decidedness of purpose, against "respect of persons." The man who once gives way to it, and who allows his conscience to yield to any such temptation, or to any such laxity of principle,-may come to practise iniquity for the merest trifle, and to sin without remorse:-"For a piece of bread that man will transgress."

Then we have a fresh statement of the advantage of "rebuke" above "flattery." Rebuke is most apt to irritate, when conscience, the inward secret monitor, bears silent witness to the truth of that for which it is administered. None are so irritable under it as those who are previously dissatisfied with themselves. But although irritation may be the effect at first-verse Proverbs 28:23. "He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue."

We should learn the important lesson not to withhold rebuke, when circumstances require its administration, on account of its first effects, and not by these effects to be startled or discouraged. We should not look for immediate confession, or fancy we have failed, because our "rebuke" has at the time produced even anger. Let our friend have leisure to think, to consider, to cool. It is with "rebuke" just as it is with a controversy. We should not expect a man with whom we engage in an argument, to give in at the moment of discussion. We should state and urge our arguments; and then leave them to be thought of and weighed afterwards, and, in the moments of calm consideration, let them work their way to conviction at leisure. The case is not to be regarded as hopeless, merely because feeling himself perhaps hard-pressed, he has got a little heated, and spoken keenly and dogmatically. Don’t press your advantage too eagerly at the time:-dismiss the subject, and let his judgment dwell coolly upon it after. Do the same, when you have administered a reproof. If it irritates, and draws forth hasty and passionate words,-keep your temper; answer not again. Say no more, but leave him to come to himself. You may then experience the truth of the verse. It is not, remember, at the time, but "afterwards"-that "he that rebuketh a man finds more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue."

Verse Proverbs 28:24. "Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer."-Here is something for the younger portion of my audience. Young people are sometimes apt to fancy that they may make more free with what is in

the house,-what is the property of their parents, than with what belongs to others,-to regard it as in a manner their own,-and hardly to imagine that they are alienating it when they appropriate it to their own use. But it is a sad mistake. Beware of the disposition. There is evil, and there is danger in it. For, first, "What belongs to parents-is not yours: and to take to yourselves what is not your own, without express request and permission, is, beyond question, a direct breach of the eighth commandment. It is stealing. Attempt not to evade this: for, secondly, the property of parents ought to be peculiarly sacred-not less, but more so than any other. A feeling should attach to it somewhat like that which attaches to holy things, things pertaining to God and to his service. The violation of their property should be felt as a description of sacrilege. Thirdly, There are involved in it,-although you may not be so sensible of it as you ought to be,-ingratitude, disobedience, disrespect,-and deceit and concealment, toward those with whom, of all on the face of the earth, there should be most of openness,-the openness of daylight sincerity and confidence. I can conceive few things worse,-more ominous of evil,-than when a young person practises deception upon a parent. And, lastly, This kind of freedom, when once ventured upon-grows. It serves to cherish a covetous spirit. It tempts to extravagant courses, of which the means are thus accessible; and such courses tempt further to other means of maintaining them.

Thus the disposition and practice in question tend to ruin-to ruin both temporal and eternal. The youth who begins by home pilferings, is preparing to be "a companion of the destroyer,"-of those who destroy both themselves and others. Such associates will tempt him to more extensive pilferings, and make him the tool of their base machinations and crimes. And this suggests a counsel to parents. The counsel is-to beware of being too hard with their children. To give them much money, and to indulge them in all their desires, is infallibly to spoil them, and train them to evil. But the opposite extreme,-allowing them nothing,-giving them no indulgence, no gratification,-but treating them as if self-denial were the one and only virtue they had to learn,-is tempting them to take what should rather be given them, and endangering their principles of open integrity and honesty. On such a subject, as on many others, no precise rule can possibly be laid down. Every parent must learn to mingle affectionate indulgence with discreet and firm restraint; so as to make children sensible (this is the whole mystery) that you wish to make them happy, and to deny them nothing in mere caprice,-nothing which is right and good for them to have. While a child may be spoiled and ruined by injudiciousness and excess of gratification, parents must not, on this account, jump to the opposite extreme. The case is hardly more promising, when a child is so made to feel restraint, as that he ever secretly indulges the longing wish to be free.

Verse Proverbs 28:25. "He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat." The phrase for "He that is of a proud heart" is in the original, "He that is large in mind." And this is a phrase of which the meaning depends on the connexion in which it occurs. It is said of Solomon, that God gave him "largeness of heart, as the sand which is by the sea-shore." But here the designation is used in a bad sense,-and seems properly enough translated. It describes the man of aspiring ambition,-full of large and grasping desires after the honour, wealth, and power of the world, and thus rendered discontented, haughty, and imperious. These are the men who have been the disturbers of the world’s peace:-ever restless, dissatisfied, envious, quarrelsome,-unhappy themselves, and the causes of unhappiness to others.

Men of such "proud heart" rouse opposition. This hinders their advancement; which aggravates the evil. Checked in their ambitious aims, they fret and fume, and are exasperated by whatever

comes in their way. Hence "strife"-personal, domestic, and national feuds. And their pride is associated with high-minded self-confidence. They look to their own devices, their own resources, and their own power, for success; and to these they ascribe the success actually obtained. "They sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag." But that spirit never can secure the smile of Heaven:-"He that putteth his trust in The Lord shall be made fat." "Trust in the Lord" must not here, or anywhere else in Scripture, be understood of inactive indolent expectation of all things from Him. That is not trust; it is presumption: it is expecting what God has nowhere promised. He who "trusts in the Lord" is the man who is active in duty, and looks to the Lord for a blessing upon means,-who leaves the result in His hands; and is satisfied with His appointments. This man "shall he made fat:"-he has comfort and peace and happiness in all situations; an inward satisfaction, a heart-feast, a prosperity of soul, to which the other is a stranger.

Verse Proverbs 28:26. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered."-He is ever, and justly, esteemed foolish, who puts confidence in a detected and known deceiver; and of all deceivers on earth the human heart is the least to be trusted. It has been, like the tempter who first introduced into it the principles of evil, "a liar from the beginning." Its inclinations change with the changing times, like the vane with the ever-veering and varying wind. How often does this happen in sickness, in adversity, in danger! Men think, and with confidence they say-if they were but well, if their life were but spared, if they were but brought up from their calamitous depression, if they were but saved from the threatening peril,-how differently they would live!-what altered characters the world would see them!-what they would do I and what they would not do! Health comes back; prosperity returns; the darkness dissipates; the danger passes over:-and all their goodness passes with it! Their fears are smiled at, and their resolves forgotten.

There are things too which we fancy and which we indignantly protest it impossible we should ever be induced to think of doing. We fire at the very association of our names with the supposition. And yet, when circumstances change,-and when opportunity and temptation are united, we actually do what even in imagination we shrunk from,-wondering how any man should dare to deem it possible!-"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." To such confidence nothing but self-ignorance can give birth, or can maintain it in being. It is palpable, whether in respect to the power of enduring trials,-of bearing prosperity,-of using aright increasing wealth,-of resisting temptation,-of discharging duty,-of making sacrifice to principle.-Blessed is he who "walketh wisely"-who (as this stands clearly in antithesis to the folly of self-reliance) walks in the fear of God, and with believing dependence on Him.

Behold anew the man of selfishness (verse Proverbs 28:27), and mark well the description of him. He not only does not set himself to seek out objects for the exercise of his sympathy and kindness,-but turns away from such as present themselves. He "hideth his eyes." He has no wish to see, because the seeing might oblige him to give. He pretends he cannot bear to see. He has a hundred excuses for not attending to petitions, of which the answer must come from his purse. Were words only wanted, he could keep both his eyes and his mouth open enough. Mark too the result-"He shall have many a curse." The sentiment of the closing verse is the same with that of the twelfth-"When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase." Do seek the best interests of our country, by praying that our beloved Queen herself may be under the influence of the principles of true godliness, and preserved from the infection of

all that is anti-protestant and anti-christian,-and that wise and faithful counsellors may ever be round her throne, men "fearing God and hating covetousness."

88-Pro_29:1-11

Proverbs 29:1-11 LECTURE LXXXVIII.

Proverbs 29:1-11.

"He, that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance. The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it. A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet. In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice. The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it. Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath. If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest. The blood-thirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul. A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards." The opening verse is one of many solemn admonitions in the divine word which require more of impression than of illustration. Is there an individual, who has been counselled and warned by parental authority and affection, expostulating, entreating, encouraging, correcting, rebuking;-who has heard many a kind admonition from the friends of his youth, and from the ministers of God's word;-who has been visited and alarmed by the corrective afflictions of divine providence, and at once wooed by mercies and awed by judgments,-but who still "goes on in his trespasses,"-in his wicked, worldly, careless, ungodly course?-O let such a one listen now to this solemn and emphatic declaration-"He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Wilt thou "harden thy neck," scorner? Wilt thou refuse to bend to the yoke of divine authority? Wilt thou resist divine commands and divine invitations?" Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" How unutterable the malignant baseness of the ingratitude which the too faithful representation of Solomon elsewhere implies-"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil!" Recollect-there is a limit. You have not resolved for the future that you will always "harden your neck,"-that you never will give a serious thought to the interests of your better part and your better being;-but you flatter yourselves that it is time enough-that you will take it to heart by and by. Yet every day and every hour, you are becoming more callous. Every repetition of your refusal is settling you the more firmly in your habits of careless and worldly inconsideration. It is more than probable that some of you may recollect a time when you thought more and felt more than you do now; and, yet, in spite of this experience, you cherish the delusive idea that the tendency will be reversed, and that, instead of the same progress bringing you to think and feel still less than you do now, there will be a reaction, and that you will soften yourselves to reflection when you have got a little harder-when the indurating effects of sin and the world have steeled your hearts more

thoroughly against the influence of what is good!-May not God in the end, after such a course, and as its merited reward, give you up to your own hearts' lusts? May not He justly say of you-"Let them alone?"-May He not, in righteous retribution, leave you to a reprobate mind? Since you have "hated truth," may He not suffer you to be the "dupes of lies?" and having wilfully turned away from Him and from His invitations, may He not allow "delusions strong as hell to bind you fast?" and let you sink to the grave and to perdition, "with a lie in your right hand?" And then-when the "sudden destruction cometh upon you"-appalling thought! it is "without remedy!" Then warnings, reproofs, invitations, entreaties, will be for ever at an end; and nothing mil remain but the unavailing anguish of regretted opportunities, that can never return. The lesson of the following verse is for youth. How solicitous the wise man is for their wellbeing,-for their preservation from all the snares of evil! How often to impress his lessons and admonitions, he repeats them.* In the latter clause of this verse, the phrase in the original is-" he that feedeth or feasteth harlots." The rake-the dissolute abandoned spendthrift is meant, who, like the prodigal son in the parable, "wastes his father's substance with riotous living"-"devours his living with harlots." But ah! my young friends,-is the "spending of substance" all the father's grief? All!-it hardly comes into the estimate in comparison. No: it is not the loss of the substance, but the loss of the son, that rends with agony the godly parent's heart.

* Comp. Proverbs 23:24-25; Proverbs 28:7; Proverbs 28:19. From the antithesis in the fourth verse between "judgment" and the "receiving of gifts"-or the taking of bribes, it is obvious that by judgment is to be understood the exercise of the judicial function, and of the entire function of government, in the spirit and on the principles of stern unbending equity and impartiality, as opposed to venality, corruption, selfish partiality and respect of persons:-and we have affirmed anew the benefit to a country of the one, and the ruinous consequences of the other:-"The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it." The topic of the next verse is another to which we have found Solomon making repeated and pointed reference-"A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet."* Spreading a net for the feet of another-laying snares and traps for him, is what no man ever thinks of doing but for some purpose of mischief. And such is the evil of flattery. It is a snare spread for the feet. And it is often spread very dexterously. The experienced flatterer knows well what will take best with different characters. You have heard possibly of the man who tried every thing he could possibly think of, but without success; and who finished the whole of his insinuating address by telling the object of his adulation, and whom it was his interest and his aim to win,-that he was the first ho had met with in all his experience, who was proof against flattery. This was the very flattery that gained the day:-and all that had gone before was only an artful preparation for this. Be jealous then of flatterers, and jealous of yourselves. There is no flattery of which it can be truly said that it is harmless. In the verse before us, Solomon does not refer solely to the intention of the flatterer; he refers also to the tendency of the flattery. The latter may be far from harmless, even although, to a great degree, the former may. Injury may be done, and many a time is done, when no harm is meant to the party, and when there is no interest of our own to serve. And there is no little guilt on the part of those, who, seeing vanity to be a man's failing, set themselves of purpose to feed it,-pouring into the ear, merely in the way of an amusing experiment, every description of fulsome adulation, trying how much, and in what variety, it will be taken in. The experiment is a cruel one. But it has another and a more direct ingredient of evil-falsehood. You cannot flatter thus without lying:-and it is much to be feared, there is no small amount of falsehood uttered in this way, of the

turpitude of which they who are chargeable with it never think.

* See Proverbs 26:23-28.

Verse Proverbs 29:6. "In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice." In the former part of this verse, the expression is general; and the question naturally suggests itself-"A snare to whom f to himself, to others, or to both?"-I should answer the last; there being no restriction in the words, there is neither necessity nor warrant for making one. Often is the designing villain ensnared by his own devices-by his own schemes of wickedness. His foot is taken in his own net:-the trap which he had set for another catches and maims himself. Then the latter part of the verse is realized. The righteous praise God with songs of rejoicing;-thanking Him with gladdened hearts for their deliverance and safety, and for His righteous judgments on those who had unrighteously, without any desert of theirs, been plotting mischief against them. But the words are equally applicable to the tendency of sin,-of sin of every kind,-to the delusion and destruction of him who commits it. Scripture speaks of "the deceitfulness of sin:" and who is there that has not known and that has not felt it?-In the idea of a snare we have the conception of something concealed,-of a danger that does not appear, and into which a man may fall before he is aware. Thus it is with the sinner who goes on in his trespasses, who persists in his course of wayward rebellion. The evil does not immediately follow the commission of the sin to which he is tempted. "Sentence against his evil work is not executed speedily." He finds himself, after the perpetration of it, as he was before. No judgment overtakes him. Conscience speaks; but he feels himself safe, and he succeeds in silencing it. He is encouraged to repeat the sin; and with less and less of remorse. The remonstrances of the inward monitor becoming less and less distinct, he adds iniquity to iniquity,-still enticed onwards and onwards in the way of evil. Now, in all this there is "a snare" a perilous and fatal snare. He is lured on to a ruinous end. He falls into it at last, and perishes.*

* See for this general lesson of the sinner’s danger-Proverbs 5:21-23. And for the same general lesson, in connexion with the more particular and special one-Proverbs 11:5-6; Proverbs 12:13. The antithesis is remarkable:-"But the righteous doth sing and rejoice." He has joy in the inward " testimony of his conscience." He has joy in the God of his salvation. He has joy in the good hope of the gospel;-"a hope that maketh not ashamed," because, in the way of faith and obedience, "the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit." And this state of spirit in which he "rejoices with joy and singing," he possesses in the midst of all the privations, trials, and sorrows of the present life.-In this joy there is no "snare,"-no snare in the path in which it is experienced. There is nothing deceitful, nothing bewildering, nothing disappointing in the ways of God, and truth, and holiness. Ways of present-happiness, they end, not in disappointment, and shame, and ruin, but in "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore."

Verse Proverbs 29:7. "The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it." When the Apostle Paul is speaking of his being acknowledged as a fellow-worker by "James, Cephas, and John," and of his getting from them "the right hand of fellowship," that while they went to "the circumcision, he should go to the Gentiles," the particular stipulation which he mentions is a very remarkable one:-"Only they would that we should remember the poor." There is nothing in which, both in spirit and letter, there is a more perfect harmony between the Old and New Testament Scriptures, than the regard of God to the poor, and the injunctions of a

special regard to them on the part of His people. As it is not the case of the poor, in a general way, that is here mentioned, but "the cause of the poor,"-we may consider the verso as bearing more especially on the duty of magistrates and judges-of persons occupying situations of authority and influence as far as possible to protect their interests. In this view we may take, in connexion with it, verse fourteenth-"The king who faithfully judge th the poor"-who protects his rights and avenges his wrongs, even when these rights have been invaded and these wrongs-perpetrated by the aristocracy of his land, by the nobles that surround his throne, and whoso favour it might seem most natural for him to court and most available for him to secure,-the king who thus, in judgment and in his general administration, shows the impartiality of uncompromising and incorruptible principle-"his throne shall be established for ever." He settles it on a secure basis,-in the affections of the masses of the people, and in the respect, admiration, and awe of the nobility themselves. They cannot but approve and admire even what they may not personally like. And moreover, if his poor subjects that are thus protected and vindicated by him are of the number of the godly,-how much may he owe of the stability of his throne and the prosperity of his government, to the prayers of these lowly and despised ones, who, how overlooked and neglected soever by men, have the ear of the Supreme Ruler,-"have power with God, and prevail!"

Let it be especially observed from the terms of the seventh verse, that disregard of the cause of the poor is part of the character of the wicked; and is itself wickedness:-while the consideration of the cause of the poor is a part of the character of "the righteous," and is itself a part of practical righteousness. There is in the former an unprincipled setting aside of the great rule of right between man and man,-a rule of universal and indispensable obligation on "high and low, rich and poor together"-the golden rule-the royal law;-and there is a defiance of all the express injunctions enforced by the example of Jehovah himself.

Those described in the first clause of the following verse-"The scornful"-are such as, in their conduct and their measures, regard not the restraints of divine authority, hold in contempt the idea of apprehension from an over-ruling Providence, neither fearing its vengeance nor seeking its protection and blessing; despise counsel and advice; dash forward with self-sufficient and self-confident recklessness; and too often infect the people with the same spirit of ungodly presumption. They "bring the city," that is the country at large, (the metropolis or seat of government being taken as the representative of the kingdom) "into a snare." It is not discovered till it is too late for the application of any remedy;-and there is at once danger from human enemies, and danger from the judicial displeasure of an offended God. Thus, many a time, did the rulers bring Jerusalem "into a snare"-involving the people with themselves in divine visitations.*

* See Isaiah 28:14-22 compared with Matthew 27:20, with verses 39-43. And what was the consequence? Ans. Luke 23:27-31 and Luke 19:41-44. Thus the rulers of Israel brought the wrath upon the nation by their counsel and example.

"The wise who turn away wrath," are the men who are humble and receive counsel, who "order their affairs" with combined integrity and prudence,-with decision yet with caution; men who, under the influence of religious principle themselves, diffuse that influence among others. They "turn away wrath,"-the wrath of enemies by their discreet measures uniting the honour of their country and its security with the spirit of conciliation and peace and amity;-and the wrath of God by their counsels and by their prayers. They rescue from " the snare." They prevent or they avert danger.

They propitiate and pacify, instead of provoking. One of the very strongest modes in which Jehovah declares to his ancient people His fixed determination to punish them for their sins, is that which avers the unavailingness of the intercessions even of such men as stood highest in His favour for turning away His displeasure. They should deliver themselves alone.* * See Ezekiel 14:13-30.

Let us be thankful that we have an advocate with the Father, by whose intercession-(such is the Father's delight in Him-such the unlimited influence of His mediation)-there is no amount of merited wrath that may not be turned away. The influence or "power with God " of the very best of men and greatest "saints of the Most High" that ever lived, has still been limited. But to Christ there is nothing which the Father will deny. If you come to Him in faith, and make Him your friend, your cause with God will be safe. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool." If you are wise, you will take this way of "turning away wrath;" and to this all who are "wise to win souls" will counsel you. Every other counsel will leave you exposed to "the wrath of God;" and it will "abide upon you."

Verse Proverbs 29:9. "If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest." This verse is capable of different interpretations, according as we understand the reference of the pronoun "he" in the words "whether he rage or laugh." This some highly respectable commentators consider as referring to the "wise man" and as signifying the different methods he adopts, according to the different tempers of the persons he has to deal with, for turning them from their folly-"whether he be angry at them, or endeavour by gentler means, to reason or laugh them out of their folly." With all due deference, I am disposed to differ, and to regard the words as referring to the "foolish man" and as expressing the different ways in which he may receive the reasonings, remonstrances, and persuasions of the man of wisdom. The "foolish man" may, as in other cases, mean the ungodly man, and the "wise man" the man that fears God. In which case the "contending" may refer to the appeals and pleadings of the latter against the wicked practices of the former. He will sometimes receive them with resentment and proud passion, and sometimes with scornful laughter and bantering mirth. In either case, "there is no rest." There is no satisfactory result; and "the wise man" is in danger of being thrown off his own guard, and losing his temper, and exposing himself; which will only increase the turbulence,-either the rage or the mirth, of the fool. But "contending with a foolish man" may signify entering into discussion-disputing some point with him. A wise man should rather shun engaging with such a disputant-especially where the want of principle is associated with weak capacity. The latter may often be found abundantly fond of disputation-eager to get into an argument. But there is no comfort or satisfaction in it, no end to it, and no good from it. In all discussion, the one object of the "wise man" is truth. He will not think of "contending" for anything else. But the "foolish man" cares not for this. He is confident he has truth already. He wishes nothing but a dispute. He is, in his self-sufficiency, eager to show off-to display his powers-powers hidden from all but himself; and is therefore ever ready and eager to enter the lists. There are the two ways here mentioned, in the one or the other of which such a man may receive and encounter you;-with violent anger, or with contemptuous laughter. The anger may arise from one or other of two causes,-your not at once admitting the force and conclusiveness of his arguments, or his finding himself puzzled and pinched by the force of yours;-while the laughter (which may be the very cover of felt though not confessed perplexity,) at your alleged silliness and blindness, in reasoning so weakly yourself, and

not seeing what is so very plain,-the laughter of self-complacency and self-consequence. It is not easy to say which of the two is the more provoking; whether he blusters and storms and fumes with passion,-or whether he laughs and scouts, and turns to banter and ridicule all you say,-"there is no rest." The wise man's object is, to bring matters to a point; to leave discussion, when enough has been said, and to rest in the conviction of truth. But he cannot get to this. There is no silencing a fool. There is no end to either his heated and impetuous or to his scornful and laughing talk. Whether you answer him, or answer him not, he will, in either case, "rage" the more, or "laugh" the more. Nothing can be made of him. The wise man, having once entangled himself, may find it no easy matter to get out again with comfort or with credit. When you meet with a man who is very eager for a discussion,-keen-set upon it, and who will not let you alone, till he has forced you to it,-you may be pretty sure that the object of that man is an argument,-an argument for the argument's sake; that he has the fondness of a fool for fighting; that of course his mind is already made up, and that he only wishes to show how he can beat you off; that it is the battle he wants, and the victory,-not the truth, which he has already taken for granted. He is likely to prove a fool,-more hot-headed than clear headed; in arguing with whom you will beat the air. Better let him alone;-unless you wish an interminable altercation, with no rest while it continues,-and no resting-place at its close,-rather when it ceases without coming to a close at all.

"But the just seek his soul"-is susceptible of two senses. It may mean first, the just seek the life-the welfare, temporal and eternal-of their persecutors-of their bloodthirsty enemies, at whose hands they are suffering-it may be, even unto death. Such was the case with David and Saul; with Christ and his murderers; with Paul and his unbelieving countrymen; with Stephen and those who "gnashed upon him with their teeth," and cast him out of the city, and stoned him;-and with all the prophets, apostles, and martyrs, in the bloody history of intolerance.

2. They may mean-and probably do mean-that the upright, in opposition to the blood-thirsty by whom the just is hated, "seek his soul,"-that is, the soul or life of the object of the hatred-of the just or the upright. Of the Lord himself it is said-"He loveth the righteous." And in this all His people resemble Him. It is one of their characteristic distinctions. They pray for the upright, and endeavour, by all means in their power, to preserve them from the deadly machinations of their persecutors. The amount of love required of God's people towards God's people is that they be ready to "lay down their lives for the brethren." And if "for the brethren"-how much more for THE JUST ONE. We should think of our lives as nothing, when the alternative is the forfeiture of his love. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea set an example of this, when not only did the former plead for Jesus during his life, when his enemies were exasperated against him and plotting his destruction,-but both came forward, at the most perilous crisis of his history, and avowed themselves on the side of the Crucified. And such is the love which Jesus expressly demands towards himself.

Verse Proverbs 29:11. "A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards."* It is obvious that this is another instance in which folly is to be understood of weakminded indiscretion: for the unprincipled are deep enough in their counsels, and cautious enough in the communication of them. While the "wise man" chooses time,-place, and company, for what he says,-especially when it relates to any matter that is important, or of which the beneficial issue depends on secresy and caution-the fool minds nothing of the kind. He thinks not of proprieties or of consequences. He speaks out at all times, in all places, and in all companies alike;-no matter to

him:-he must speak; and, while many a time he speaks without thinking, it is a rare thing for him to think without speaking. If he has nobody else to talk to, he will rather talk to himself than be silent;-and in too many instances, it were well were he confined to his own company! For, whatever occurs to him coming out, no matter when, where, or to whom, there is incessant danger every time he opens his lips before others. Be it yours ever to act, in this respect, the part of the wise. Guard well your tongue. With intelligence and sound discretion, duly time your words, and duly weigh them; and let all you do say be marked by calmness, temperance, dignity, and truth.

* Comp. Proverbs 12:23; Proverbs 14:33; Proverbs 15:2.

89-Pro_29:12-18

Proverbs 29:12-18

LECTURE LXXXIX.

Proverbs 29:12-18.

"If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked. The poor and the deceitful man meet together; the Lord lighteneth both their eyes. The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever. The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul. Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."

It is natural, when we think of Solomon's own situation as king of Israel, to expect to find some of his maxims of proverbial wisdom bearing special reference to the character and conduct of men in power. And so it is. When, moreover, we think of the wisdom with which, at the outset of his reign, and at his own earnest request, he was divinely endowed, we as naturally anticipate a correspondence between the maxims and the character. Nor are we disappointed. The maxims are not those of the selfishness of power,-not those of arbitrary despotism or the sovereignty of royal will; nor are they those of an artful, intriguing, Machiavelian policy. They are sound and liberal, and based on the great principle of the public good being the end of all government,-the principle that kings reign, not for themselves, but for their people; while, in all their administration, they ought to be swayed and regulated by the laws of an authority higher than their own, by a regard to the will of God as their rule, and the glory of God, to which all else must ever be subordinate, as their supreme aim. But we must not forget, that the Book of Proverbs forms part of the canon of inspired Scripture; that it does not contain, therefore, the mere dictates of human wisdom, how extraordinary soever that wisdom was; that "a greater than Solomon is here."

Verse Proverbs 29:12. "If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked."-It becomes the interest of them all to lie and to deceive him; and the competition will then be, who can ply this wretched trade most artfully and most effectually. When it is perceived that truth is not welcome, and that a man gets nothing by straightforward honesty but a frown and dismissal,-"all will be wicked" for all will be liars. Flattery and slander become the staple of their communications to the ear of their master; the latter to serve the purposes of the former, and the former to make the latter go down,-the good that is artfully spoken of himself opening his ear to the more easy and credulous admission of the evil that is said of others. The upright being incapable of yielding to the general example, are made the victims of detraction and calumny, and are by this means either constrained to withdraw, or are put away from before the throne, and so leave it beset with wickedness,-the wickedness of flattery, falsehood, treachery, and malice. The jealousies of the monarch are awakened,-jealousies both personal and official, both as it respects himself and as it respects his government; and there comes to be brought into operation that most accursed of all

systems-the system of espionage,-of spies and informers, plying all the arts of a despicable and villanous deceit,-fastening themselves on individuals, insinuating themselves into their confidence, tempting them to familiarity, and worming out their secrets; artfully intruding themselves into the social circle, in every class of society; "speaking lies in hypocrisy," so as to open hearts and elicit discoveries, and lead on the simple even to language stronger than they would ever think of using;-and all this for the purpose of pleasing and poisoning the royal ear, and ruining the objects of their mean and treacherous venality and villany. Such spies and informers have been justly designated "the pestilent vermin of a nation." The monarch that has recourse to them deserves not to reign. There is hardly a conceivable case in which the employment of such a system can be vindicated. The principle of the verse is quite capable of application in other cases than that of the monarch. It is true of masters. If a master "hearken to lies,"-keeping an ear ever open to their admission,-"all his servants are wicked." They imbibe the spirit of falsehood, and study the vile arts of flattery and malice; thus the conscientiously and sternly upright are kept or driven from their domestic establishments. Let masters and mistresses guard against those servants who discover a disposition to ingratiate themselves into special favour by smooth words and "fair speeches;" by great assurances of their own fidelity, and sly insinuations against their fellow-servants. They are cheats.-Parents too may take a lesson. Let them beware of listening to the fawnings of artful childhood and youth; and above all of giving any encouragement to tale-bearing. This can seldom be practised without lying; and it is itself a wicked and dishonourable thing. That there may be cases in which it becomes the duty of one child to reveal the words and doings of another I am far from denying. But the spirit and manner which distinguish the child that discovers what conscience will not allow it to keep secret, for the sake of the brother or sister, as well as of father and mother, and that does so by constraint and of necessity, are widely different from those of the cunning, selfish tell-tale. Would you, parents, have your children simple-hearted, honourable, generous, and noble-minded?-frown from you every approach to the coaxing and insinuating malice of tale-bearing, and cherish amongst your children the mutual open confidence of affection and truth,-teaching all to be the guardians of each other’s character and honour, to love one another, and to be eager to tell of each other the tale of good rather than of evil.

Verse Proverbs 29:13. "The poor and the deceitful man meet together; the Lord lighteneth both their eyes."-There is a sentiment in a former chapter* analogous to the one in this verse, but by no means the same:-"The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all." The word in this verse translated "the deceitful man" is used nowhere else in Scripture. Some understand it of the creditor, and some of the usurer. The latter is probably near the truth:-the man who takes advantage of the necessities of the poor to exorcise extortion,-to exact from them,-to "grind their faces." The two "meet together,"-in the intercourse of life, and in the transactions of business:-the one in need, the other taking advantage of the need.

* See Proverbs 22:2. The case was provided against by the Mosaic law;*1 and the conduct enjoined by that law is enforced by the consideration in the verse before us:-"The Lord lighteneth both their eyes." There are instances in which the enlightening of the eyes has reference to the mind-to the understanding-and is to be interpreted accordingly, as signifying the imparting of discernment-the giving of knowledge, or the capacity to receive it. But such does not seem to be the sense here. It appears to mean no more than that the Lord sustains the life of both, and at the same time is the giver of all that cheers it, according to a very common and natural sense of the

word light.*2 In all our ordinary phraseology regarding life and death, there is frequent reference to the "eyes." The dimming and darkening of the eyes is one of the indications of life being on the wane, and a very remarkable feature in the dying scene. We speak of the shades of death coming over the eyes; of the fixing and glazing of the eyes, in that solemn hour; and of their being closed in death. The sentiment, then, I conceive, is-that "the poor and the usurer" have alike every moment's existence and every moment's enjoyment from God. "In Him," alike, they both "live and move and have their being."

*1 See Exodus 22:25-26. rr *2 Compare Psalms 13:3; 1 Samuel 14:27. The next question of course is-What is the lesson that is thus taught? The answer is-

1. There is a motive or inducement to the poor, to put their trust in Him who is "the God of their life and the length of their days." He has, in His providence, assigned them an humble lot. But they have their life from Him; and their times are in His hand. The life He has given He does not overlook. He marks and sustains it.

2. There is also a lesson to the usurious and unfeeling oppressor of the poor,-a motive to him to consider what he is doing. The poor whom he is thus using-so selfishly and so cruelly, is the creature of the same God with himself, and is sustained moment after moment by the same power and goodness. There is some thing very shocking in the thought of rendering that life miserable which the blessed God has given, and which He is every instant maintaining;-in the idea that the eyes which He is ever lightening, a fellow-creature should be dimming with the tears of bitterness. While God is giving to the poor "the light of life," it surely becomes us, instead of quenching that light and making that life wretched, to do what lies in our power to make the possession of it worth retaining,-to supply their need, and to comfort their hearts.

Verse fourteenth (Proverbs 29:14) was noticed with verse second (Proverbs 29:2).-And having formerly,* and more than once, touched on the subject of early education, and especially, as a part of it, necessary and salutary correction, explaining its principles, and giving directions for its practice, I do not now again enter into the subject, which is afresh brought before us in verses fifteenth (Proverbs 29:15) and seventeenth (Proverbs 29:17)-"The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul."

* See Proverbs 22:15; Proverbs 23:13-14.

Verse Proverbs 29:16. "When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall."-The former part of this verse seems almost like a truism. The multiplication of the wicked, and the increase of transgression, are next to one and the same thing:-the former being the increase of the agents of evil, and the latter of the evil done. They are different; but they are inseparable; tho one necessarily includes the other. The meaning may be, that wicked men encourage and embolden one another in iniquity; and that, by this means, the corruption spreads. Or,-as in the second verse of the chapter, the same word here rendered "are multiplied" is translated "are in authority"-the reference is, in all probability, to the influence of wicked rulers in promoting the increase of wickedness in the community; which requires not either illustration or proof.-"But the righteous shall see their fall."*-Their fall, that is, from power and authority. It is not the final fall-the perdition of the wicked, that is intended. In that the righteous

have no pleasure. Herein they resemble God;-are of one mind and heart with Him. He says, and confirms it by his oath-"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." In the execution of the sentence against them, God glorifies himself; and the righteous solemnly acquiesce,-acknowledging and celebrating the justice of the divine administration:-"Even so, Lord God, Almighty, for true and righteous are thy judgments!" But pleasure in-witnessing the execution of the sentence, we cannot, we must not, for a moment, imagine them to have.

* Comp. Psalms 37:34-36; Psalms 91:8. In this spirit, then-the spirit of compassionate apprehension and fear, we would, with all earnestness, warn and entreat the ungodly. We would beseech "the wicked to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and to turn unto the Lord who will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Verse Proverbs 29:18. "Where there is no vision the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he." By "vision" is to be understood divine communication. Such communications, indeed, were imparted in different ways-"at sundry times and in divers manners;" but it is clear that the word "vision" here is to be taken comprehensively of them all.*

* Comp. 1 Samuel 3:1. Things are estimated in value according to their rarity or scarceness; and the word precious in this passage is of similar import with scarce or rare. In the absence of such communications, "the people perish." The word thus rendered-has been variously understood. By one eminent critic it is translated-"will apostatize." By others it is rendered "are made naked,"-in the sense in which, on the occasion of the golden calf, Aaron is said to have "made the people naked to their shame." By others still-"are dispersed"-as our Lord is said to have "had compassion on the multitude, because they were faint and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd." The spirit of the passage remains unaffected. The words do not of course imply that wherever there is "vision,"-that wherever divine revelation is enjoyed,-it has its proper effect on those who enjoy it. Alas! no. We might refer for striking and melancholy evidence of the contrary to the state of the world in the time of Enoch before the flood, and of Noah immediately after it; to the character of the Jewish people under the judges and the prophets; to the character of the same infatuated people in the days of Christ and his apostles; to the hardened unbelief and wickedness of those cities that saw the Saviour’s mighty works and repented not; and to the condition, in regard to religion and morals, of the great masses of the population in countries, such as our own, in which the clearest light of revelation shines, and has long shone. But in one view all this is only confirmatory of the truth of the verse before us. It demonstrates and impresses the necessity of divine revelation; the need in which men universally stand of it; seeing even with it-even where it exerts all its restraining power,-men continue in their state of apostasy and rebellion.

Strictly speaking, the entire race should be regarded as in a state of apostasy,-apostasy from the revelation of God originally given to man in innocence; as the God of nature, and subsequently to his fall, as the God of salvation. The apostasy has continued with regard to the vast majority until the present day. There is "vision;" yet the people "perish." Jehovah sent his word to Israel. And what was the result? "What was the manifestation of the character of human nature thence produced? Did not they show, in the midst of "vision,"-when enjoying privileges and means of knowledge and goodness such as had been bestowed on no other people,-an incessant tendency to depart from God?-to leave their own Jehovah for "the gods of the heathen that were round about them?"-to prefer human folly to divine wisdom,-the darkness of error to the light of truth?

Yes: and of this propensity the false prophets were ever availing themselves, while the true were ever lamenting over it, and expostulating with it. But bad as things were, amid "line upon line and precept upon precept," how much worse would they have been, had the people been left with "no vision!" The rise of distinguished prophets often wrought for the time a wonderful change. Thus in the days when Elijah appeared,-the state of religion was very low. Elijah himself thought he was left alone as a worshipper of Jehovah. And, although in this he was mistaken, what were even the seven thousand of Jehovah's reserve compared with the millions of Israel? Elijah was the instrument of giving an effectual check to prevailing ungodliness, and of "turning their hearts back again" from Baal to the Lord their God. And similar was the effect on other occasions. The "vision" threw a light on the deepening gloom-the prophet, with divine authority and evidence, imparting and impressing his messages from Jehovah. The Bible, and faithful teachers of its divine discoveries, are one of God's greatest blessings to the world. It has not unfrequently happened, in regions where the gospel has for a time flourished, and wrought its pleasing wonders in "turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," and in building up believers in their holy faith, and manifesting its salutary influence in the prevailing practice of what is "true honest, pure, lovely, and of good report,"-the rise and succession of a series of careless and unfaithful ministers, has completely altered the moral and spiritual aspect of the place; from life and vigour and fruitfulness, to deadness and desolation, to lukewarmness, declension, and apostasy. What a blessing to such a region, when, in the providence of the Church's exalted Head, there conies a change of the opposite kind; when active, faithful, affectionate, and prayerful teachers start up amid the waste, and pitying the miserable destitution of the inhabitants, "preach the word, and are instant in season and out of season!"-They effect a revival; and, instead of "the people perishing," souls are converted and saved; and "the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose." The increase of "vision," and the circulation of divine instruction works a change on which the eye of every good man,-every child of God, rests with a grateful delight.

Forget not the second part of the verse:-"But he that keepeth the law, happy is he." The words imply our having the law. If you have the law, and do not keep it, you expose yourselves to a heavier sentence of condemnation, than if you had it not. It will be emphatically for the worse to you, and not for the better, if you are found possessors only and not improvers of privilege,-hearers of the word, and not doers.

90-Pro_29:19-27

Proverbs 29:19-27

LECTURE XC.

Proverbs 29:19-27.

"A servant will not be corrected by words; for though he understand he will not answer. Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him. He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child, shall have him become his son at length. An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression. A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit. Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not. The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe. Many seek the ruler's favour: but every man's judgment cometh from the Lord. An unjust man is an abomination to the just; and he that is upright in the way is an abomination to the wicked."

Verse Proverbs 29:19. "A servant will not be corrected by words; for though he understand he will not answer." In interpreting proverbs, it is necessary to bear in mind, that from their very nature, as concentrating in brief expression, whether under a figure or in plain terms, some result of general and long-continued observation and experience,-they must always have some general meaning; and our object should be to find such a sense of the terms in which they are expressed as admits of such a meaning. Now in regard to this verse,-it would be rather hard on the class of society referred to in it, to apply the maxim with any thing approaching to universality;-as affirming that no servant, or that very few servants, will yield obedience to mere verbal orders, or be at all affected by verbal reprimands. On this account it is interpreted by some as expressing only the character of "the slothful, unprofitable, and wicked servant." And thus it is in the Septuagint:-"an obstinate ox perverse servant will not be corrected by words." But this, you will observe, converts the saying into a mere truism-that an obstinate servant will behave obstinately; a saying entirely destitute of the salt of a proverb.-Now, the difficulty is taken away by rendering the word, instead of servant, slave. The general sentiment then expressed, is one which, judging from the principles of human nature, all would expect to find true, and the truth of which has the attestation of experience, wherever slavery has prevailed.-I enter not into the question of the abstract lawfulness of slavery-further than to say that it can never, unless directly enjoined by God as a punishment, be reduced to any thing like consistency with the grand general rule of all rectitude between man and man; and that not till a man can lay his hand on his heart and say, in any given circumstances-"I should like to be a slave," can he be an honest advocate of slavery, or a conscientious slaveholder. But domestic and predial bondage was then, as it since has been, extensively prevalent. And the words before us are expressive of the natural tendency and effect of such bondage,-modified of course according to the measure of absolute property in the slave and power over him, prescribed by the laws of different communities. That tendency is to reluctant and constrained service. The service is not that of affection, but of fear. It is not rendered with willing

and cheerful activity, but solely under the influence of the selfish dread of punishment. There is a constant proneness to sullenness; for which, accordingly, there was (I am glad to be able, even to any extent, to speak in the past tense) an appropriate term in the vocabulary of our own colonial slave-owners and slave-dealers-a proneness to the sulks. There is a backwardness to hear, because there is no will to obey. It is otherwise when service is rendered from attachment, and from felt interest in a master's comfort and benefit. Nor does it at all follow, even with regard to slaves, that the natural tendency of their condition may not be, to a great extent, counteracted by the power of kind and lenient treatment. Few in any situation, even the most unfavourable to the cultivation and exercise of the generous sensibilities, are entirely proof against the influence of these:-but of all states the state of slavery is the most prejudicial and destructive to the open and generous feelings of the heart, and to the influence of gratitude and obligation. The argument against slavery, indeed, is powerful, from its tendency on hath sides of the relation-that of the owner or master as well as that of the slave. In regard to the latter, it tends to the degradation, and prostrate depression to the very dust, of all mental dignity and energy,-as well as to produce resentment, and sullenness, and suspicious jealousy, and reluctant and heartless subjection:-and in regard to the former, its tendency is to engender and foster superciliousness, pride, and passion, severity and cruelty, and an unworthily light estimate of fellow-creatures,-brethren of the same great family, destined to the same immortality, subjects of the same sinfulness and guilt, and redeemed by the same price to the enjoyment of the same inheritance!

I need hardly remark that, to a certain extent, the same tendencies pertain to the relative position of master and servant, whether the latter be bond or free, and whether the former be a purchasing proprietor or a joint possessor of the same liberty. There are rights on either side: and while servants owe to their earthly masters their time and all their powers of active industry, and the application of these with cheerful and hearty readiness,-it will be well for masters and mistresses, on the other hand, to bear in mind that their servants are partakers with themselves of all human feelings and susceptibilities;-and that, if they judge of these from their own experience, and from the principle of the golden rule,-they will be at once sensible that, while necessarily maintaining their own place and expecting all due obedience, the most effectual means, generally speaking, of attaining their end, will be-their throwing into the manner of issuing their commands, and exacting the required obedience, as much as possible of the spirit and practice of the law of kindness. And if they find tempers which even kindness will not subdue,-into which their attempts are vain to infuse the spirit of willing and cheerful activity,-they will have the inward consciousness that the fault has not been theirs.*

* For the spirit in which the mutual duties of master and servant should be fulfilled, see Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-25, with Colossians 4:1. For the illustration of the sentiment of the following verse-"Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him," the reader is referred to Proverbs 26:12.

Verse Proverbs 29:21. "He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child, shall have him become his son at the length." The reference in this verso seems to be to home-born slaves-slaves born in the house and brought up from childhood in the family,-while, under this particular reference there is conveyed a general principle-a maxim of wider application. Observe 1. The conduct is unkind. The child is supposed to be still intended for a slave,-though, from what cause soever of particular liking to it, it is "brought up delicately." The training is unsuitable to the

future station: it unfits him for it. Instead of being inured to subordination, and to the toils and hardships of a slave's life, he is nurtured daintily, so as neither to be fit for them by habit, by strength, nor by anticipation. Were the intention to make him a freeman, and to let him be his own master, and follow his own will, and make his own fortune in the world, it would be well enough:-but to treat like a pet child one who is destined to slave it for life, is, however meant, really cruel.-And here the observation may be generalized. It applies to all cases in which persons are brought up in a way that does not accord with the prospects in life that are before them,-with the situations they are destined, or are even in providence likely, to fill. When they have been accustomed to a style of living quite above what they have any reason to anticipate, they cannot, when the inferior prospects (to which they have never been taught to look forward) come to be realized, feel comfortable or happy. They are not in their element. Their habits unfit them for their occupations; so that they are at home in nothing;-while they feel all the while the depressing influence of disappointed hopes, and an unanticipated change-a sinking from the position they were wont to sustain, and the mode of living and of social intercourse they were accustomed to enjoy.-2. The conduct is imprudent. Expectations may be produced, which never can be gratified; foolish they may be, yet still not without some foundation,-expectations of being always treated as a member of the family, as a child instead of a slave. Nay, such as are crafty and insinuating in their address may, very naturally as human nature goes, take advantage of the partial liking discovered towards them, to ingratiate themselves further and further; and on some occasion when they have succeeded in making a specially favourable impression,-inducing the master to look with a more kindly eye upon them than ordinary,-may even by the arts of flattery and by sly insinuations against the heir, prevail so far as to supplant the children, and in part or in whole, dispossess them of their rightful patrimony. The master of the one-the father of the other-may do a thing in a moment of credulity and of passion, which he cannot recall, and over which he may grieve to the end of his days.

It is greatly conducive to the order and comfort of society, when all have the good sense and the principle to keep their respective places, with mutual good-will and cheerfulness. In the Scriptures, every thing said on the duties of masters and servants, is full of equity, propriety, and kindness. But the most righteous, honourable, and affectionate treatment of a servant, must not be considered as implying such indulgence as would prove to the injury of a child, or as would even unfit the servant for the situation which he or she is destined to fill, or is actually filling. There is not, in this, as in multitudes of similar cases, any possibility of laying down rules of universal observance;-so much depends on diversity of disposition and tempers, so that what would be proper and safe with one would be wrong and hazardous with another. It is a most important qualification of a servant, on the one hand, to know his men place, and from a sense of propriety and duty, cheerfully to conform to it:-and on the other hand, nothing can be more unamiable and unchristian on the part of masters and mistresses than a haughty assumption of superiority, and a determination that a servant shall always be made to feel his situation. The duty is, so to mingle authority with gentleness, and dignity with kind condescension, as that the authority shall be promptly and cheerfully obeyed without being felt,-as that the servant shall be at ease and happy, in the full confidence that nothing equitable and reasonable will be wanting on his master's part, and nothing unjust or unreasonable exacted of him on his.-Christian servants, if they have good common sense along with their Christian principles, will beware of imagining that the equality of all in the church-the union of servant and master as fellow-disciples in the communion of the house of

God, obliterates the lines of demarcation between the different classes in civil society. They will rather be anxious to show the contrary, especially in the eyes of men of the world, to avoid bringing unnecessary reflection and reproach on the religion they profess. It may be exceedingly painful to a Christian master to repress the undue forwardness which may be dictated by a false conception on this subject, associated with a deficiency in strength of mind;-whilst yet it may be indispensable:-only it should be done, not with hauteur, but with monitory and smiling kindness, or with sharpness of reprehension as varying tempers and circumstances may require. What says the Apostle? "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort," 1 Timothy 6:1-2.

Verse Proverbs 29:22. "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." Why does Solomon dwell so often on the evil tendencies of the angry passions? For two reasons:-because they are so prone to excess; and because, not being in themselves directly and in every case sinful, they are ever prone to find excuses for their excess in their legitimacy. Many times have we found him adverting to the subject: Proverbs 10:12; Proverbs 15:18; Proverbs 17:19; Proverbs 26:21. To these passages the reader is referred, and for the sentiment of the following verse, "A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit," to Proverbs 15:32; Proverbs 18:12.

Verse Proverbs 29:24. "Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not." "Hateth his own soul," means in this, as in other instances,-acts to the certain injury and ruin of his soul, as if he hated and desired evil to it: he is his own enemy,-in fact, if not in feeling. The turpitude of theft, as a trespass against the principle and the express precept of the divine law, is here assumed. It requires no proof. The "partner" in any fraud is the man who, although not himself actually engaged in the direct perpetration of it, is privy to it, winks at it, secretly countenances it, and profits by it. He is as bad as the doer. He may screen his conscience under the pretext of his not doing the deed; but such a screen is a mere cobweb; it-will not stand a breath. He may possibly be even worse. If he flatters himself that he is getting the profit without the sin, when he is coolly and deliberately allowing another to damn his own soul,-taking no concern about that, provided he get something by it,-he must indeed be under the power of a "strong delusion." The receiver and resetter is at least as guilty as the thief. I say at least; for in one obvious respect he is worse. His is a general trade, which gives encouragement to many thieves, by holding out to them the means of disposing of their stolen property and evading the law. He is thus, in fact, a partaker in the guilt of all. One thief cannot set up and maintain a resetter; but one resetter may keep at their nefarious trade many thieves. Moreover, when the thief swears falsely* the partner is tempted to allow the perjury to pass undetected, lest he should expose himself as well as the thief; by which means he covers the guilt of another doubly-in the theft and in the perjury. Nay, if he were summoned as a witness, he is tempted to similar perjury himself, and so to bring additional guilt more directly upon his own soul, and draw down upon himself the wrath of God. Thus, every kind and degree of participation in evil, and connivance at its perpetration, is a snare to a man’s soul. What, then, my brethren, is the general lesson? It is-"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." "Finally, brethren, whatsoever

things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things," Php 4:8.

* From the language here used, the Author seems to regard "cursing" in this sense as meaning perjury. Others understand it of "the curse pronounced (Leviticus 5:1.) on him who conceals a theft." "His partner hears this curse;" he is brought under it, yet will not reveal the thief.

Verse Proverbs 29:25. "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." Here we have-1. A principle that leads to evil:-And 2. Another principle that counteracts and corrects it.

1. "The fear of man bringeth a snare." The cases are so endlessly various in which this principle may be conceived to operate, that it is almost impossible to make a selection. I may notice a few. It "bringeth a snare" at the entrance on a religious life, there being few things that have in them a stronger withholding power than "the fear of man"-the dread of the contempt and scorn of the world, the alienation and desertion of friends, and the possible injury to prospects in life, thence arising. It "brings a snare" to believers themselves, when it tempts them to shrink from owning their Master, or from saying and doing what He commands to be said or done; or when it tempts them to concealment, to temporising, to evasion, to apostacy, to undue conformity to the world. It "bringeth a snare" when Christians are tempted to dissembling of their real sentiments, even by the fear of one another, when they happen to differ. It "bringeth a snare," when ministers of the word, "stewards of the mysteries of God," of whom it is required that they be "found faithful," are tempted by the dread of offence, and censure and unpopularity, of the displeasure of individuals or of the multitude, to trim, to consult and conform to the likings and inclinations of their hearers,-to "shun to declare any part of the counsel of God"-or to "handle the word of God deceitfully,"-silencing their consciences, it may be, by pleading prudence, and blaming as deficient in this virtue such as are more faithful than themselves. It "bringeth a snare" to public men, in every department of civil life, when it tempts them from apprehension either of displeasing superiors or inferiors, to swerve from the straightforward course of truth, integrity, and justice, and the public good. The cases indeed, both more public and more private, in which this "fear of man" operates injuriously, are without number; cases, in which we may be tempted by it to "do those things which we ought not to do," and to "fail of doing those things which we ought to do." It operates in great matters and in small; in the highest and the lowest ranks of society, and in all between. It is ever suggesting the question-What will such a one think and say?-What will the world say?-instead of the one and only question which ought to determine every act and every word-What will God say? Our business is, to do our prescribed duty, and trust in Him;-to fulfil the dictates of His will in every situation, steadily, immoveably, without flinching, uninfluenced alike by the smiles and the frowns of men,-"fearing God, and knowing no other fear." This is safety, and this alone. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever," Psalms 125:1. Even if a man’s firm fidelity should occasion him present evil, yet is he safe in the hands of his covenant God. Nothing shall ultimately injure him. O! had this trust in God possessed its due power in the hearts and over the conduct of God’s people, the impartiality of the sacred Record would not have had so many mournful cases to relate of deviations from the path of "simplicity and godly sincerity." It was "the fear of man" that tempted the father of the faithful, and after him his son Isaac, to similar and repeated prevarication and falsehood, in Egypt

and in Gerar. It was "the fear of man," in "Aaron the priest of the Lord," that made the molten calf, even when the vision of the burning mount should have impressed the fear of God. It was "the fear of man" that stained the page of David's history with such deplorable instances of duplicity and dissembling. It was "the fear of man" that led Peter to deny Christ; and at a later period to dissemble so unworthily as to draw down upon him the censure of his fellow-apostle. It was "the fear of man" that made the friends and fellow-servants of Paul, when he was brought to trial before Nero, act with such dastardly unkindness, as to give him cause to say-"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me." And to these might be added, many instances, from the sacred history, of the working of the same principle in characters where we are less surprised and mortified to find it; as in Saul, and Pilate, and others. Beware, then, of the fear of man, and cherish the fear of God!

Verse Proverbs 29:26. "Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the Lord." This may be considered as the opposite temptation. We have had the fear of man: here is his favour. The temptation designed is-the love of "the honour that cometh from men,"-the benefit to be expected from being in the good graces of those who have much in their power. In both cases, let us well remember the assurance:-"Every man's judgment cometh from the Lord." This may be understood as referring to the overruling providence of God. Every man shall have what God appoints to him. Men are in His hand. They are His instruments, whether for evil or for good. Our fears and our hopes are alike in His power,-to disappoint or to fulfil them.-Or it may mean that every man's final judgment cometh from the Lord,-the fixture of his everlasting state. And surely there can be no motive more powerful than this to beware of being swayed by either the favour or the fear of man.

Verse Proverbs 29:27. "An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked." Assuredly the feeling meant by the same form of expression in the two clauses of this verse, is widely different. In the one case, it is the character alone that is "abomination." In the feelings of the just toward the unjust, there is nothing of the nature of personal hostility,-no wish of evil,-no pleasure in his sufferings. It is all the contrary. He pities, and he prays for him:-he does him good as he has opportunity: he would fondly seek and save him. It is otherwise with the unjust toward the just. The malignant hatred of their goodness provokes exasperation against their person. How illustrative of this remark is the contrast between the feelings of the murderers of Stephen and the feelings of their suffering victim!-of the persecutors and the persecuted!-the former "gnashing upon him with their teeth," thirsting for and imbruing their hands in his blood:-the latter, with his dying breath, pleading, like his gracious Master, for their forgiveness! Their character was an abomination to the holy martyr; but not their persons. But they made no such distinction. They hated the principles and the character, and they hated and killed the man. As that first martyr felt, so ought we to feel towards our fellow-sinners, how bitter soever may be their thoughts of us, or their feelings toward us. We own ourselves debtors to the mercy of God in Christ; and we cannot, we dare not, glory over even the worst of men. We may loathe their characters, but we pity and love themselves. We may hate the sin, but we hate not the sinner. The blessed God "hateth all the workers of iniquity." He hates them as workers of iniquity. But in the midst of all His assurances of abhorrence while they go on in sin, He still expostulates and pleads with them in mercy.

You think God’s commands are hard. No; it is "the way of transgressors that is hard." Where is the single command of God’s, that does not bear upon it the impress of goodness as well as of holiness? What is the sum of all that He commands you to do, or commands you to abstain from? Does not the whole mean-"Forsake not thine own mercies:"-destroy not thyself:-consult thy first and best interests? Is not all He says to you said with the view of persuading you to escape from woe, and to embrace happiness ?-What is His one command by the gospel-" that ye believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," but a command to accept salvation, and to be blessed for ever? Obey it and live.

91-Pro_30:1-6

Proverbs 30:1-6

LECTURE XCI.

Proverbs 30:1-6.

"The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake onto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal, Surely I am more brutish than any man. and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell? Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar."

We have now finished what are properly the proverbs of Solomon; consisting, after the introductory part of the book,-of the proverbs selected by himself,-and those subsequently copied out from his larger collection by the men of God in the days of Hezekiah. What remains in the 30th and 31st chapters, may be regarded as a kind of appendix to the book; and in all probability was added by the same persons; no doubt under divine guidance. The first verse may be considered as the title prefixed by them to this small portion of inspired truth, which they were thus directed to preserve from oblivion, and to insert in the canon of holy writ. It is a small portion, consisting of no more than this one chapter. And yet it is not smaller than the words of Obadiah in the Old Testament, or the Epistle of Jude in the New. The occasional sayings and the inspired prophecies of others besides Agur are recorded in the histories of the Bible, although not assigned, any more than his, a distinct and distinctly titled place in the Canon. The apostle Jude, in his epistle, short as it is, has redeemed from being forgotten and lost one of the earliest prophecies delivered in the history of our world,-the prophecy of "Enoch, the seventh from Adam." Had the chapter before us been separated from the book of Proverbs, and placed alone, with the Title in the first verse prefixed to it, it would have borne resemblance in length to one of the small books referred to-"The Vision of Obadiah."

Agur must have been well-known as a "man of God;"-even although it may be doubted, as by some it has been, whether he belonged to the number of those who were called the "sons of the prophets,"-and who were trained in the seminaries called the "schools of the prophets." The doubt has been founded on what he says of himself in the third verse-"I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy;" which has been interpreted as amounting to much the same thing with the words of Amos-"I am not a prophet, neither a prophet's son." How far this may be correct and conclusive, I will not pretend to say. We know nothing of Agur from Scripture history; and but little of him here. His "words" are called a "prophecy." It is, in the Hebrew, the term which, in some passages,* is translated "burden." It occurs again in Proverbs 31:1:-and both there and here it means a weighty and divinely dictated discourse or writing. This portion, then, of the

sayings of Agur,-of what he delivered in the form of inspired instructions, has thus been, in divine providence, preserved, and, with the sanction of other inspired men, assigned a place in the sacred Canon.

* e.g. Isaiah 13:1; Isaiah 15:1, and Habakkuk 1:1.

Some of the ancient fathers had a fancy that by Agur was meant Solomon himself. But this could have no foundation but the place in which the words are inserted; which is but slender evidence. They probably got their place here, in consequence of the resemblance they bore to the contents in general of tho book to which they are appended.

"The man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal." Some translations have it-touching, or concerning, Ithiel and Ucal:-but it is much more likely that Ithiel and Ucal were two of Agur's pupils.

Some have regarded the import of the names Ithiel and Ucal, of which the one signifies God with me, and the other the Mighty or the Mighty one,-not as names, but as expressing the nature of the prophecy or of its subject. But this seems a mere fancy,-both in itself, and in any attempt to make out the appropriateness of the terms as descriptive of the lessons contained in the chapter. Almost all Hebrew names were significant: and the common opinion, as in many other cases, we take to be the true one,-that Ithiel and Ucal, as already mentioned, were two of Agur's disciples; to whom he addressed his instructions, very probably in answer to inquiries from them. Only make the supposition (not in itself surely an improbable one) that they had put to him some questions on topics of a mysterious nature,-topics surpassing the apprehension of the human intellect, and on which God had not been pleased to make any discoveries,-some of the "deep things of God,"-the "secret things which belong unto the Lord:"-make, I say, the supposition; and it imparts a propriety and emphasis to his words-those especially with which he commences, peculiarly striking: *-

* Stuart, supported by several other able critics, gives a widely different rendering of the first verse from that of cur English translation:-"The words of Agur, the son of her who was obeyed in Massa. Thus spake the man: I have toiled for God; I have toiled for God, and have ceased." This rendering does not involve " the change or omission" of even "a single consonant" of the Hebrew text, but only an alteration of the Masoretic vowel points. If the reasons assigned for it may not be regarded as conclusive, they seem at least to establish a strong probability in its favour. Stuart's long and elaborate note is worthy of perusal by those interested in such a critical question.

Verses Proverbs 30:2-3. "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy."-This language, observe, is not the language of another about Agur; but his own words about himself: and we should be about as near the truth were we to regard him as a man destitute of ordinary understanding, and little if at all above the level of the brutes, because he speaks thus of himself, as if we were to regard the Apostle of the Gentiles as hardly having about him as much of the character of a child of God as to admit of his being looked upon as one, because he calls himself "less than the least of all saints." In both cases we have the language of strong feeling-the feeling of deep personal abasement and conscious deficiency. And such language is never measured and precise; it is always very strong,-always in hyperbole. Imagine Agur bringing the powers of his mind to the trial, on some subject of mysterious depth or sublime and incomprehensible vastness; feeling his incompetency to fathom or to grasp it; sinking under the weight of the difficulty, and the

consciousness of his ignorance and weakness, when his intellect was put to such a test;-his breaking out, in terms of extravagance in expressing the feeling with which he was burdened, is in perfect harmony with nature. As Asaph, when, recovering from his temptation, and made sensible of its extreme foolishness, exclaims-"I was as a beast before thee!"-so Agur, feeling the subjects under his consideration utterly above and beyond him, seems to himself as if he had no understanding at all: and indeed it is neither impossible nor improbable, that, in the humility of his spirit, he might think his ignorance and incompetency to be owing, in part, to his deficiency in spirituality of mind, and in becoming elevation of thought and of aspiration after God;-sensible as he must have been then, as we all are now, how much views of divine things are often obscured, and rising affections and earnest aspirings after The Great and The Good,-after the knowledge of God and of heavenly and eternal realities,-are kept down by the influence of the flesh and the world.

It is not unlikely that Ithiel and Ucal had shown a propensity to pry into the secrets of God,-to desire discoveries which God had not been pleased to make,-and to urge their desire with a vehemence and importunity, which, however natural, went beyond what was becoming. Their teacher sets them an example,-an example of the humbleness of mind which belongs to creatures of limited faculties, and dependence on God for the knowledge of what was beyond their own penetration. He expresses himself strongly, in order to impress their minds the more deeply. Arid the more they had been accustomed to look up to him as their superior, with admiration and confidence, the more would they be surprised and struck by the force of his expressions of almost selfannihilation, in regard to the subjects of their inquiries,-respecting which he might have seen them (as is too often the case with those whom experience has not yet shown the limits of their faculties, and the humility which the lesson inspires) too self-sufficient, and hard to satisfy with anything short of the wished-for information. Agur had become duly sensible how little it was that he possessed of wisdom and knowledge,-especially in what regarded the highest of all the fields of human investigation,-the being, the attributes, the counsels, the ways, of the Most High and the Most Holy. In the third verse, "the Holy" is in the original a plural word-the Holies, or the Holy Ones. It is the same as in Proverbs 9:10. The comparison of the two passages shows clearly that it is a designation of Deity:-and the plural nouns which are thus, in different ways and in different instances, used in regard to Jehovah, are justly regarded as having a reference in them to the personal distinction in the unity of the Godhead. And what if the nature of Deity, in this and in other respects, was one of the very subjects of the inquisitive speculation of these disciples of Agur?

It is as if he had said to them:-"You ascribe wisdom and knowledge to your instructor:-you look up to him for information, and for the solution of your difficulties, the unravelling of your perplexities, the clearing of your darkness. But you expect a great deal more from him than he is able to communicate. I have thought of your questions; I have exhausted the powers of my mind upon them; and, whatever may be the effect of the avowal upon you,-how much soever it may possibly let down your teacher in your eyes,-the avowal must be made of my ignorance and incompetency,-with a sense of which, deeper than ever, the consideration of them has overwhelmed me!" Then, to check their presumption,-to impress them with the reasonableness of being, on some subjects, satisfied in ignorance,-subjects manifestly beyond man’s unassisted powers, and beyond the boundary which divine revelation has prescribed for itself,-subjects which God has not explained, and of which, perhaps, no explanation that could be given would be

intelligible to the mental capacities of man,-subjects relative to "the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity"-who "dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto"-"whom no man hath seen or can see,"-and whose "ways are high above out of our sight"-he adds:-

Verse Proverbs 30:4. "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?"-Of these striking words the general spirit appears to me to be the same with that of Job 11:7-9; Job 11:12; the subject of which is the incomprehensibility of God. We cannot scale the height, we cannot fathom the depth, we cannot reach the length, we cannot embrace the width, of the vast, the illimitable subject. Such is the lesson of these words now before us:-"Who hath ascended up into heaven?"-that is, to see the glories of the Invisible,-to learn the secrets of the world unknown,-to read the books of providence, and grace, and judgment? And who hath "descended?"-that is, to bring down and to communicate the discoveries He has made? No man has mounted to the third heavens, and explored their hidden wonders,-and received a commission to carry back the revelation of what he has seen and heard to the sons of men-the children of earth. If such a man there be, "What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?''-who and where is he?-and who and where are they that have the privilege and the honour of connexion with him? What is his name? Is he on earth? Or, if he himself has gone the way of all living, what is his son's name? Point out the descendants of the man whom God has thus supremely distinguished. This is neither more nor less than a challenge to find and to name one, either now existing, or in all preceding ages, who has had an intuitive and perfect acquaintance with the mysteries of God's being, and the secrets of God's mind:-and it implies a strong admonition to humblemindedness,-to beware of presumption,-to be satisfied with the amount of divine communications. Something further than this, indeed, there is. The language clearly conveys the sentiment, that no one but a being who himself possesses the perfections, and exercises the powers, and performs the works of God, can be capable of comprehending God. This seems the intended import of the questions-"Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth?" Find me out the man who has done, or who can do, these things; and I will show you the man who is competent to answer your questions,-to penetrate the depths of God, and to give you full satisfaction. One thing indeed might still be wanting. They might themselves require to have the same capacities and powers with the man who made the communications, in order to their being able to comprehend them. The plain import is-He who has done, and continues to do, these things, is God himself,-and by God himself alone can God be comprehended. By some commentators these words have been understood as containing "a prophetic intimation of Him who came down from heaven to be our instructor and Saviour, and then ascended into heaven to be our advocate; who, as one with the Father, created and upholds all things; who was known in some measure to the ancient church as Jehovah, I AM, and the only-begotten Son of God; and from whom alone the knowledge of God can be obtained. The name of the great Creator, as manifested through his Son, appears to be inquired after; and who is that wise and happy man who has obtained this knowledge?"

While it ought ever to be interesting to the believer's mind to find his Lord in every passage of the Bible that will justly bear to be interpreted of Him, yet, most assuredly, the true way to honour the divine Author of the Bible, as I have had more than once occasion to observe, is-to endeavour to

discover, in all cases, the precise meaning of every portion of it,-to find what was the design of the Holy Spirit,-what the lesson which was intended by Him to be conveyed. This should, in every case, be our sole and earnest aim.

Now the view of this passage which has just been mentioned I cannot regard as at all the true one, for the following reasons:-

First, The form of question here implies the idea of difficulty or impossibility to tell either the name of him who hath "gathered the winds in his fists, or bound the waters in a garment, or established all the ends of the earth,"-or "the name of his son." Now, considering the question as relating to the actual Creator and Governor of the physical universe and the elements and powers of nature, there could exist no difficulty to tell who did the things specified,-to tell the name of the almighty Maker and Superintendent of all things.

Secondly, The question, "What is his name, or what is his son's name?" applies, you observe, to the same person of whom it is also asked, "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?" Now, if this be supposed to refer to Jesus, the future Immanuel, then what are we to make of the additional question, "What is his son's name?" And the question, "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?" cannot apply (nor is it at all pretended that it does) to the Father. Then-

Thirdly, According to the terms of the exposition quoted, that there is a prophetic reference to Him who came down from heaven to be our Instructor and Saviour, and then ascended to heaven to be our Advocate-the questions in the passage ought to be inverted in their order, and should have stood-"Who hath descended from heaven, and ascended?" In the order in which they stand, they do not seem susceptible of any other sense than that which we have put upon them:-namely this, "Where is the man,-where are there any traces of his existence? where is his son, that we may find his genealogy?" "You make your inquiries at me, (as if Agur had said,) but have I gathered the wind in my fists? have I bound up the waters in a garment? have I established the ends of the earth? And before you can obtain satisfactory information, you must find the man who has done all this."

While I say these things in regard to the immediate and proper sense of the passage, I am far from denying-I rejoice in believing-that what is said in it is, in the fullest amount of its meaning, true respecting Jesus of Nazareth-"God manifest in the flesh." Yet even now, when we have obtained, and happily enjoy, the full and clear revelation of the mind and will of Jehovah;-in this gospel age, when "the darkness is past, and the true light shineth"-when, though "no man hath seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, hath declared him,"-when "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath spoken unto us by his Son:"-even now, are there no questions of perplexing difficulty to be asked?-is everything that was before mysterious respecting God and the ways of God, now plain and easily comprehensible? No, verily. Many are the inquiries which may yet be put, which the revelation of God has not answered:-and even of what revelation has made known, many are the explanations which may be desired and sought, which He has not seen meet to give. Still we stand in need of lessons of humility; lessons of selfdiffidence; lessons of gratitude for what has been made known to us, and of patient and submissive acquiescence in that measure of knowledge, without prying into what God has seen meet to withhold and to keep among the "secret things which belong to Himself." It is ours to "receive with meekness" what God has taught us, and not to

attempt making additions to His lessons,-"intruding into those things which we have not seen, vainly puffed up by our fleshly minds." It is well, brethren, to have our minds fully disciplined to this. And this, accordingly, is the lesson pressed by Agur on each of his disciples, and through them upon us.

Verse Proverbs 30:5. "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him." "Every word of God is pure." Yes: how can it be otherwise? If it be asked respecting man, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" so may it be asked respecting God, "What but what is pure can come from untainted purity?" The same character is everywhere given of God's word.* It "is pure," as being truth without any mixture of error. It "is pure," as being perfectly free of all deceitful purpose-all its promises faithful. It "is pure," as having in every part of it a holy influence. It "is pure" in its own nature, like the God whose word it is; and "pure" in all the effects which arise from it,-the characters which the faith of it produces being counterparts to itself,-God's word making those who receive it like Himself.

* Psalms 12:6; Psalms 18:30; Psalms 119:140; Romans 7:12.

There is, perhaps, in the expression here a more immediate reference to the unmingled truth of God's word. This suits the connexion with what follows:-"He is a shield unto them that put their trust in him." Scepticism and infidelity unsettle the mind. They leave it without confidence and without security. The mind under their influence is like a vessel that has drifted from its moorings, and has been left to drive out to sea, without rudder and without anchor,-unmanned, and at the mercy of the winds and waves and currents:-or, to keep nearer to the allusion in the verse under comment, it is like a soldier in the thick and peril of the battle without a shield, in danger from every arrow that flies, and every sword that is raised against him. They make their unhappy subject the sport and the victim of every delusive theory and every temptation of Satan. Hence such expressions as that of Paul to the Ephesians:-

"Over all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall bo able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." God is the "shield" of all who trust in Him. And it is the trust,-it is the firm faith in God,-that imparts the feeling of security. So, what is here said of God himself is said of His truth or faithfulness:-"His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." God could not be "a shield," though His power be almighty, unless He were faithful. It is His faithfulness that renders Him the object of trust. And when this view of God's faithfulness is such as to impart perfect trust-the spirit, calm and tranquil, feels as if it were under the protection of an all-covering shield.* * The figure is frequent:-Genesis 15:1: Psalms 89:11; Psalms 111:2, &c. The sixth verse (Proverbs 30:6) contains a most solemn and important caution:-"Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." "We take the word of God as we have received it. What Paul says of the books of the Old Testament, which formed the Jewish canon in his day, may be applied to the whole Bible-"All scripture is given by inspiration of God." We have the surest ground for believing that the books of both Testaments have all on sufficient authority had their place assigned them in the sacred canon. The very circumstance of some of them having been disputed, only shows the jealousy with which the claims of each were scrutinized ere they were admitted. And to the word of God in general, as well as to the book of prophecy in which they immediately occur, may we truly apply the language-language expressing only more fully and pointedly still the lesson of this verse-"I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man

shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book," Revelation 22:18-19. Of inspired men it was the sacred duty to deliver the word of the Lord exactly as it was communicated to them,-without addition, deduction, or alteration. The charge of God was-"The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord," Jeremiah 23:28. The maxim of the true prophets under the old dispensation was-"As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak." And what Micaiah and others exemplified faithfully under the old economy, Paul and his associates in the ministry exemplified under the new:-"For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ." "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God," 2 Corinthians 2:17; 2 Corinthians 4:1-2. Our duty, my brethren, is clear. It is to KEEP BY THE INSPIRED RECORD; to keep by it sacredly, implicitly, with a holy jealousy for its supreme, sole, and universal authority. As Protestants, we disown all human infallibility;-the authority of all traditions,-of all the dicta of the Fathers,-of all the decrees of councils, whether provincial or oecumenical. Our motto is-"THE BIBLE, AND THE BIBLE ALONE, IS THE RELIGION OF PROTESTANTS." Let us see that we firmly cling to our motto, and that we consistently and uniformly act upon it. It is not merely when, like some enthusiasts, we pretend to receive, ourselves, communications from the Spirit of God of equal authority with his written word, or when we rely upon such communications as are received by others,-that we are chargeable with the guilt of "adding to his words." There are other grounds on which this charge may be found to lie against us. We are thus guilty, when we make any part of the written word itself express a sentiment different from, or even beyond, that which God, by the Holy Spirit, intended it to convey. Our exclusive inquiry should be-What did the divine Author of the Bible mean by this sentence, by this section, or even by this expression? When we have ascertained and expounded the meaning, we may then take it up as a subject for more enlarged illustration and proof from other parts of Scripture; ever bearing in mind that while we are doing so, each portion of the word that is adduced for illustration or evidence be treated precisely on the same principle,-no one of them being ever used beyond its proper amount of meaning. The same principle should make critics very cautious in applying the principle of conjectural emendation-altering words so as to express what they think must have been the sense of the writer. This is extremely hazardous. There is a strong temptation to introduce the application of the principle, when by the alteration the passage is made to speak a language that accords with their preconceived opinions. And commentators and paraphrasts should be on their guard, what phrases they use as synonymous with those of the writer on whom they are commenting,-and equally upon their guard in the use of supplements, for the making out and the clearer expression of the sense. Moreover, in every case in which it can be made clearly to appear, that any word, or phrase, or sentence, has been, under whatever circumstances, foisted into the text in after times, and that it formed no part of the original writing,-the same principle imperatively requires, that we do not employ that word, or phrase, or sentence, or paragraph, as possessing the authority of God;-and if it be of doubtful authenticity, the doubt must in justice be carried forward to the inference we draw, and the conclusion to which

we are led by it. We ought to regard nothing as more fearful, and more anxiously to be shunned, than making the God of truth affirm what he did not mean to affirm, or deny what he did not mean to deny: and so, in effect, to put the seal of heaven to a forgery of our own. And on all points which are of a mysterious character, it becomes us to be very diffident and cautious:-where the simple fact is stated, and no explanation given, we must beware of attaching to our own explanations the authority of the word of God. By attempting to unfold the mode of the fact, where the fact alone is stated, we are in danger of "adding to God's word," and of being "found liars," and exposed to His just reproof and punishment. My brethren-if ever there was a time when a more than ordinary strictness of attention to the principle in this verse was demanded-it is the time in which we live. Let us see that we not only in words assert and maintain it, but in all our practice conscientiously and scrupulously exemplify it,-and press the example on the universal and undeviating imitation of our fellow-christians. Let Christians seek more, at the same time, of a deep and humble sense of their own ignorance, and of their natural perverseness; their inaptitude and slowness to learn the lessons of divine wisdom,-their proneness to spiritual pride,-to the independence of thinking for themselves, and of interpreting God's lessons in a sense of their own,-to being dissatisfied with the measure of divine communications, and adding thereto presumptuously human speculations and inventions. Let us learn, in the humble and docile spirit of children, to sit at the feet of our gracious Instructor,-thankful for all that He gives us to know, and never allowing what we do know to be unsettled in our minds by what we do not know. Let us neither make the God of truth a liar by disbelieving aught that He testifies, nor expose ourselves to His reproof as liars by presuming to add to His words what He has not testified. The prayer which becomes us is that of the psalmist-"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."-"Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day." And let not any be startled at finding in the word of God statements which are above their apprehension. If there are mysteries in the works of God,-should we not expect to find them in His word?-if in nature, why not in revelation?-if in all that God has done, how much more in GOD HIMSELF?-There is not a single department of His works of which the investigation does not bring us to a stand,-to points beyond which we are unable to penetrate. Were everything in that part of the divine administration which His word unfolds perfectly level to every capacity, so as to suggest no questions of perplexity, and to give no occasion for the exclamation-"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me!"-there would be an incongruity between His word and His works. And when we are lost among the works of God, in every direction in which we can explore them, how specially unreasonable to suppose that in the divine nature itself there should be nothing transcending our comprehension;-that we should be competent to search out God, when we are unable to search out any one of His works!-that we should be able to comprehend the mode of His subsistence, when we are unable to understand our own,-unable to answer the question What is life?-unable to explain the connection between the soul and the body-their mutual influence upon each other, and the power which, on the formation of any volition, sets the energies of the physical frame to work for its accomplishment. Let all, then, be diffident and humble in regard to divine communications; and beware of that spirit of lofty and independent speculation which makes light of all that it is required to receive on dictation. Let the evidences of revelation, by all means, be studied and investigated; and when the Bible has had its claims to divine authority satisfactorily established, let the sole question be,-What saith the Scripture? The design of revelation is infinitely gracious-"to show unto men the way of salvation."

That is its own peculiar lesson. If that is missed, all is missed that is worth finding:-for what is all else besides, if it leaves you WITHOUT SALVATION?

92-Pro_30:7-12

Proverbs 30:7-12

LECTURE XCII.

Proverbs 30:7-12.

"Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain. Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty. There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness." In the first of these verses there is no form of address; but there can be no doubt that we are to regard the words as a prayer to God:-to God as the God of providence-the supreme Disposer of all events,-that He would order everything, in sovereign wisdom, agreeably to the spirit and design of the suppliant's prayer; and to God as the God of grace-that in whatever situation He might be pleased, in His providence, to place him, He would furnish him with all the supplies of divine influence required to keep him from evil.

When, with regard to the different petitions of the prayer, Agur says, "Deny me them not before I die," his words are, obviously, not to be understood as meaning that he would be satisfied if, at any time before he closed his earthly life, the things he asks for were granted. The petitions are not of a description to admit of any such interpretation. He could never consider it enough that "vanity and lies should be removed from him" ere he died, though they should continue with him till the latest stage of his course; or that he should only learn contentment before he took his final leave of the world. The words properly signify-"until I die;" that is, grant me them from this time forward to the end of my life, till I shall "go the way of all the earth." His first petition is-"Remove far from me vanity and lies." What may we regard as included under "vanity and lies?" First, all idolatry. This is often, in Scripture, alluded to under such designations as "vanity," "falsehood," "a thing of nought:" and I cannot doubt it was in Agur's mind. In this view, what he asks is, that his heart might be "right with God, and steadfast in His covenant,"-that his affections and desires might be supremely and solely to God, and that Him only he might serve.-Secondly, all error in sentiment;-that he might be so enlightened from above, as to embrace no false views, but might clearly understand divine truth, as revealed in the divine word, and might under a becomingly deep impression of the authority and sacredness of that word, cleave to it in its simplicity and purity, with full purpose of heart, unto the end:-Thirdly, the folly and deceitfulness of sin;-that he might not be the foolish dupe of temptation to those indulgences in evil by which many, in the vanity and infatuation of their minds, cheated themselves of their best blessings, and forfeited the final and eternal inheritance; that he might not hearken to the lying promises of Satan, and, at the expense of such a forfeiture, follow "the pleasures of sin which are but for a season:"-Fourthly, the thinking, inventing, and uttering of falsehood;-that he might ever keep his heart, as under the eye of Him

who "desireth truth in the inward parts;" and that he might ever "speak the truth as he thought it in his heart," putting away all lying, deception, and folly from his lips, and practising all that was "true, and pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report:"-and lastly, having, or expecting foolishly and selfdelusively, to find, his portion in this life,-that he might not be of those who were the victims of the world's delusions, vainly pleasing themselves with that "fashion of the world which passeth away." And this naturally leads me to the threefold prayer which follows. The prayer, let it first be observed, is a very extraordinary one. In the first of its petitions, indeed,-"Give me not poverty"-who is there that will not join? What man of the world, if he thought he should be heard and answered, would not, with his whole heart, say-Give me not poverty?-the great object of the world's deprecation and dread!-But ah! on what different grounds from Agur's would the petition be presented!-for this must be specially remarked-that it is not on account of anything in the situations themselves, considered in a temporal respect, that this good man deprecates either the poverty on the one hand or the riches on the other. It is not on account of the difficulties, privations, and hardships of the one, nor is it on account of the cares, and risks, and anxious encumbrances of the other. It is solely on account of the temptations to sin-the hazard to the religious principle-involved in them. Here, the world cannot go along with him. But all the true children of God will. They will, like Agur, regard every situation and every want in life, as it bears upon and affects their highest and best interests-their relations to the unseen world and to eternity. Look then at the petitions as they lie before us, in this light. We take them in the order of the reasons assigned.

2. "Give me not riches-lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" The gifts of God's kind providence ought to draw the grateful hearts of those who receive them to himself as the Giver: and it is truly affecting to think that they should work on our hearts in the very opposite way to that which is reasonable and right, and in the best sense of the word, natural-in agreement with the true and eternal nature of things:-that the gifts should so often usurp the Giver's place, the place in the affections and desires which should be occupied by Himself. This is one of the strong and melancholy indications of our depravity; that the more we enjoy of God's goodness, the more prone are we to forget Him; the more we get, the more apt to forget. What should we think of such treatment of us? and yet such is our treatment of God. It has been in all ages the manifested character of our fallen race. It is under the influence of this sad tendency, that the man of wealth "denies God and says, Who is the Lord?" This is quite similar to the description of the same character by Asaph:-"They speak loftily: they set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth."-"Who is the Lord?"-that is, that I should seek Him, or serve Him. Agur had seen this exemplified, and he was afraid of himself;-afraid lest he should imbibe the same spirit of lofty independence and high-mindedness,-as if he were superior to the obligations of religion, and could do well enough without God.

Such, then, is the danger of "being full,"-of the ample enjoyment and free use of the wealth of the world,-to engender and cherish the spirit that "denies God,"-that owns not His providence,-that disdains the restraints of His authority,-and that defies His threatenings, and spurns His grace; that says-"Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."-Agur did not consider himself as superior to the influences by which the principles of others had been shaken and overcome, or to the dangers before which others had fallen. He knew human nature better; he knew his own heart better. "Blessed is the man that feareth always!"

3. We have a petition, in the same spirit of self-jealousy, against poverty:-"Give me not poverty-lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."-His apprehensions were the same in kind as before. He feared lest, when feeling the hardships of a state of penury, not to himself alone, but still more to his family, to those nearest and dearest to his heart, he should be tempted to fraud and theft,-that is, to any dishonest practices, for the supplying of his own and their wants,-to any thing inconsistent with the high principles of integrity and honour by which the people of God should be distinguished. And associated with this is the temptation to impiety-"and take the name of my God in vain." This may mean, that he might be tempted, having committed the theft, to conceal it by false swearing-to perjure himself, and so try to coyer one sin by the commission of another; as it is not the first nor the thousandth time that lies have been told, and confirmed by spontaneous or exacted oaths, to prevent the detection of theft. Or it may refer, more generally, to the temptation to use "the name of God" in fretful and impious murmurings; in uttering hard things, in the spirit of angry discontent, against Him. This the poor are too often ready to do. Even the pious poor may, by great and long-continued privation and suffering, have their patience worn out,-become "envious at the foolish, when they see the prosperity of the wicked,"-be tempted to say, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?"-and thus step by step, to arrive at "cursing and bitterness," and "taking the name of Jehovah in vain." This process was what Agur feared, in regard to himself. He dreaded the evil influence of this extreme, as well as of the other.

It is not, perhaps, correct to say, that the desire which Agur expresses, was for a moderate competency of worldly good. That he was impressed strongly with the dangers of the extremes is clear; and with the conviction that in the intermediate position the temptations were fewest and least,-as without question they are. But, in the spirit of humble self-diffidence, he would have been afraid to fix any thing in his mind as that which he exclusively desired:-he would have shrunk from determining, had the determination been put in his power. He leaves all to the judgment and appointment of God himself.

4. Such is clearly the spirit of the words, "Feed me with food convenient for me."-The phrase "convenient for me," or "suitable to me" evidently signifies consistent with my truest interests-the interests of my spiritual state and my everlasting destiny. It would be a very low interpretation of the words, to suppose them to mean no more than what God knew on the whole would be most conducive to his temporal comfort and enjoyment. The interpretation, moreover, would not be at all in harmony with the reasons assigned for the preceding petitions. It would set this fourth request, in the spirit of it, wholly out of keeping with the others.

He says in effect, "Place me, my God, in the condition which Thou-knowing fully as Thou dost my character, and the tendencies of my nature-seest to be best for me-best for me, as regards my highest welfare-the welfare of my soul and my prospects for eternity-that I receive damage in nothing by the snares and temptations of this present evil world."-The lesson is one,-and few lessons can be more important,-of perfect, unreserved acquiescence in divine appointments; along with the supremely earnest desire that all may be directed and overruled in such a manner as most effectually to secure from injury, and to advance in growth, the principles of the spiritual life in our souls, and to ensure our final attainment of heavenly glory,-of the "unsearchable riches of Christ." And where is the man deserving the name of Christian who would hesitate about choosing poverty in preference to riches,-the lowest abasement to the very highest elevation of

worldly condition,-were he assured that the riches and the honours must be enjoyed at the expense of his soul’s good, at the risk, and more than risk, of his spiritual interests, and of his being despoiled of the "better and more enduring substance,"-the "treasure in the heavens which fadeth not?"

Verse Proverbs 30:10. "Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty."-"Accuse not"-literally, "Hurt not with thy tongue"-that "unruly member" by which so immense an amount of mischief, private and public, has ever been wrought. No general counsel, or maxim of duty, is without exceptions. It is obvious that there are cases in which to accuse may be an important and imperative duty. When a master is known by us to be wronged, his property plundered by secret embezzlement, or other evils perpetrated affecting his interests or his reputation, without his privacy. In such cases, it becomes much more than allowable, it becomes incumbent,-a sacred duty, on the principle of the "royal law," to give information. But-

1. There are included in the prohibition slander, and false accusation.-Every thing of this kind is, in all cases, bad; but its turpitude is specially aggravated, when the subject of the slander is an inferior, and the charge against him to his superior, on whom he depends, and whose good opinion is of such essential consequence to him: and on this principle, if aggravated in the case of a servant, still more so is it in that of a slave,-the situation of such a one being sufficiently oppressed and wretched in itself. It is, then, "helping forward the affliction," which humanity should ever seek to alleviate.

2. It implies that we should not be forward and officious in accusing; eager to do it, needlessly; doing it,-when no good end is to be answered by it; or for trivial causes; or on grounds that are not clearly ascertained, but are uncertain and dubious. It should be remembered, how serious a matter it is to introduce an unfounded jealousy between a master and his servant,-serious especially to the latter, being a deep injury to the poor man’s reputation, interest, present happiness, and future prospects; his all, in every view, as regards this world, depending upon his character.

3. The disposition which we ought rather to cherish, in this as in every case, is the disposition to excuse and to palliate, as far as truth will permit, rather than to criminate and blacken. A more unamiable feature there can hardly be in the character of any one, than a proneness to watch for and to report faults;-a malicious satisfaction in destroying a master’s confidence in a servant,-and in this way, it may be, avenging himself of the inferior for some neglect or impropriety in his conduct towards him. This is mean, pitiful, and vile. The motive urged is, "Lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty." The spirit of this consideration is the same as in some other cases mentioned in the Mosaic law.* I understand the words in the verse before us in a similar sense to that expressed in these passages. The curse of the servant may not be itself in a right spirit, or in a justifiable form of words:-yet if there is substantial ground for it,-if wrong is done,-if the inferior, of whom Jehovah is the graciously pledged protector, is really and seriously injured,-if the accuser is thus "found guilty" in the sight of God, He will prove himself the friend of the oppressed, and will vindicate his cause, and avenge the wrong.

* See Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 15:7-9; Deuteronomy 24:14-15. In the following verses Agur may he considered as warning his disciples,-and now warning us, against the characters described by him. In Scripture, the word "generations" is repeatedly used to signify particular

classes or descriptions of men; for two reasons, or points of analogy:-first, that as generation follows generation, so surely, in every generation, a succession of such characters is to be found;-and secondly, that they very often communicate the character to one another, and thus keep up their respective kinds,-are successive propagators of their species.

Beginning with the earliest earthly relation, we have brought before us first the generation of unnatural, ungrateful children-the "generation that curseth their father and doth not bless their mother." Parents ought to be blessed of their children, not cursed. They should be the objects of sincere attachment, self-denying obedience, and kind attention. For their sakes life itself should be ready to be risked and sacrificed. Children, from a proud, self-willed, stubborn spirit, may dislike discipline, restraint, and rebuke:-they may thus long for freedom, as they think and call it,-long to be their own masters, and to have their own way:-they may spurn at the rod, and fret and revile and "curse" their parents. Or, from the spirit of covetousness, and eagerness to obtain possession of their substance, they may wish them dead, and secretly, in their hearts, if not with their lips, "curse" them for living so long, and wish them out of the way, and have no tears for them when they are gone, or only the tears of feigned and hypocritical sorrow. Alas! it is to be feared that such cases were not mere suppositions in the days of Solomon; and that neither are they in our own. If you imagine the cases beyond nature,-then let me remind my young friends, that there may be various degrees of the same description of evil. Young persons may belong to the generation in this verse, who, if they do not positively "curse" yet, negatively, "do not bless." Under both forms of expression Solomon conveys the same generic description of character: and although, on the principle of parallelism, the two clauses of the verse may be regarded as much alike, yet even that does not require perfect sameness, but only similarity-admitting, and indeed generally exemplifying, some shade of difference. "Not blessing" is only thus an inferior measure of the same unnatural spirit that "curses." It implies the destitution, in feeling and in conduct, of the affection and gratitude which the relation requires. Do any of you, my young hearers, belong to this description of character?-this "generation" of unnatural children?-May God forbid! It is a very infamous and detestable character. It is ominous of all else that is evil. I am a father. But I trust I do not speak as a father only, but as a son too, whose memory blesses the departed objects of filial love, when I say that with nothing that concerns me would I trust the youth or the man that "curses his father and blesses not his mother." There is nothing that is good there; no principle on which to depend. It is well that men have agreed to execrate conduct so unnatural. I must remind you, however, that there are some feelings, of which the absence is deeply shocking, while their possession is hardly to be recognised as among the moral virtues, they have in them so much of mere instinct, and are common to men with the brutes. To constitute natural affection a virtue, it must be cultivated and exercised under the influence of a higher principle. Parents must be loved, obeyed, and blessed,-because such is the will of God. Parents stand next to God in the claim which His law makes on the love of the heart:-"Honour thy father and mother, that it may be well with thee:"-"Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right."

Verse Proverbs 30:12. "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness." This is the generation-a very numerous one in every age-of self-deceivers. The "filthiness" here spoken of is the moral pollution of fallen and sinful humanity; of which the word of the holy God gives so sad and so true an account It is in the very nature of this depravity to be insensible to its own existence, or at least to its own degree. Sensibility to its

true extent implies the operation of a new principle, the principle of a new spiritual nature. It is no matter of wonder, then, that depraved creatures should be found thinking well of themselves. There are some who have little consciousness of evil in them at all. And the reason is plain. They look at human laws and human theories pf morals, and the conventional but godless morality of the world, and the prevailing sentiments about good and evil, virtue and vice, among men like themselves, whose moral sentiments are deadened by sin like their own. They come not at once to the only true test-that spiritual law, holy, just, and good, which begins and ends with supreme love to God, as its first requirement, and its pervading and summary principle; from which alone any one act of right and acceptable obedience can proceed. No soul is "washed from its filthiness," till it is delivered from the elementary principle of all moral pollution-enmity against God. There is no true moral cleansing that does not begin with this. There are two things the propensity to which has ever been strong, since man became a fallen creature:-One is, to separate morality from religion, and to imagine that there may be no religion, and yet good enough morality; whereas the divine summary of the moral law consists of two precepts, of which the first relates to God, and the second to men. And it would be just as reasonable to say that the first may be obeyed without the second as to say that the second may be obeyed without the first,-as reasonable to say that a man may be religious without being moral, as to say that a man may be moral without being religious. The two tables of the law are only the higher and the lower departments of one moral code; and the same principles that produce conformity to the one will produce conformity to the other. And where the first principle of all is wanting, there can be true conformity to none. This source of self-deception is most extensively and ruinously prevalent. The other to which I referred is-the externalizing of religion itself. The love and fear of God, springing from faith in Him as revealed to sinners in the Gospel, is the religion of the Bible. But the religion to which men have ever been prone is a religion of outward observance,-of rites and ceremonies, of bodily presence, and posture, and utterance, and act:-a system that lulls the conscience in security by deadening it to the demands of all that is spiritual and holy in the affections and desires of the heart, and all that is truly godly in the life. "What an exemplification of this propensity among the Jews, when they were persuading themselves that they were the chosen people and the favourites of Heaven, at the very time that they were "walking after their own lusts"-"having no fear of God before their eyes,"-breaking every command, and making "the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles,"-"far from God, and far from righteousness." There was a fearful forgetfulness of the apostolic maxim-"He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God," Romans 2:28-29. Nor was the propensity confined to the Jews:-it prevails still. It involves danger to all. It is deplorably manifesting itself in our own days. And many other sources are there of self-delusion-making men "pure in their own eyes, while they have not been washed from their filthiness." They may think well of themselves, as saints and favourites of God, from high doctrinal profession, the antinomian "grace" which tempts the lofty talker and pretender "to continue in sin:"-dreams and visions, and impressions and special intimations of the safety of their state, while their character will not abide the Bible tests of true religion:-connexion with godly men, and especially with godly parents:-self righteous and fanciful experiences, of which the extent and variety are sadly great:-peculiar circumstances in the manner of their own supposed conversion, of which they make much and are ever prone to talk,-dwelling more on themselves than on Christ,-more on what separates them

from others, than on what is common to them with all believers; while after all they are addicted to a variety of evils, which their fancied religions attainments hide from, or palliate to, their consciences, and keep their hearts in the enjoyment of a deceitful and ruinous self-complacency. O my brethren, while we pray sinners to bring themselves to the true standard of character, in order that they may see and feel their need of gospel grace; let us be faithful in bringing ourselves and our profession of that gospel to the true test of faith in Christ and filial relationship to God; "examining ourselves whether we be in the faith, proving our own selves;" lest we be found having a name to live while we are dead,-a form of godliness while we axe denying its power;-lest we be of those who are "pure in their own eyes, and yet have not been washed from their filthiness."

93-Pro_30:13-20

Proverbs 30:13-20

LECTURE XCIII.

Proverbs 30:13-20.

"There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jawteeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men. The horse-leech hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: the grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough. The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it. There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid. Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness." The first of these verses brings before us the haughty, selfconsequential, and supercilious-the "generation" of those who carry their heads high, and look disdainfully down on all around them. This class of men too has been found abundantly in all ages. The spirit described may originate from various causes. There is the pride of high birth-of aristocratic lineage,-that regards with lofty scorn all that is plebeian and vulgar.-There is the pride and vanity of riches, that measures its importance and exacts its homage according to the number of its acres or of its bank deposits; and of this species of the evil there is none that is either so contemptible, so ridiculous, or so provoking, as the pursepride of the weak-minded upstart who has risen suddenly to the self-consequence of a gold-and silver greatness.-There is what the poet has called "the insolence of office"-the lofty and sometimes sufficiently ludicrous airs of men who have got themselves "clothed with a little brief authority;"-and this description of the silliness of self-elation is to be found in the ecclesiastical department of honours, as well as the civil, and in them both from the highest to the lowest grade of dignity,-from the woolsack of the Lord Chancellor to the chair of the smallest municipal corporation; and from the throne of the Archbishop to the desk of an Independent church. There is also, I might mention, the overbearing arrogance of learning-real or pretended, profound or superficial; and the little but often very consequential vanity of various other descriptions of accomplishment. There is still another description of the character,-and in some respects the worst of all. It is exemplified in the sidelong glance of the self-vaunting Pharisee, when he said-"Or even as this publican!"-the haughtiness of self-righteous consequence, which holds its head erect, and lifts the eye of presumptuous boldness, before that God in whose presence archangels "veil their faces with their wings;"-and that to all fellow-men says, with the scowl of indignant disdain-"Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." And indeed the spirit of the "Stand by thyself, come not near to me,"-may be regarded as, in every department, the spirit of the character before us. It says-"Stand by thyself," for I am nobler;-"Stand

by thyself," for I am richer;-"Stand by thyself," for I am wiser;-"Stand by thyself," for I am more learned and accomplished;-"Stand by thyself," for I am by office greater;-as well as "Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou."

All these and all other descriptions of pride are laid under severe condemnation and prohibition in the divine word. Its declarations are-"The lofty looks of men shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted:"-"God resisteth the proud:"-"The proud he knoweth afar off:"-"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven:"-"Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones:"-"Before honour is humility:"-"Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalteth."

"Whenever any man comes aright to God,-that is, comes to him as a sinful and guilty creature,-feeling his own unworthiness, nothingness, and obnoxiousness to the divine displeasure,-abased in his own sight,-a suppliant for mercy,-all descriptions of pride will be brought down and crucified. They will no longer be indulged;-no longer vindicated under plausible excuses and palliative epithets. As a believing sinner, he will become, like his gracious Master, "meek and lowly in heart:"-his eyes no longer lofty, nor his eyelids lifted,-the heart being no longer haughty. "Put on, as the elect of God, humbleness of mind."

Verse Proverbs 30:14. "There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw-teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men."-Here we have another class,-the generation of hard-hearted, cruel, insatiable oppressors. The forcible figurative expressions here used to depict them need no analysis. To analyse would be to weaken. They are persons who, whether to gratify their avarice, or their profligate ambition, or their love of pleasure and dissipation and extravagance, make no account of the property, the liberty, the peace, the comfort, the enjoyments, the very lives of others,-and especially of the poor,-when they stand in the way of their own gratification. We dwell not on the character. It is too often to be found. All history, alas! is full of it; nor would it be difficult to multiply examples of it, on a larger and on a smaller scale, in our own days. The history of conquest, of colonization, of slavery and slave-trading,-and of some departments of business, in which griping and grasping avarice-that "love of money which is the root of all evil,"-might furnish many a sad tale in the way of illustration. The character is ever introduced in Scripture with the strongest expressions of divine detestation.* * Proverbs 28:15-17, &c.

Verses Proverbs 30:15-16. "The horse-leech hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: the grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with, water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough."-There is an evident connexion between these verses and what precedes,-especially with the character described in the fourteenth verse. There is a comparison intended, in illustration of that character;-or rather a series of comparisons. There could not be a more apt one than the first. The "horseleech" or blood-sucker,*1 gorges itself with blood, drawing it in with all possible eagerness, and never relaxing its hold,-still emptying itself, and still seeking more,-or filling itself even to bursting:-an appropriate image surely for the insatiable desires of the man of avarice, or of the profligate man of pleasure and extravagance. In the expression-"The horse-leech hath two

daughters" there is by some thought to be an allusion to the two forks of the tongue by which it fastens itself to draw the blood. And different notions have been entertained as to what are meant by the "two daughters." It has been said that daughter, in the same way as son, is used to signify that which bears some striking resemblance to the thing of which it is represented as the son or the daughter:-and cruelty or blood-thirstiness and covetousness have been conceived the dispositions here meant to be thus represented. I confess myself very doubtful as to these views; and am much inclined to leave out the supplementary word crying, and to consider the Give, Give, as what Solomon intends by the daughters of the horse-leech: "The horse-leech hath two daughters, Give, Give."*2 The daughters have one name and one character. They plead and cater for the mother. The plain meaning is that the "horse-leech" is never satisfied. Greed is its very offspring:-"Give, Give," its two daughters. A more fit emblem, then, there could hardly be, for insatiable avarice, or the insatiable love of pleasure. What follows is also to be understood as being in the nature of comparison:-"There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: the grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough." The meaning is-that the desires of avarice and of ambition and pleasure are insatiable, as the grave, and the barren womb, the earth, and the fire. Taking the words in this connexion, they are full of point and appropriateness. To take them by themselves, out of connexion with what they are clearly designed to illustrate, is to render them tame, vapid, and unworthy of the position they hold among divine sayings. "The grave" is still, since sin entered into the world, ever, ever, ever, opening its mouth for new victims. The barren womb is still fretfully impatient for the blessing of children-"Give me children, else I die." The earth "drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it," and is incessantly needing and craving fresh moisture,-and after long drought can hardly be saturated. The fire is ever requiring new supplies of fuel, consuming and devouring all that is thrown into it. Such are the insatiable appetites of avarice, pleasure, and ambition.

*1 The meaning is disputed. Stuart renders vampire.

*2 Stuart takes the same view. His work had not appeared when these Lectures were prepared.

If you only suppose that, in this series of comparisons, Solomon has reference at once to the characters in the fourteenth verse and to those also in the twelfth and thirteenth-(the desire of notice, and admiration, and flattery, being as insatiable on the part of those who, in different ways, entertain the high conceit of themselves, however false and foolish, which is there described, as are the avaricious, the ambitious, and the sensual)-then, by taking the seventeenth verse in connexion with the eleventh, we shall have the series of comparisons complete. In the eleventh verse we have the generation of rebellious children-without natural affection: and in the seventeenth we have their sentence:-"The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." Here too is a figure. It expresses the certain and fearful vengeance that shall fall upon despisers and mockers of parents. Think of it, my young friends. The eye that winks in mockery,-or that leers with disdain,-or that kindles in hatred and rage,-or that turns away with indifference or aversion,-that eye indicates states of heart which the Lord abhors, and which He will visit with punitive vengeance. Although the language is manifestly figurative, and the birds of prey that pick out the guilty eye are but emblems of the avenging displeasure of a sin-hating God, bringing punishment upon the guilty soul,-yet has it not unfrequently been verified to the letter. All who have marked the

history of crime are well aware how many criminals who have come to the gallows, have acknowledged the commencement of their career of vice and villany to have been contempt of parents. And these, after public execution, have been thrown to the beasts and birds of prey; or they have been gibbeted in irons, till the mocking eye has been picked out by the ravens of the valley, or devoured by the young eagles, and the carrion fowls have eaten their flesh from their bones. Let the young take warning,-and beware of every rising emotion of disrespect, and of every word, or look, or act of contempt and insubordination:-"Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise." The following verses must, in like manner, be understood in the way of comparison:-and so understood, they are full of force, and full of practical instruction-verses Proverbs 30:18-20. "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid. Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness."-What is the comparison? It is that of the wiles of the infamous and practised seducer of female honour and virtue,-and of the arts of the intriguing and accomplished adulteress, both in laying wait for her prey, and in concealing her guilt-to "the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, and the way of a ship in the midst of the sea:"-and a warning is thus conveyed with regard to both,-a practical and profitable warning. It is not the philosophical or scientific principle on which the eagle flies, by which she is borne up on the air, and by which all her motions are effected, that is here the subject of wonder, although wonderful it is, and like everything else in nature, fitted to fill the observant mind with devout admiration:-neither is it the peculiar structure, and the laws of muscular motion connected with it, by which the convolutions, and the side and forward movements of the serpent are accomplished and regulated:-nor is it the mechanical principle, applied and adjusted by the skill of man, by which the ship is upheld on the water, and is propelled, and "turned whithersoever the governor listeth." It is not to these,-no, not at all-that Agur refers. His lesson is one, not in natural or in physical science or in human art,-but one in morals,-one relative to vice and to virtue,-to the dangers from the one, and the necessity of carefully guarding the other. The spirit of the comparison, in all the three cases, lies in the difficulty or the impossibility of tracing the path. The capricious windings, and circlings, and dartings and hoverings, and risings and fallings, of the eagle, no one can follow. The bird itself could not trace the same course again. The path of the serpent is intricately tortuous, bending, and twisting, and convoluting, and pushing itself in every possible direction;-so that there is no tracing of its foldings and doublings. The ship’s course is instantly lost: and it tacks and retacks, and stretches from point to point, to attain its destination. It is impossible to follow the very same track again. And in addition to the impossibility of tracing the course, there is another thing in the comparison. There is, in each of the cases, an end in view, an object to be effected. The eagle adapts its various movements, so as at last to pounce upon its prey:-the serpent, tortuous as is his path, has his aim, and reaches it:-the ship, with the wind ahead, shifts and tacks about; but still with a certain point to be gained. The comparison is of these three things to two others-to the manifold wiles of the artful and vile seducer:-and to the similar arts of the crafty adulteress in luring secretly her prey, and in hiding from detection her infamy.-Artful villains-wretches for whom no term of infamy is too strong-insinuate themselves into the affections of young women, by an endless diversity of schemes and stratagems,-of pretensions, and promises, and flatteries, and sophistical arguments, and protestations, and persuasions, such as cannot he all unravelled:- "Studied, sly, ensnaring

arts," varying according to characters and circumstances;-like the wheelings and circlings of the eagle in the air,-or the curvatures of "the crooked serpent" upon a rock,-or the tackings and doublings of a ship at sea. And, as in these cases there is no trace of the course left, so in the case which they illustrate, the great art is, to leave no trace by which the progress and consummation of guilt can afterwards be marked and substantiated.* * Comp. Proverbs 5:6. So too the unfaithful-the adulterous wife, is full of artifice,-this being in her case even more necessary than in the other. And when she has secured her end,-there is artifice to conceal it-to impose upon her injured husband. She here appears before us, most graphically, assuming the air of perfect composure-of one completely at her ease;-her conscience, if not actually seared, brought under sufficient coercive control to cover all emotion. She sits down as usual to her meal, with her husband and family,-with full self-possession and indifference of manner,-just as if nothing had happened; "eating, and wiping her mouth, and saying, I have done no evil"-telling tales perhaps of the guilt of others, affecting to shudder at them, and comparing her own innocence with their shameful conduct.

I dwell not on these monstrous evils. Read the early chapters of this book, ye youthful and thoughtless especially, and weigh them well. You will find there an abundance of faithful and affectionate warning-warning drawn from both observation and woful experience, of the criminality and the ruinous consequences to body, soul, and estate,-for time and for eternity,-of the evils in question, evils against which faithfulness commands us to warn, and to warn with all possible earnestness,-while delicacy and propriety forbid enlargement.

I conclude by beseeching God’s spiritual children to cultivate the tempers and pursue the courses of conduct, that stand opposed to those of the "generations" described in this passage.-Ye who have parents,-and especially young professors-cherish and display the reverential and dutiful affection that ought ever to be maintained towards father and mother.-Cultivate all of you real inward purity of heart, from which there will spring a growing purity of life.-Cherish a lowly spirit:-"be clothed with humility,"-not humility on your knees before the throne merely, but humility which, when you rise from your knees, and mingle with your family and with the world, diffuses its lovely influence over your entire deportment.-Cultivate benevolent kindness, in affection of heart, in the words of the mouth, and in beneficent activity, towards all who come within the sphere of your influence;-"doing good to all, and especially to them who are of the household of faith:"-"putting on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies." "Take heed, and beware of covetousness:"-"lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven:"-and as to ambition, let "the honour that cometh from God," rather than that which men bestow, be what you seek and long to secure. And beware of every unchaste thought, word, and action. Let, in short, your entire course of life, in all its departments,-in your closets with God,-in your homes with your families,-in your fields, your warehouses, and your workshops,-in all your private and your public intercourse,-be constantly under the regulating, the impelling, and the restraining influence of the fear and the love of God. Thus "work out your own salvation," and "hold forth the word of life."

94-Pro_30:21-33

Proverbs 30:21-33

LECTURE XCIV.

Proverbs 30:21-33.

"For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear: for a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; for an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress. There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces. There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: a lion, which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; a grey-hound; an he-goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up. If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth. Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood; so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife." The particulars here enumerated have reference to both public and private life. They have many a time created, and are calculated from their nature to create, much disturbance and mischief in the different departments of human society. We shall first offer a few remarks on each, and then you will be able to judge of their extensive comprehensiveness.

1. "For a servant when he reigneth."-History is not without examples-and especially the history of ancient eastern nations, of men of low extraction and of mean and ignoble spirit and character, who, by favouring circumstances, have either raised themselves, or for the purposes of others have been raised, to stations of authority and power. Such men are apt to become intoxicated by their sudden or their self-acquired elevation:-and the haughtiness of self-importance is nearly allied to, and naturally draws after it in its train, the spirit of imperiousness, cruelty, rapacity, and oppression,-of impatience of contradiction and control,-of fierceness and vindictiveness,-of incessant jealousy-a jealousy engendered by the very consciousness of their being out of place and the objects of envy and indignant pride on the part of others-as harbouring designs and framing plots against their crowns or against their lives:-and this jealousy, like other descriptions of it, is "cruel as the grave."

Moreover, a slave, or menial, is not supposed to have the fitness and competency, in point of mental culture, habits of life, knowledge of mankind and of the science of government, or comprehensiveness and foresight in his views, for the exercise of rule. His elevation is a departure from the ordinary course of things in society, and is not to be expected to be productive of good;-not only on account of his own defective qualifications, but the inevitable risks, springing from such causes as those already adverted to, of conspiracies and seditions, of rebellions and civil wars,-so fearfully destructive of the peace and order, the prosperity and happiness, of every

community.

There is in the words, as in most of the proverbs of the same form, a general principle applicable to the cases of all persons who are suddenly raised, and raised high it may be, above their level, to stations they are not competent to fill. Disquietude and vexation are the natural consequences. And those who, unhappily, are not sensible of their own deficiencies, and, from "thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think," aspire to situations which are above them, are the most likely, if they obtain the gratification of their ambition, to abuse the power which they get into their hands. "The earth is disquieted" by them; "it cannot bear them."

2. "For a fool when he is filled with meat."-We have many times had occasion to notice the character meant by Solomon under this designation of "fool;" and Agur is to be understood as using it in the same sense. His being "filled with meat" may be understood literally as descriptive of the fool indulging to repletion in eating and drinking,-by which his spirit is elevated, by which the restraints of the fear of God and man are for the time removed. Then their unprincipled folly breaks forth in all its exuberance, without control, and carries them frequently beyond all the limits of possible sufferance. They give full and free scope to their insolent self-sufficiency, their impertinence, their scurrility and abuse, their disputatiousness, their profaneness, their obscenity, or their sheer and drivelling nonsense, in such a way as causes a large amount of present laceration and distress to the feelings of others:-and then, their words uttered, and their actions done, in these circumstances, frequently give rise to consequences extensively and permanently mischievous. But being "filled with meat," may be understood as the image of temporal prosperity. "When thou hast eaten and art full," was, in the language of Moses to the Israelites, the expression for abundance of temporal good:-and a part of Asaph’s description of the prosperous man of the world-whom he denominates "the foolish" and "the wicked"-is, "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish." And Paul, in describing his own spirit of contentment, says-"I know both how to be full and to be hungry,-both to abound and to suffer need." In this view of the words, the character before us in them is that of the man who prospers in the world, but has neither sense nor principle to make a right use of his abundance;-whom it elates with purse-proud insolence, with all its quarrelsomeness and fiery jealousy, which exacts the punctilios of haughtiness, and which nothing but blood will appease;-or who squanders it in every way that is pernicious to society around him,-in all that is vile, and vicious, and mischievous,-drawing others in numbers, along with him, into the ways of profligacy, and debauchery, and crime. By such characters "the earth is disquieted; it cannot bear them."

3. "For an odious woman when she is married."-Here we come into domestic life-which may be called the nursery of human society-in which, to a great extent, the character of communities is formed. "An odious woman" is a woman of unamiable character,-whose temper is violent, contentious, and quarrelsome, or peevish, fretful, and unreasonable; or, still worse, who is addicted to shameful vices,-as of insobriety and incontinence. Such a woman is utterly unfit for the care and management of a family, in any one of its departments,-as a wife, as a mother, or as a mistress. When unhappily she finds one who, whether from ignorance or infatuation, unites himself with her, she produces a whole lifetime of disquietude, vexation, and wretchedness to husband, and family, and connexions, and friends. She makes her yoke-fellow rue the day that he made so luckless or so mad a choice,-having chosen one of "those cheats, who are doves in their virgin state, and vultures the week after they are married."* By such characters-in domestic life, "the

earth is disquieted; it cannot bear them."

* Comp. Proverbs 19:13; Proverbs 21:9; Proverbs 21:19, &c.

4. "And an handmaid that is heir to her mistress."-This is evidently a case similar in nature to the first of the four-"a servant when he reigneth." It is one of the same genus,-an inversion of the natural and proper order of society. It is the case of a maid-servant, who, by humouring, and pleasing, and flattering, and coaxing, has got about her mistress, ingratiated herself into her good-liking,-as Matthew Henry quaintly says, "got the length of her foot,"-and has thus induced her to put her into her will, as the heiress of her fortune-of all that she has. Such things had been, it would appear; and such things may be still. And from the tendencies before stated, a person of this description is all but sure to be selfish, insolent, and overbearing; either from the ascendency she has acquired, and her knowledge of what is before her, (especially to any whom she may have outwitted, and supplanted, and disappointed of their hopes)-or from the sudden possession of property, without strength of mind to bear the change, or prudence and discretion to improve it to any good purpose.

Another view, and a much worse one, has been taken of the case-as being that of a servant who has supplanted her mistress in the affections of her husband,-found ways and means to usurp her place there, gained an ascendency over him, and induced him to give her, tacitly or by express engagement, the prospect of succession,-or possibly even to divorce his wife upon false pretexts, or to make her so miserable as to force her to separation,-that he may live with the usurper of her rights, and give her all that he can of what should have gone to the other. This is indeed a case of fearful and intolerable distress. O! what an entire and wretched overthrow of all the blessings-in themselves, virtuously enjoyed, so exquisite and so precious,-of domestic life!-What bitterness, and alienation, and jealousy, and heart-break, and family ruin and desolation!-For such characters "the earth is disquieted; it cannot bear them." And now, just notice the comprehensiveness, in regard to the happiness of human life, of the four things thus enumerated. They begin, observe, at the throne, and come down to the domestic servant. They embrace four great sources of the social unhappiness of mankind. These are-incompetent rule, prosperous and besotted folly, conjugal alienation and strife with its domestic miseries, and the unnatural inversion of social order. In the four verses which follow we have an assemblage of instances of what we may term the instructive wisdom of the inferior creation; which, in all its departments, is full of lessons to man, if man had but the wit to learn and the inclination to follow them.-Nature is the art of God. Instinct is the wisdom of God. Few things, if any, are more difficult than to draw the line, with any precision, between instinct and reason. A great deal (as might easily be shown, were this the time and place for the discussion,) of what is thoughtlessly ascribed to the former, bears all the marks and indications of the latter. We many a time call the very thing instinct in the brute which we call reason in man. The truth is, that man has his instincts, and that brutes have their reason. But the difference in degree is so immense as fully to justify the designations of rational and irrational. The great leading distinction in kind between man and beast lies in a sense of God and of moral responsibility, connected at the same time, with the attribute of immortality, of which both pertain to man, and neither to the beast. But, without entering into any metaphysical distinctions on the subject of reason and instinct, whether in man or in brute, it is enough to say that the cases here brought before us are cases, to a great extent at least, of pure instinct. We have-

1. The ANTS. We cannot enter into the natural history of these little creatures, of which there are many varieties, and of which accounts the most extraordinary, yet well authenticated, are on record. The words before us limit our attention to one point-the same point Solomon had brought before us toward the beginning of this book, in his inculcation of providence and industry:-"The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer."* Thus these little and feeble creatures supply the lack of strength by combination and perseverance,-all directed to an end, and yet that end, we have no reason to imagine, thought of at the time. By an instinctive propensity, common to them all, though more extraordinary in some tribes of them than in others,-and, there is every ground to believe, manifested and exercised by them all, from the creation of the world to the present hour; yet at times with an adaptation to peculiar circumstances, and a mutual communication and harmonious co-operation one with another, altogether confounding;-by this propensity, I say, they provide against the coming winter enough, and more than enough, for their own sustenance and that of their young; and make the provision without any knowledge on their part of the changes of the seasons, or of the astronomical causes of those changes. The instinct that guides them is one of the varieties of the "manifold wisdom" of Him who formed them; at once giving them their being, and adapting their natures to their modes of life.

* See Proverbs 6:6-8.

2. We have next the CONIES:-"The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks." It is the same animal that is mentioned, and with a similar distinctive property, in Psalms 104:18. It has been with naturalists and Hebricians, a matter of question what the animal is that is meant by the original term. This is not a point of material consequence in regard to the lesson designed to be conveyed. The two qualities here mentioned are, feebleness and dwelling in tits rocks. It seems pretty generally agreed, that the animal meant is not what we term the coney.* It is, most probably, what was called the daman Israel or Israel’s lamb; spoken of as a harmless creature, resembling in size and qualities the rabbit, and quite agreeing with the description before us,-being distinguished for its feebleness, which it supplies like the former, by its instinctive wisdom and sagacity; and by its making its nest or habitation in the clefts of the rocks,-to which it shows decided attachment, as well as by its being gregarious, and living in families or little companies. Their "houses" are very commodious residences, and secure refuges from their enemies and pursuers. Incapable of protecting themselves by any strength, or any powerful offensive weapon, with which many other animals are provided, nature teaches them to betake themselves for protection and safety to the rocks of the mountains. And what is nature but the God of nature?-and what this instinct but again God’s manifold wisdom?

* Conies do not appear to build among the rocks; and it is doubted whether they are indigenous to Palestine. Some render the word here used mountain-mice.

3. We have the LOCUSTS:-"The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands." The accounts given by naturalists and travellers of the countless myriads of these insects, which go in such immense and compacted legions, as to darken the air and to desolate the richest and most fertile districts to a vast extent, in an incredibly short space of time, are very astonishing. They formed, as all of you are aware, one of the plagues of Egypt. It is not, however, to their destructive ravages that our attention is here called:-it is to the regularity and unanimity of their simultaneous movements. They keep time, and they keep rank,-they rise, they fly, they halt, they settle again for

the purposes of devastation for their own support,-just as if they did every thing by direction, under the orders of a general, with one consent, and for the common good. I may direct you for a fine and highly poetical illustration of this in the book of the prophet Joel-only of course premising that under the figure of an invading army the prophet is describing the judicial visitation of God by the devastating swarms of the locust,-of whose approach the noise was sometimes heard at the distance of several miles,-"the sound of their wings being as the sound of chariots and horsemen rushing to battle."* * See Joel 2:2-11; Joel 2:25. rr

4. We have the Spider.-This insect, on different accounts, is not a favourite. But its structure is full of wonders:-and the assiduity, and persevering diligence of the little creature, and the ingenuity, the delicacy, and the appropriateness of its workmanship, together with its varied adaptation to places, and situations, and circumstances,-are all very interesting, and very curious and surprising. She "layeth hold with her hands" and the neatness, the fineness, and the despatch, with which she draws out her threads, the firmness with which she attaches them, and the symmetry and strength with which she intertwines and weaves them together; and then the patience with which she lies in wait for her prey, and the instant alertness with which she springs upon, seizes, and secures it, either devouring it, or fastening it for future use,-are all admirable.* Thus both gregarious and solitary creatures, according to their respective characters and modes of life, read to us lessons of practical wisdom. For assuredly, those here mentioned were introduced not merely as furnishing facts in natural history, but for the purposes of moral and prudential instruction.

* Stuart contends, perhaps correctly, that the word should be rendered Lizard; and it would, in some respects at least, be sufficiently appropriate if it is in Palestine as in India; where in every dwelling, from the palace to the hovel, the little house-lizard may be seen on the walls watching for and darting upon its prey. The lesson taught us by the ants, as we have seen, is that of diligence, discretion, and foresight.-The lesson from the coney, or rather the Israel’s Lamb, is the duty of prudent regard to residence, and security for ourselves and families against discomfort and danger-against all enemies and invaders.-From the locust we learn the importance and benefit of order, and union, and co-operation, for the accomplishment of objects of common interest whether civil or sacred. From the spider we learn the advantage of skill, ingenuity, and industry in all the arts and occupations of fife. And by the expression which Agur adds-"and is in kings’ palaces," we seem to be taught an additional lesson; this expression being apparently designed to associate in our minds the ideas of diligence and ingenuity with honour, distinction, advancement. There is no saying what men who, in station and appearance, are the most unpromising may, by dint of these virtues, attain to.* * See Proverbs 22:29.

We may even conceive views of still more enlarged comprehensiveness as being included in these verses. It has been remarked by some, that the four emblems express all that is requisite for the conservation and well-being of a STATE or KINGDOM. There is supply of food;-commodious and secure dwelling-places;-subordination, concord, and united exertion;-and the prevalence and encouragement of the ingenious and useful arts. These are things that governors and kings should look to. And we may apply the emblematic lessons to domestic life. Before a man can prudently marry, and have a family, he should have some suitable provision made, and something like a fair prospect of being able to support them. Next is to be found a suitable dwelling, adapted to his circumstances and convenience. Then, when settled, there must be harmony, union, co-operation,

in all departments of the household. And lastly, there must be the diligent, constant, persevering application of his skill and labour to his worldly calling. And to these allow me to add, without charging me with being fanciful,-that, as these creatures derive their instincts from God, and act under his superintendence and direction, that God should be acknowledged by us in all our ways and in all our doings, and in all the comforts and enjoyments which are their results, as the blessed source of all we are, of all we have, of all we enjoy, and of all we hope for.

Another lesson still let us learn-namely, to estimate men not by external condition or greatness, but by their wisdom; making the "mind the standard of the man." These creatures appear insignificant; but they are commended to our admiration by their sagacity and skill. So-"there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." And when man, in the position which he holds in the scale of being, acts as consistently with the ends of his existence,-with his character and his destinies, as these creatures do with theirs,-then is there room for our highest admiration!-" The chief end of man is-to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever!"

Verses Proverbs 30:29-31. "There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: a lion, which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; a grey-hound; an he-goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up." Here too lessons of moral wisdom are meant to be conveyed. We are not for a moment to suppose that the intention of Agur is merely to invite us to admire the gait of the "lion," the king of beasts, who marches on in the nobility of his might, in courageous consciousness of his power, altering not his pace, and fearless of whatever comes in his way:-or the grace and elegance of the "greyhound," and the nimble fleetness of his course,*-or the portly dignity of the leader of the flock, that walks at their head, conducting and caring for them:-or the majesty of royal authority and honour, of a king maintaining his dignity, bearing his crowned head with the stateliness of office.

* The original word means contracted or girt in the loins. Some from this have thought the war-horse meant:-but the descriptive term applies well to the greyhound.

I am disposed to think that here, as in verses Proverbs 30:18-19, we are to interpret the language on the principle of an intended comparison between the last of the four and the three preceding; that is-of a king to the lion, the greyhound, and the he-goat. In the peculiarities of the three animals, the characteristics of the king’s character are figured:-his courage and undaunted intrepidity by the lion;-his readiness for activity and speed in the pursuit of every legitimate object,-as well as fit elegance and gracefulness, by the greyhound;-and his becoming example set before his people, leading them in right ways, and caring for their safety, by the he-goat. And there are lessons for all; that all should maintain a deportment dignified, becoming, and exemplary,--such as will command respect, repress the forward petulance of self-sufficiency, and conceit,-subdue opposition, and induce imitation, and conciliate affection.

What he had said of the king probably suggests verse Proverbs 30:32. "If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil. lay thine hand upon thy month."* The meaning seems to be-when thou art made sensible of having done wrong by taking too much upon thee in the royal presence,-conducting thyself in any way with deficiency of due respect;-or, when thou art conscious of having "thought,"-intended and meditated evil;-then thy best and most becoming, and withal thy safest course, is immediate submission and silence; not eager self-vindication, not hasty

and irritating words,-not recriminating and laying the blame on others; and seeking to palliate unduly thine own behaviour,-but to the full extent to which thy consciousness of wrong reaches, "confessing and forsaking." This is in itself the dictate of propriety: and it is at the same time that of prudence. The reason follows:-verse Proverbs 30:33. "Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood; so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife." As these causes produce their respective effects,-effects which naturally follow, which every one expects,-so-" the forcing of wrath "-by obstinate self-vindication, or by arrogant and. reproachful language, as if one wore trying how far he might go in putting the royal forbearance and clemency to the test,-"bringeth forth strife,"-produces the most violent and implacable animosities and contentions;-and with a king "against whom there is no rising up," what can be more infatuated?

* Comp. Ecclesiastes 8:3. To conclude, let us all seek, by fulfilling aright the duties becoming the spheres in which Providence has called us to move, to be a blessing in the circle of our influence, and not a curse. Let others, if they will, "glory in their shame," in disquieting, troubling, harassing all about them; but let us cultivate and carry out into practice all those dispositions which are fitted to secure for us the affection, esteem, and blessing of our fellow creatures.

Let us further, in the exercise of sound wisdom, derive hints and lessons from nature around us. We may learn much that is practically useful and salutary from those animals in the inferior creation, which God has so wonderfully fitted for their respective situations and functions. O how many are there, who stand condemned by the example and the silent but emphatic admonitions of these creatures,-admonished for improvidence, and carelessness, and irregularity, and sloth!-for discontent and insubordination!-for trifling, impatience, and want of perseverance; for timidity and meanness in duty!-for deficiency in promptitude and alertness!-for neglect of those committed to their care and training!-and last of all, but not least-for failing to answer the end of their being! These all, according to their irrational natures, by fulfilling their respective functions, under the operation of the instincts of their different constitutions, show forth the glory of their Maker. But man, the rational creature, uses not his higher powers and endowments, as he ought, in voluntary and delighted subserviency to this highest and best of ends,-the true end of his existence and of all that he is, as an intelligent, moral, and immortal being. Earnestly would I urge on all with immediate and special reference to the King of kings-the lesson of these words-"If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth." O! if there be duty, and if there be safety in the course recommended, as it respects a monarch of this world-after all, but a man whose "breath is in his nostrils," with what unutterably greater force and conclusiveness, in application to Him! How infatuated in sinful creatures of the dust, to lift themselves up, in selfrighteous and rebellious pride, against the God of heaven! Surely submission here is at once duty, wisdom, safety. "Lay thine hand upon thy mouth." Confess guilt, and bow to the sceptre of mercy. "Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth; but woe to the man that striveth with his Maker." The admonition of Jesus is, in its fullest force of import, applicable to the case of the sinner with Ins God:-"Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison."-God is an adversary to you only as sinners persisting in your sins. He seeks your reconciliation. He offers you His friendship. He is revealed to you as "in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And

the entreaty of His gospel to every one of you is-"Be reconciled unto God:-for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

95-Pro_31:1-9

Proverbs 31:1-9

LECTURE XCV.

Proverbs 31:1-9.

"The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him. What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink; lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy." This chapter stands in a predicament quite similar to the one preceding it. They were, in all probability, both found among the writings of Solomon;-a portion of what he had collected, along with his proverbs, for the instruction of his people, and which were "copied out" by the "men of Hezekiah." Like the former, they obtained their place in the Jewish canon under divine direction; and constituted, without doubt, a part of those "Holy Scriptures" referred to by Christ and his Apostles, and of which Paul especially speaks as "given by inspiration of God." To the question, Who was Lemuel? it is impossible to return any certain answer. Some think it was a name given to Solomon himself. It signifies, "One belonging to God," and is thus similar in its signification to Jedidiah. There is, however, nothing in the history that affords any ground for supposing that his mother, Bathsheba, gave him any other name than those which are there recorded; though tho idea has the countenance of Jewish writers, as well as of several Christian commentators. And if Bathsheba was young when Solomon was born, and lived to a great age, it is not impossible that, in her old days, she might perceive the commencing symptoms of her son’s backsliding from God, and in such terms as those in this passage utter the grief and bitter anguish of her spirit.-But the more probable opinion is, that Lemuel was a neighbouring prince, whose mother was a pious Jewess, visited at times, as was the case with other females, by the spirit of inspiration, and whose instructions have received the stamp of divine authority by their admission into the sacred canon. As the words are called at once "the words of king Lemuel," and "the prophecy* (or inspired communication) which his mother taught him;"-we learn that the son, whosoever he was, paid a reverential and affectionate regard to the counsels of the mother,-carefully recording and preserving them; and it may thence be presumed, following them out in his course of life.

* The word is here, as in the first verse of the preceding chapter, rendered by Stuart as a proper name-"The words of Lemuel, king of Massa; which his mother taught him:"-the rules of Hebrew syntax making the rendering in the English translation "an impossible construction."

Verse Proverbs 31:2. "What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?"-Of this verse there are two principles of explanation; of either of which, according to the circumstances in which the words may be conceived to have been uttered, it is susceptible.

1. It may be interpreted as the expression of surprise,-of regret, and grief, and bitterness of spirit, in the disappointment of fond anticipations, arising from the discovery of symptoms and tendencies to evil on the part of one who was the object of so much tender love and so much prayerful solicitude. In this view, the expostulation is full of interesting and irresistible persuasiveness:-it is an appeal to filial affection, and a commentary on the first of the proverbs of Solomon, (Proverbs 10:1,) "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." "What! my son!" the object of the mother's fond affection!-an affection in which there is a force and a tenderness which none but mothers know!-"and what! the son of my womb!"-part of my very self! the fruit of my travailing pangs! for whom "I had sorrow when my hour was come," and for whom "I forgot the anguish for joy that a man was born into the world!" "And what! the son of my vows!"-the subject of many an anxious and earnest prayer, and of much pious and solemn dedication to God! Is this the result-this the reward of all? Am I indeed to see thee departing from the living God,-and pursuing the paths of irreligion, and folly, and worldliness, and vice, which lead down to the chambers of death? O! sad, sad day! O! bitter, bitter disappointment! Are all my cares, and counsels, and tears and prayers, to end in this?

2. The words may be explained as the utterance of an earnest desire, by salutary and affectionate counsel, to anticipate and prevent evil-evil to which all experience and observation had taught her there was a perilous propensity in the heart, and many temptations in the life, and especially in the life of those who were called to move amidst the honours and the pleasures of the world in high places,-"What shall I say to thee, my son?-the son of my womb? the son of my vows? What advice shall a mother give thee, who is solicitous about thine own best interests, and about the well-being of the people thou art commissioned by providence to govern?" She then admonishes her son against those vices which she knew to be a special source of danger: and she does so in a manner calculated to interest, impress, and melt his heart,-appealing, with the tenderness of maternal to the tenderness of filial love:-"What! my son! and what! the son of my womb!-and what the son of my vows!-It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of the afflicted." The vices thus warned against are the libertine indulgences of the seraglio and the banquet. Here, as in many other places, the two are connected together, They were generally associated then, as they are still,-both in the superior and the inferior circles of society. The courses mentioned were fitted to enervate both body and mind. They tended to indolence,-to negligent and slothful disregard of public obligations and duties,-and to the prostitution and abuse of royal eminence; as if high station were bestowed for the gratification of the selfish and vicious inclinations of those raised to it, instead of the benefit of those over whom they were set. The warning was given to the future kings of Israel by Moses, Deuteronomy 17:17-and the anticipated evil was mournfully realized in Solomon's own case, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin," Nehemiah 13:26. It was indeed a miserable contrast to the delightfully interesting and promising outset of his reign,-between his youth and his age,-the former shaming the latter, instead of (what ought to

have been) the latter improving upon the former, and realizing its promises.* Whether the words of Lemuel's mother were spoken before or after the time when this wretched defection took place,-the fact of the defection shows how imminent was the danger, and how much reason there was for the warning.

* See 1 Kings 11:4-10. The principle of the caution is applied to the priests, "whose lips should keep knowledge, as being the messengers of the Lord of hosts."*1 The admonition was given at the time when the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, had "offered strange fire before the Lord," and had been struck dead by fire from His presence. Whence the conclusion appears natural, that they had been in a state of insobriety when they fell into the sin for which they suffered. And if they were, we have in their case a clear proof that one sin can be no excuse for another.*2 *1 See Leviticus 10:10. rr

*2 It is said of an ancient prince, that he made a law that if a man committed a crime when he was intoxicated, he should be held guilty of two offences, and be punished for both. But such maxims and cautions apply to all. In all, at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, the mind ought to be in entire and undisturbed possession and exercise of its powers, for the transaction of business,-for the discharge of duty-for the avoidance of temptation. In every condition and relation of life, sobriety should be one of the cardinal virtues. It well deserves such a designation, when so very much hinges upon it. Let it be impressed upon every conscience, that in every instance in which, even in the slightest degree, the regular exercise of the powers of the mind is affected and impaired-there is sin. But let it not be even thus limited. Let it not be imagined that no sin is committed, unless, in some degree or other, there is the unsettlement of reason. There may be a large amount of sin where there is nothing of the kind. There are those mentioned in Scripture who are "mighty to drink wine, and men of might to mingle strong drink"-a most noble, dignified, estimable, praise-worthy distinction,-the most difficult and elevated of human acquirements! They have actually succeeded in training their stomachs to stand more than those of their neighbours, in this most exalted department of the human faculties! And they boast of their powers. They fancy and flatter themselves that there is no harm, so long as they are able to keep themselves decently sober. What a mistake! Their powers, when thus prostituted and abused, are their degradation and disgrace. And there is sin as well as shame. They are guilty of criminal waste. They are guilty too of setting a fearful example, encouraging others in the trial of their powers of endurance in the same way,-and glorying in the sin and shame of those whom, in this worse than beastly competition, they have succeeded (as the phrase is) in "laying under the table." In the higher circles of society, there is, happily, much less of this amongst us than there once was. It is well when fashion takes the right side,-the side of virtue. And it were well, if the example of temperance, spreading downwards, should reach every rank and condition of the community; well for individuals, for families and neighbourhoods, for cities, for communities! Are wine and strong drink, then, absolutely and in all cases, useless and worse than useless?-in no cases to be used?-in none to be given? The inspired writer does not say so.

Verses Proverbs 31:6-7. "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."-Some imagine, that in the phrase "ready to perish" there is an allusion to the practice of administering a potion of strong mixed wine to criminals when led to execution, for the purpose of stupefying them, and so diminishing their sensibility to suffering. Such a potion the Saviour, when

on the cross, declined to drink. He would not seem as if he were impatient of the sufferings he was enduring, or diminish by a single pang the expiatory agonies of the substitute and atoning Redeemer of the lost. There is no necessity for supposing such an allusion. The phrase is meant to be descriptive of a class of persons who are on the brink of some very heavy and ruinous calamity,-who are overwhelmed with apprehension, and fainting in despondency:-as the other phrase is of persons whose souls are embittered by the severe distresses of extreme poverty and privation, with their attendant evils,-or by any affliction that preys upon the mind, oppressing and dispiriting it. To such as these it is that the "wine" and the "strong drink" are here recommended.

I pity the state of that man’s mind, who can for one moment allow himself to suppose that this passage contains an inspired toleration of excess;-a permission and encouragement to the destitute and the afflicted and disconsolate, to drown the remembrance of their cares, and the sense of their ills, either in the intemperate carousals of social indulgence, or in secret and solitary application to the contents of the bottle;-to seek their relief in the insensibility of intoxication, or even to chase away the real sadness of care and mental trouble by the false and temporary excitement and merriment of strong drinks;-to make wine, in its inebriating excesses, the refuge from melancholy!-Would it be fair to set this one passage against the whole Bible?-one text against its entire scope and unnumbered positive and pointed and damnatory prohibitions? That were to treat the Bible as we treat no other book:-and indeed many a time has it been treated thus, as no other book has been. But when men do take hold of a passage like this, and turn it into merriment, and enjoy it, and quote it with a leer while they are putting the bottle to each other’s mouths and drinking themselves drunk,-they only discover the bent of their minds, and the inclinations of their hearts. They know all the while that the Bible condemns them, and that while they perversely cite this text over their jovial cups, a thousand others could be thundered in their ears, denouncing against them the vengeance of offended heaven, and shutting them out of the kingdom above. It would even be more consistent to question the canonical authority of the passage than to use it thus. But there is no need for such a resource. The lessons plainly taught are-

1. That, while wine and strong drink were not to be used in excess by any, and specially by those who, from their situation required, for others’ interests as well as for their own, the constant possession of a clear head and a sound and discriminative judgment,-yet, they were not without their use:-

2. That their use especially consisted in their being cordials to the suffering and depressed in spirit, to be used in the manner and for the purposes which a kind and gracious Providence designed them to answer. The same Providence that furnished the corn furnished the wine; and, when the one was used for its own purpose, with equal propriety and sinlessness might the other.* Those therefore who were "heavy of heart," from whatever cause, were warranted to use the means, in such a way as to revive them, and cheer them, and give them power to enjoy the good that remained to them. It is obvious that the use recommended is such as to enable them thus to enjoy whatever is fitted to yield enjoyment. But the drinking which the drunkard would fain find in this passage, is drinking which, while it drowns suffering, drowns enjoyment too; inasmuch as by a reasonable creature nothing can be rightly enjoyed when he has deprived himself of his reason; and such is the effect of all drinking to excess.

* See Psalms 104:15.

3. The lesson is one of benevolence, sympathy, kindness. Instead of abusing the gifts of Providence in wanton, unbecoming, and criminal self-indulgence,-make a right use of them for the benefit of others. If bread is intended to "strengthen man's heart," and wine to "make it glad," it becomes just as much a duty to administer the latter where it is required, as to supply the former where it is wanted,-to furnish the heavy-hearted with wine as the starving with bread. All depends on its being done on right occasions-in cases of really urgent need. This is the use, then, which Lemuel's mother admonished him to make of his abundance. Instead of spending his substance in gluttony or in epicurean nicety and luxury-she would, on the same principle, have admonished him to "deal his bread to the hungry"-to supply the wants of the destitute and famishing. The principle is in both cases the same. Give meat where it is needed; give drink where it is needed. Give the loaf to the starving; give the wine and the cordial to the sick-at-heart and desponding.-But-

4. Let not any such sentiment be misunderstood and perverted. Let not such inference be drawn, as that the blessed Bible directs to wine and strong drink as the refuge from the cares and sorrows of life. Because a thing may contribute to an end in one way, it does not follow that it must contribute to it in another. Because wine may contribute by its naturally cheering influence, to raise the animal spirits, and, from the connexion between the body and the mind, may thus dispose the latter for enjoyment which it would not otherwise have been in a condition to relish, that therefore it is the source to which the Bible directs the wretched for their comfort-would be an inference as senseless as it would be false and impious. No, my friends. When resorted to for such a purpose, it is the most wretched of all resources. We tremble for the man,-for his health-for his prosperity-for his character-for his family-for his own and their temporal and spiritual interests-who has recourse to the bottle, as his refuge from himself and from the cares that press upon his spirit. O ye poor and afflicted ones, the Word of God directs you, when distressed by the present, and anxious for the future, to another, a higher, a purer, an innocent, and a sure spring of consolation. The religion of the Bible,-the gospel, with its "exceeding great and precious promises," opens fountains of joy and gladness to your souls, amidst all the drought and desolation of your earthly lot. It sheds a blessed and cheering light upon the gloom of affliction, checks the feelings and the utterance of despondency, and teaches and enables the desponding and sinking spirit to say-"Yea, though the figtree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." He who professes to believe in God, as a reconciled God and Father in Christ Jesus, and in those promises which relate to both the life that now is and that which is to come, the promises of unchanging faithfulness and love,-who believes in the divine assurance that "all things do work together for good to them that love God;"-that He will never leave them nor forsake them;-that, "not having spared His own Son, He will also, with him, freely give them all things;"-he who believes these things, and yet betakes himself to other and baser sources of relief,-flies from his cares to the wine and the strong drink, and drinks himself into forgetfulness of them,-finding his Bible and the throne of grace either distasteful or incompetent for his relief,-must labour under some mighty delusion,-some unquelled and unsanctified principle of corruption. O! as you value all that is dear to you, beware of imagining that you have Bible authority for such a refuge. The Bible, wherever the subject is touched, condemns every approach to excess; and no circumstances will justify it.

And it is a relief, moreover, as temporary as it is sinful; and it leaves behind it the superadded distress of a conscience ill at ease; and this again goads on to the greater indulgence, till even the professing Christian, who for a time "did run well," sinks into the degraded and miserable sot!-And those who complain of a nervous and morbid temperament had better beware. By having recourse to this cure, they may get a momentary stimulus, but one which, by its reaction, may only, in the long-run, aggravate the very evil which it was meant to alleviate and remove, and bring them to ruin.* * For the discussion of the use of intoxicating drinks, see Lectures lvii, lviii, lix.

Verses Proverbs 31:8-9. "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy."-This stands directly opposed to whatever would unfit a magistrate for "judging righteous judgment." The "dumb" are either the literally dumb-who are thus naturally incapacitated for speaking in their own behalf,-or such as from extreme modesty and timidity, or any similar cause, are prevented from pleading for themselves. Such as these, together with "the poor and the needy" and "those appointed to destruction"-the friendless and unprotected-those who have no resources to enable them to maintain a plea with the man who oppresses and would defraud and injure them-those unjustly and cruelly devoted to ruin, by their superiors in rank and power,-he was to regard it as in a special manner his incumbent duty to take by the hand, to see that they get justice, and to save from meditated and attempted wrong.

I close with one reflection. If it is of importance for the poor and unfriended to have any one who will take their part, and come between them and wrong, how valuable to us poor helpless sinners the interference and advocacy of the gracious Redeemer,-the days-man and mediator between us and our justly offended God! From that God, it is true, we can never "suffer wrongfully:" He is "the righteous Lord," who "loveth righteousness:"-a "God of truth and without iniquity." But His law we have violated; and in His judicial capacity He must punish us. How delightful to know Him in the mercy as well as in the justice of His character, and to be assured that to that mercy, on the ground of His own atoning blood, our divine and all-merciful Intercessor makes appeal. He will plead the cause of all who in faith commit their cause to Him. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." O to be able to say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day!"

96-Pro_31:10-31 (A)

Proverbs 31:10-31 (A)

LECTURE XCVI.

Proverbs 31:10-31.

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengthened her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and be praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates." This is the remainder of "the words of King Lemuel"-of "the prophecy which his mother taught him." We learn from it on what correct principles that mother estimated the happiness of her son:-how sound, how judicious, and how fully in accordance with the revealed mind of God, the counsel which she thus gave him.-I say, the counsel: because, although the passage contains only a description, yet nothing can be more manifest,-especially when the verses are taken in connexion with the negative and prohibitory admonition in the third verse,-than that counsel is meant to be conveyed. And when we recollect that the passage forms part of an inspired communication, we must regard it not merely as the counsel of Lemuel's mother, but of Lemuel's God. As introductory to the illustration of the verses, we may observe, that the counsel proceeds upon the assumption of the original state of things,-of the primary and divine constitution of the marriage relation, when "God made a male and a female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh:"-that is, upon the great general principle, which alone has the authority of Heaven, that "Every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband." We do not deny that the same legislative authority which fixed the principle may, in particular cases, grant the suspension of it. But has this ever been done? That good men have acted in violation of the original

constitution, is true; but that they had, in any instance, the divine sanction in doing so, is another question. I more than doubt it. Every instance of the kind I believe to have been sin:-nor does there seem ground to make a single exception in affirming, that they who sinned suffered for it; that every departure of the kind brought with it a greater or less degree of unhappiness. In the passage before us, the "virtuous woman" is, beyond question, represented as the one wife of one husband. The description, it may be remarked, is a regular poem. It is composed on a similar principle with that exemplified in the 119th Psalm. Each verse begins with a different letter, and according to the order of the letters in the alphabet. This, amongst other advantages, was fitted to assist the memory;-and the poem was one well worthy of being committed to the memory of every mother and every daughter in Judea.

Whether the picture was drawn from real life, or merely by the mind of the artist under divine illumination,-the Spirit of God guiding her hand in the sketch,-is a question which we need not be careful to settle. The latter is probably the truth. And the portraiture is a lovely one. It is arrayed, it is true, in the appropriate costume of the country and the age in which it was delineated; but in every country and in every age the features are such as must command admiration. The character, I mean, is sketched with a reference to the peculiar usages of the place and the period; but the great outlines of it, divested of those local and temporary peculiarities, are of permanent and universal excellence. A "virtuous woman" (verse Proverbs 31:10.) must not, in this connexion, be understood merely with respect to the single point of honour and chastity. The word here is very comprehensive. It is to be interpreted from the description. It means such a woman;-a woman rightly feeling the various and interesting obligations under which her situations and relations have placed her; and conscientiously and perseveringly discharging the duties arising out of them, under the predominant influence of "pure and undefiled religion"-the fear and the love of God.

What means the question-"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies."-1. Rarity. There are comparatively few who come up to the standard which the mother of Lemuel had conceived in her mind. Many may approach to it, in nearer and more remote degrees; but there are few-we might ask, perhaps, are there any?-who have not their peculiar defects and failures. Thus the happy husband of such a wife as is here described, is represented as saying-verse Proverbs 31:29, "Many daughters have done virtuously; but thou excellest them all."-2. That it is not by purchase that such a wife is to be obtained. "Her price is far above rubies." Her principles and her character are such as place her above being purchased. Solomon and other Eastern princes might get their seraglios filled with beauty, by the temptations they could hold out to vanity and to worse passions by the bribes of wealth and splendour. Solomon might thus have his hundreds of princesses. But well might it he said, Who can by such means find a virtuous woman? What virtuous woman would have her place there? A thousand was the very number of Solomon’s seraglio:-and when he says, "One man among a thousand have I found, but a woman among all those have I not found;" who can wonder? The wonder would have been if he had. It is slander of the female character, to take an estimate of it from such a quarter. Buy a virtuous woman!-buy such a woman as is here depicted!-the very imagination of her consenting to be so bought-were it even to be, not the associate of hundreds more, but the wife of one-spoils the character,-robs it of its prime attraction.-3. Preciousness. This unbought and unpurchasable excellence is, in the eyes of the man to whom it is spontaneously, and in conjugal faith and love, surrendered, of inestimable value:-and she becomes the happiness of his life. It is the first of earth’s blessings; and it never

comes alone; it brings a thousand with it. Truly and emphatically might it be said of the man who found such a wife-"He that findeth a wife findeth a good thing: and shall obtain favour of the Lord."-4. The question suggests the reflection, which, from its importance, can hardly be too often repeated-that the forming of the marriage union should be a matter of serious deliberation and inquiry; not a matter of hasty, capricious, thoughtless resolution,-the resolution of momentary fancy or sudden impulse. It should be an endeavour to find a suitable character,-a careful looking out and searching for such a one. And allow me to say-for it is a true saying-that if this were more attended to by those who seek wives, the character, in its various features of excellence, would be more sedulously cultivated by those who are destined to be wives. The character of the one sex will ever tell reciprocally on the other.-5. Lastly, and above all, this connexion must never be a matter of barter, or of pecuniary calculation:-"Her price is far above rubies." It is an infinite degradation of this first and highest and most hallowed of earthly unions, when, on either side, it is reduced to a balance of sordid worldly interests. He who gets such a wife gets what is, in its own intrinsic worth, incomparably better than the greatest amount of wealth,-than the richest precious stones and jewels. It would be a rare act, (but, were it possible, it would be a far more rational one,) for a man to part with the largest fortune for the acquisition of a good wife, than to obtain the largest fortune by wedding a bad one.

It would unavoidably lead to a good deal of repetition,-while it would not, in the end, leave in the mind so distinct a conception and estimate of the character described, and the benefits arising from it in conjugal and domestic life, were we to illustrate the verses in the order in which they He before us. I shall rather endeavour to classify the particulars under the two heads at which I have just hinted;-THE CHARACTER:-AND ITS HAPPY EFFECTS.

1. We have, then, as the first feature of this lovely character, inviolable fidelity:-Verse Proverbs 31:11. "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil." This implies, first, the faithfulness of pure, virtuous, undivided attachment. Her husband has no ground for any restless, uneasy jealousy of wandering affections. He has perfect reliance on her plighted troth, and on her undivided love; assured, and happy in the assurance, that her heart is his, and his alone. In proportion as the spirit of jealousy, when it finds admission into a man’s bosom, is a spirit of disquietude and agony, the experience of this unshaken unsuspecting assurance of the heart’s entire appropriation must be precious and delightful. Then, secondly, the faithfulness in which "the heart of her husband trusteth," relates to the entire management of her domestic affairs. He can entrust everything to her. He can put his purse into her hands, in the full confidence that not one farthing will be alienated by her to either selfish or foolish ends,-but all held sacred to the good of the family; that nothing will be unprofitably squandered, and nothing secretly kept back,-but all applied faithfully, and wisely, and well; so as to leave her husband, in regard to all domestic concerns,-all the transactions that relate to the supply and regulation of the household-"without carefulness." That this second department of fidelity is specially meant, is clear from the latter part of the verse-"So that he shall have no need of spoil." While he trusts, he "safely trusts." He feels no temptation to have recourse to any unjust, oppressive, and unwarrantable means for recruiting his lavished resources,-for supplying his exhausted coffers,-spoiling others, in whatever way, to get means for himself:-a temptation which many a man has been made to feel by the extravagance of either a selfish, or an imprudent, rash, miscalculating wife,-a wife whose sanguine temper and fondness for personal and family display, destroy all providence, shutting her

eyes both to the past and to the future. It may be right to notice here, the imperative duty of every husband, in order to his wife's being in a condition to "deal prudently," and to be faithful in her management,-to put her in possession at all times of a correct knowledge of the true extent of his means. If in this she is deceived by him, and made to fancy the resources at his disposal greater than they actually are, she may get the blame which is due not to her but to him. And when the means are narrow and scanty, it is a vast comfort to the poor man to have full confidence that his wife will keep within them-that she will not run accounts, and contract debts, and disgrace and ruin him. For the principle of the character must be cherished and displayed among the wives of all classes of society. The poor man needs the comfort of this confidence as well as the rich.

2. Next after her duty to her God, the first desire of her heart, and the constant and persevering endeavour of her life is, to promote the comfort and well-being of her husband and family:-Verse Proverbs 31:12. "She will do him good, and not evil, all the days of her life." No doubt this implies that she studies his character,-makes herself aware of his peculiar tempers and humours, his likings and his dislikings,-in order that she may, as far as possible from ability and from principle, accommodate herself to them; seeking in all things to please and gratify him. But while I make this remark, let it not be abused by husbands, as if it held out any toleration to them to indulge humours that are capricious, wayward, and unreasonable. Even with such humours the truly good wife will do her utmost to bear,-and more than to bear. But because servants are enjoined to be subject not only to "good and gentle" but also to "froward" masters, this is no vindication of the masters' frowardness. We must not allow husbands to lose sight of their own duty, while we are speaking of that of their wives. Yet the good wife will remember that to make a froward and capricious husband sensible that she is ever desiring and aiming to "do him good and not evil," is the most dutiful way on her part, and the way most likely to succeed with him, of subduing his waywardness, and winning him to greater reasonableness and right temper. But that which the words before us specially imply is-that she devotes herself to the advancement of her husband's honour and reputation-his health of body and of mind,-his substantial interests,-his temporal and spiritual benefit, and of course the benefit of his family:-that she does this with cheerful delight, from the prevalence of real affection,-her heart being in it all. And this she does-"all the days of her life." She does it constantly:-not by mere fits and starts; not after the manner of some women, who are the subjects of shifting tempers and capricious humours; who are wonderfully fond-passionate in their endearments, while the fit chances to be upon them, but as cross-grained and ill-natured as possible perhaps the very next hour.-And she does it perseveringly. Her engagement being for life, she keeps to it till the end. She does not "weary in well-doing," but pursues the one object of her wedded state and her plighted conjugal love, to the very last. Her course of attentions, and active promotion of her husband's well-being is not the result of the mere fervour of a first love, but of a firm, faithful, principled attachment, and, along with it, a paramount and imperative sense of duty. That duty is-"till death us do part."

3. The next feature is assiduous and cheerful industry;-diligence in every useful occupation opposed at once to laziness and to pride,-to sloth and to vanity; and accompanied with wise, considerate, prudent management. This embraces a number of verses, in which it is presented under various aspects:-Verses Proverbs 31:13-19; Proverbs 31:21-22; and Proverbs 31:27. In the first of these verses, she is said to "work willingly with her hands;" that is, cheerfully, without sighing that she has it to do, and wishing she could but be exempted from either the exertion or the

degradation. She does not consider it as either; but puts her heart where she knows her hands should be. I have said that this is in opposition to both laziness and pride, sloth and vanity. The description, remember, was addressed to a prince, and therefore has reference to such a wife as he should choose, for the inmate of his palace,-for the partner of his royal dignity. Yet the mother of Lemuel does not regard manual labour as beneath respectability and high station of the wife of a king. She says, Verse Proverbs 31:19. "She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff." It was customary among the Jews to bring up all their youth to some handicraft occupation. It was an excellent rule, both as respected the cherishing of right dispositions, and as respected a prudent anticipation of the future, in which so many and so great alternations of condition might await the rising generation. And we may suppose the inculcation of practical industry was not confined to the one sex alone, but extended, and that in all classes of the community, to both. But the lesson before us is a good one in all places and times. Those who are in superior stations in life ought never to be ashamed to put their hands actively to household affairs. If the mother of king Lemuel had any daughters, it will not be doubted that she would inculcate upon them the habits which she commends in a wife for her son. She would train them to be such wives as the one she here describes. The qualities she would have Lemuel seek in a daughter-in-law, she would desire to see in her own daughters. Wives in high life need not have their hands hanging listlessly down, or think it beneath them to apply themselves to any useful and becoming occupation. There are those at times to be found who would toss their heads at the very idea of their being supposed even to know anything about the management of a household. To name a spindle and a distaff to them, would be an insult never to be forgiven! What would Lemuel’s mother have said of such? She would have warned the young prince against them-as not fit wives for him! Women in such stations should even have an honest pride and pleasure in showing as much as they can of the fruits of their own industry-doing all in their power for the internal comfort and well-being of their households. It does not become any to regard industry as a vulgar virtue, and so to sit at their ease with their hands folded, as if it were the privilege and the honour of their caste in society to be idle. If they have not enough to keep them busy with the concerns of their own families, need they, on that account, be unemployed? May they not be Dorcases? How many families around them who would bless them for the product of their industry! Was it any discredit to Dorcas, was it not, on the contrary, her enviable honour, when "the widows" stood around her corpse "weeping, and showing the coats and garments she had made while she was with them?" She who is too proud to "lay her hands to the spindle and the distaff"-that is, to apply herself actively to such employment as her husband and family and the good of others may require,-has much yet to learn of the spirit of the religion of Jesus, and of the character of a "good wife." We have still many examples, even in superior stations, of active housewifery,-of minds vigorous in common sense and sound principle, and far above the pitiful affectation of sentimental idleness. Spinning-wheels, however, were more in fashion in the days of our grandmothers, than they are now;-and I am not sure if the change has been for the better. The industry, I have said, is associated with considerate prudence and propriety. She rightly keeps her place and station. While always busy, and usefully busy, she still holds her proper position as mistress and superintendent of her household: she sees that all are at their proper employments, and that these are all suitably and seasonably provided for them; that they have their morning meal and their means of work in due season:-she is the general directress and provider. Such is the spirit of verse fifteenth, "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a

portion to her maidens." And it is the spirit of the passage we must seek to extract:-the minute illustration of particulars in detail would be tedious and unprofitable. Hence we notice further, that she studies to preserve a discreet and happy medium-maintaining an equal distance between mean penuriousness and wasteful profusion and extravagance. First of all, she procures abundance, and that at the best markets:-verse Proverbs 31:14. "She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar." It would be no recommendation to get from a distance what could be got equally well at hand-as good, and as cheap. The meaning therefore is-(and it were not amiss for statesmen sometimes to learn the lesson as well as wives) that she does not satisfy herself with getting at hand what she can get better and cheaper from afar. She spares no pains to provide what is good-what is suitable and wholesome-for all her household: and, as her industry enables her to go to the best markets, she is never at a loss for the requisite supplies. This is one part of her prudence. Then, with regard to the laying out of what she still has to spare, there is equal discretion. She lets nothing go to waste; but makes the most of every thing. She "gathers up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." And what does she with the surplus?-what does she with the produce of her industry? Does she spend it in what is trifling and useless-in what serves no purpose but the gratification of vanity? The answer is-verse Proverbs 31:16. "She considered a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard." Here is something valuable-something of real permanent use to the family:-and even with regard to this, observe, there is consideration before purchase: the field and the price are carefully looked to, that she may not buy land that will yield no return; and that she may not give more for it than it is worth. And then, when she has made the purchase, she turns it to the best account:-in the field, "with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard,"-the wine of which may at once supply the family and bring a profit from sale.

4. A further feature is liberal and kindly benevolence,-open-hearted, open-handed, practical charity:-ver. Proverbs 31:20. "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." This implies, first, The spirit of tenderness and compassion:-a spirit lovely in all; and especially attractive in the female character. And the modes of expression used respecting the practical working of this compassion indicate two things-readiness, and liberality. Without doubt, charity, both in men and women, should be regulated in its exercise by judicious discretion; and in the previous parts of the character this has been well provided for. It is right and necessary that sound judgment should be united with sensibility. To give way to every impulse of the latter without the intervention of the former, would often do harm instead of good. This is all true. Judgment must preside over the practice of charity. And yet, in woman especially, the sensibility of charity is better than the philosophy of charity. I would rather see a woman give, under the impulse of feeling, with a full heart and a melting eye, even in a case which to judgment might be somewhat questionable,-than hear her, in such a case, discuss with acuteness and zeal the principles of political economy, and freeze up her heart in the coldness of clear but icy calculation. It implies, secondly, the spirit of obedience to the divine will. We have that will beautifully and briefly expressed in the words of an inspired Apostle-"Let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." The principle of labour is thus the spirit of benevolence as well as of self-love. The latter of course is first:-the supply of our own need and that of our families. But we are not to stop there. We are not to think that we have laboured enough when we have made out that object:-there is still an ulterior one. The wife here portrayed, while her husband and family have the prior claim, still looks, with the eye of

benevolence, beyond them, and stretches beyond them the hand of charity. And I may notice, further, That such a wife-thus faithful, thus active, thus prudent, thus kind,-is well entitled to full liberty in the exercise of her charity-in the delighted indulgence of her benevolent affections. She will, without doubt, in all cases of importance, seek to go along with him who is, or ought to be, the partner of all her feelings and all her wishes. But it would be harsh and cruel to stint and restrain such a disposition in such a bosom. Where feeling has so complete an ascendency over judgment as to dethrone it altogether, and to produce a reckless, indiscriminating and really pernicious prodigality of almsgiving, greater restraint may be necessary. But this is no part of the character here depicted.

97-Pro_31:10-31 (B)

Proverbs 31:10-31 (B)

LECTURE XCVII.

Proverbs 31:10-31.

(Second Lecture.)

5. The next thing which marks the good wife is-dress and establishment, in accordance with her station and condition in life: verse Proverbs 31:22. "She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple." The station of the wife described is evidently that of the higher rank of life. Lemuel’s mother, being the mother of a prince, must be supposed to delineate the character of the wife of a prince,-although the elements of the character are such as ought to be found in wives of every degree. The character is an admirable one:-and its crowning feature is true piety. All the other features are in keeping with one another and with this. The obvious inference is, that it is not inconsistent in "a virtuous woman,"-in "a woman that feareth the Lord,"-to wear "silk and purple," or to have "coverings of tapestry" in her house.-Observe by the way, the latter is another of the fruits of her own industry. It is the work of her own hands:-"she maketh herself coverings of tapestry;" so that her very elegancies are associated with exemplary conduct, with the active occupation of her time.

It must be obvious that this is one of those subjects of a general description, which do not at all admit of anything like the precision of fixed and definite ride. The great matter is to be under the influence and the guidance of right principle-of a truly Christian disposition accompanied with sound and sober-minded discretion. The following remarks chiefly relative to dress, are in the spirit and partly in the letter of them, applicable also to furniture and household establishment generally. i. While, as I have said, it cannot be inconsistent with the other parts of the character described, for a woman to have "her clothing of silk and purple," when such attire befits her rank and station, yet, observe, the first attention is to comfort: (v. Proverbs 31:21.) "She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet." The word rendered "scarlet" is on the margin "double garments." The original word signifies double; but some consider it as referring to the double dip or dye of the scarlet or purple colour. The connexion, however, decidedly favours the marginal rendering. Now to this consideration of comfort, there is often manifested a very senseless disregard; a disregard such as would evidently have been a flaw in the character before us. There are women to be found, who dress both themselves and their children for display. Comfort or no comfort, they must, as the first pointy be fine and in the fashion. Winter or the dogdays, it is all one to them. If fashion and finery require them to shiver, shiver they must. They will risk the health of their families, and cherish the most pernicious principles in their bosoms, rather than not have them at the very top of the most approved style. Now, this is folly and something worse. The woman before you, makes the difference which nature and common sense point out:-silks in summer, and woollen in winter; single in sunshine, and double in frost and snow:

"she is not afraid of the snow for her household;" for when the snow comes, she has not new clothing to make for it, but suitable raiment in readiness:-"all her household then are clothed in double garments." ii. Dress and general style should be opposed to extravagance:-that is, they should be in accordance with the real extent of a man's or woman's means. And the extent of means must be calculated by a variety of considerations; especially, there ought to be, in apportioning what is allotted to dress and furniture and accommodation, a due regard to the other claims of a family, such, for example, as those of education-for even these are sometimes sacrificed and stinted for the sake of what is external, what meets the eye and attracts the notice of the superficial and the silly;-also to the claims of the poor and of the cause of God,-which are many a time, even by professing Christians, placed in the background, and put in abeyance, when a fashionable article of dress or of furniture comes into competition with them,-although a less expensive one might serve the purpose equally well. This is not as it ought to be. I cannot believe that the wife described by Lemuel's mother would for the sake of "silk and purple" to herself for clothing, have foregone another attribute of her character, in its practical and delightful exercise-"the stretching out of her hands to the poor,-the reaching forth of her hands to the needy." iii. These adornments of person and house should be opposed to vanity. There may be no small amount of this, where there is but little of extravagance. The dress may not be particularly dear; but there may be manifested, in the make and the adjustment of it, a great deal of minute and anxious care, and pains, and time. It may, though cheap, be gaudy and fantastic; or evidently and solicitously studied for the attraction of notice and admiration, and the setting-off of the person to advantage. What, on this subject, says the word of God to Christian women? "Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price," 1 Peter 3:3-4. * Such passages do not mean that no gold, no silver, no jewels, should ever form any part of female attire,-and that the hair must never be plaited, or in any way whatever ornamentally arranged:-for if you go thus literally to work, you cannot but see the conclusion;-that "the putting on of apparel" at all must, on the same principle, be dispensed with,-and "good works," with "a meek and quiet spirit," be substituted for clothing. This is utterly absurd. The meaning very plainly is-that in these things was not to consist "their adorning"-that these were not to be the things about them that attracted notice, or excited admiration, or that were the topics of conversation among others when they were spoken about. Christian temper and Christian character were rather to be what they studied, and were anxious to acquire; that they might be noticed and spoken of for their likeness in spirit to Christ, and for their works of charity and labours of love, rather than for the beauty and the taste, and the costliness of their dress, of aught about them that was merely external.

* See also 1 Timothy 2:9-10. iv. I need not say, that all must be opposed to the slightest approach to indecency. Everything of the kind must be studiously shunned by "women professing godliness;" and their example and influence should be united to discountenance and to put it down. v. None must be allowed to excuse themselves for tawdriness and filth, by pleading that they cannot afford to be fine. Let none thus excuse one extreme by pleading another. It is not the duty of those who can afford it to aim at being fine. But every one, in every station, can afford to be clean, and neat, and tidy:-and these are at a great remove from finery. It is surprising what a difference you may see in different females and their families, in these respects, on the very same means:-and to my mind, I confess, there is almost as much incongruity in the idea of a slovenly

and nasty Christian, as in that of a vain, a proud, a lying, or a cheating Christian.

6. The next feature is-prudent, pious, gentle and affectionate converse:-verse Proverbs 31:26. "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness." Two things are here mentioned. They both form most valuable features of character. The first-"opening the mouth with wisdom," stands opposed to such things as these-the imprudent utterance of what ought not, in discretion, to be spoken:-the disclosure of confidential secrets, or what were such by obvious implication, if not by formal stipulation:-the silly, vain, frothy emptiness, which marks the conversation of too many. It includes also the expression of a sensible and well-informed mind; conversation that is cheerful, instructive, appropriate to season and to company,-and if witty, innocuously witty, never sarcastic or venomous:-also sound advice and counsel in cases that call for it: and a disposition to serious and religious converse-pleasure in speaking and hearing of divine things,-not for display of knowledge, far loss for pharisaical and sanctimonious pretension,-but, in "simplicity and godly sincerity," for the ends of mutual edification,-the pleasing and salutary reciprocations of Christian affection, and growth by such means, in grace and in meetness for heaven. The other good quality-"having in the tongue the law of kindness" implies that all she utters is in the spirit and in the manner of a gentle and benevolent heart,-ever manifesting a kindly disposition, and fear of unnecessarily offending. Her tongue, that "unruly member" in both man and woman, is under control; and the control is that of the spirit of amenity and good-nature,-the "meek and quiet spirit which is, in the sight of God, of great price." And the expression-"the law of kindness," represents the kindness of her speech, as the result of a principle of duty-of a sense of obligation. Love is the fulfilling of the law of God. It is its beginning, middle, and end; its universally pervading principle. She knows this; and she cherishes a corresponding spirit, and restrains every utterance that, either in the temper it indicates or the temper it may provoke, is out of harmony with this love. Temper, at an unguarded moment, may suggest and prompt, what a sense of duty will curb and keep back.-The expression further implies that kindness in her speech is the result of a. principle of uniform operation. This is an acceptation in which the word law is repeatedly used in scripture-and that, both in a good and a bad sense. It is thus that Paul speaks of the "law in his members" and "the law of his mind;"-the former, the principle of corruption, tending uniformly in one direction and towards one class of words and actions; and the other, the principle of grace, tending uniformly in the opposite direction, and to an opposite class of words and actions. "The law of kindness" is kindness operating with the uniformity and constancy of a law. The principle is, at all times, in all places, and in all companies, the same,-as a law does not shift and accommodate itself to persons and circumstances. There are tempers that have anything in them but the steadiness and uniformity of a law. There may occasionally be cases of gentleness and kindness, and everything as it ought to be, at home, in the family circle, when there is roughness, sulkiness, and illnature abroad. It is much to be feared, however, that the reverse is a more frequently exemplified case; all smooth and smiling, soft and sweet, courteous and kind in other companies, while the rudeness, and the frown, and the bitterness, and the peevishness, and the crossness and the discontent, and the complaining and the scolding, are reserved for home;-"words smoother than oil" for strangers-"drawn swords" for husband and family. It is to the domestic circle-the home-scene, that the description, in the first instance, refers;-but she whose tongue "the law of kindness" regulates there, will keep it under the same authoritative regulation every where else.-It may mean also, that, while she rules her own tongue by the "law of kindness,"-this very law is the most powerful and efficient means of duly

managing her household. If her husband chances to be somewhat hasty in temper and cross in his ways, she studies his temper, soothes and brings him round, and manages him by "the law of kindness." By the same law she keeps her children in affectionate and cheerful subjection;-and by the same law she attaches her domestics, and procures the prompt and active service of grateful affection,-so that "whatsoever they do they do it heartily." There is vast power in this "law of kindness," and the woman here described, whether as a wife, a mother or a mistress, knows how to put and keep it in exercise. Her household, and the entire circle in which she moves, feel and own its salutary and. happy control. Generally speaking, it will be found, that even where authority is rightful, and the title to issue orders and require obedience unquestioned,-the tone and manner of kindness will go further towards procuring prompt, cheerful and efficient service than those of haughty and peremptory command. I speak in general. There are of course different tempers which require different treatment; and firmness may often be as necessary as kindness. The two are not incompatible.

7. I now come to the last feature in the character-namely, genuine piety,-true godliness-as the foundation of all the rest;-verse Proverbs 31:30. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."

Though this stands last, it is very far from being least. Nay, mark well its position. It does not come in along with the rest, as forming one of them merely. It is a designation which includes in it all the rest. It is the sum of the whole. The woman described is "the woman that feareth the Lord;" and "the woman that feareth the Lord" is the woman described. Her fearing the Lord is the productive germ and pervading principle of the whole character:-so that, when the rest of it has been drawn, and it is asked-Where is such a character to be found?-the answer is-It is the character of the "woman that feareth the Lord,"-of every woman who is really under the influence of true religion. And this naturally suggests two observations, which may be of use to different classes of my hearers:-i. There may be external conformity to a number of the features of the character here described,-such as conjugal fidelity, and every attention to a husband’s and family’s comfort and well-being,-exemplary industry,-modest and becoming apparel, and discreet and prudent management,-while yet there may be no piety-no true religion. I should wish to impress the minds of such persons with the conviction, that, although the presence of such features of character and courses of conduct are vastly better for the temporal comfort and happiness of a family than their absence, yet, in the sight of God, and in His estimate of character, they are miserably defective and even worthless without this. In woman as in man, godliness is what He first demands. Where the heart is not right with God,-all is wrong. There are domestic scenes to be witnessed, presenting much that is amiable, and much that seems happy,-much of mutual affection, mutual cheerfulness, and mutual desire and promptitude to serve one another, to anticipate one another’s wishes, and to promote one another’s welfare,-where religion has no place; where there is no domestic altar erected to God; where God’s fear does not preside; where there is nothing beyond the dictate of natural affection. There are wives who, in all respects but this, set a becoming example, and seem almost all that you could wish them to be; and whose happy influence in the domestic circle is felt by every inmate and manifest to every eye. O how deeply one cannot but regret, in such cases, the absence of the "one thing needful!"-the absence of God! He is not there. There is not the semblance of family religion. God’s goodness is unacknowledged. God’s blessing is unsought. God’s love is unfelt. God’s authority is unrecognized. There is neither the secret

devotion of the closet, nor the social devotion of the domestic church. It is a scene of seeming enjoyment; and yet it is a scene of atheism-of practical atheism. It is one of the many manifestations of "the goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering of God," in which He withdraws not the fruits of his kindness, even although his hand is neither seen nor owned in their bestowment. And still further, the amiable exercise of the domestic affections, and discharge of the domestic duties, may be trusted in as the righteousness and the recommendation of the wife and the mother,-while the idea of self-renunciation and reliance on grace alone through the blood of atonement, is indignantly rejected!-We cannot fail, I repeat, deeply to lament the miserable defectiveness of all this, and the dishonour done by it to an excluded God. We sigh over the want. We say, O were God but there!-were the scene of natural amiableness and domestic peace and cheerfulness only hallowed by the presiding and pervading influence of the spirit of piety! Men of the world think this would spoil the scene:-Christians think it would perfect it. What a strange, false, unworthy conception of true religion must that be, which fancies it the bane of social happiness,-which imagines the entrance of God spoiling enjoyment! It only shows what erroneous conceptions of enjoyment and happiness are prevalent in the world. What can that happiness be, which God would spoil! to which Piety would put an end! Is either personal or domestic happiness worthy of the name, of which this is true?

Let all professors of religion, on the other hand, bear in mind, that there is no genuine piety that is not practical,-personally and socially practical. True religion must tell upon the character,-and that in all its departments:-and nowhere more than in the domestic circle. It is here that men and women appear in what may be called the undress of life. It is of the female character that I now speak. Now, as a woman may array herself in the garb of her Sunday finery when she goes abroad, and be an untidy slattern at home; so may the appearances of religion, both by men and women, be assumed in public and before the eyes of others, whilst at the domestic fireside all its amiable and lovely influence is laid by. I have no notion of this. Let me see men and women in the bosom of their families. What are they there? It is not what they are at church;-or what they are in the drawing-room or the convivial party;-or even what they are in the fellowship meeting where prayer is wont to be made:-but what are they at home? Much may go on there, of which the world knows nothing. Let me see the piety-the practical working piety-that displays itself in the mutual interchange of the kindly affections there,-and in the fond and faithful fulfilment of all the relative obligations of duty and of love. I have no idea of a godly woman that is not a good wife, a good mother, a good mistress. She cannot be pious as a woman, while she is careless as a wife and a mother, and unkind and unjust as a mistress. There is such a character as a spiritual gossip;-a gadabout after sermons and religious meetings,-a mighty talker, or a whining complainer of all that will not spend their time with her as cold formalists and "wells without water;" while home is neglected, and husband and family left to feel the want. It is a very sad thing, when such anomalies in character present themselves to the world:-when women who profess to be fearers of God are surpassed in domestic amiableness and dutifulness by those who make no pretensions to religion. These things ought not so to be. It is one of the many ways in which professors "lie against the truth." The truth disowns such characters. "Everyone who is of the truth" Christ says, "heareth my voice." And where does the voice of Christ tell any woman that she may neglect her husband, provided she waits upon God?-that she may neglect her family, if she but attends the prayer-meeting?-that she may scold and maltreat her servants at her pleasure, if she reads her Bible, and minds her private devotions? What notions of piety must she have-how utterly perverse

and dishonouring to God and to his word, who can act as if such were the case! True piety is ever a practical principle. It consists not in mere notions; nor does it consist in mere religious exercises. It is a prodigious mistake thus to regard the region for the exercise of piety as lying solely in the acts of worship-of immediate communion with God. It is a principle that diffuses its influence over the entire deportment of life,-that regulates all its movements,-that gives its peculiar character to all its words and all its actions. "The woman that feareth the Lord" will show her fear of the Lord by her active diligence in all her conjugal, maternal, and other domestic duties. She will discharge all these, in the spirit of affection and with constant and persevering assiduity,-because they are the injunctions of the God whom she fears:-and she will infuse into them all the spirit of her religion,-so doing them, as that "the fear of the Lord" may not be hidden, but may be visible as the spring from which the sweet waters flow.

98-Pro_31:10-31 (C)

Proverbs 31:10-31 (C)

LECTURE XCVIII.

Proverbs 31:10-31.

(Third Lecture.) Having illustrated the Character of the good wife, we must now survey its Happy Effects. There is-

1. The blessing of entire mutual confidence. We found this on verse eleventh (Proverbs 31:11). It is true, that it is only the confidence of the husband in the wife that is mentioned:-"The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her." But it is quite evident that the good character of the husband is to be considered as assumed. He is one who is supposed to abstain from the licentious vices warned against in the previous part of the chapter; one who is capable of appreciating and duly admiring and valuing such a wife as the passage describes; one who is at the head of a happy family who in their estimate of excellence and in their love of it in one another have entire sympathy of soul. This appears from verses Proverbs 31:2-8; Proverbs 31:29. "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." Thus they are all one,-one in character and one in social feeling-husband, wife, and children. And what a blessing, in conjugal life, is mutual confidence-confidence entire and unshaken,-of the husband in the wife, and of the wife in the husband! It is a blessing precious in proportion as the relation between two parties is close and permanent, How inexpressibly precious, then, in this relation-the closest and most permanent of all that belong to time! The relation was intended by that God whose name is Love, for mutual happiness; and, when formed and maintained on right principles, it most effectually answers the gracious end. And of all principles none is more conducive to the result than the reciprocal exercise of unsuspecting confidence. Where this exists; and where there is the interchange of fervent and faithful love; where there are hearts beating in unison,-each reposing on the other, and finding a ready and unequivocal response to every act and word and look of affection, and undisturbed by any apprehension of indiscreet or faithless disclosure of what the one intrusts to the other; and where, along with this, there is the union of spiritual feeling, and desire, and prayer, and practice,-the bonds of piety being superinduced upon, or intertwined with the ties of nature,-and all the intercourse hallowed by the fear, and sweetened by the love, and enriched with the jointly and daily supplicated blessing of a covenant God;-then is realized the purest and highest earthly enjoyment-the perfection of domestic happiness.

2. There is enjoyed family comfort;-in food, in clothing, in regularity and order,-every thing in place, and time, and measure:-Verses Proverbs 31:15; Proverbs 31:21. "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet." Need I say that this is a blessing? All feel it to be so;-the poorer as well as the richer. All like to have "their portion of meat

in due season," and not a stinted but an adequate and suitable supply; and all like clothing proportioned to the cold. But let me remind husband and wife, that to this both parties must contribute. We have, in the passage, an industrious and economical wife. But what can any wife, with her utmost industry and economy, do, if her husband is an idler or a spendthrift-making nothing for the family, or squandering, in folly or in profligacy, what he makes?-and on the other hand, what avails a husband's utmost industry, if on the wife's part there is the absence of management and economy? It is a very sad thing when the influences of husband and wife are in opposite directions,-the one undoing and counter-working all the salutary efforts of the other:-when the wife misapplies what the husband has laboured to obtain; or when the "virtuous woman" does all that can be done for domestic order and comfort and enjoyment, and her attempts are frustrated and rendered abortive by the folly, the extravagance, the selfishness, or the dissipation of her husband.

3. The acquisition and maintenance of personal health and vigour:-Verse Proverbs 31:17. "She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms." This, indeed, may signify no more than that she puts forth all her energy:-that, as it is expressed verse 13th (Proverbs 31:13), "She worketh willingly with her hands." Yet it may be considered as implying, that the very exercise contributes to her vigour. There are few things more enervating than a life of sloth. The sluggard, whether man or woman, soon becomes unfit for exertion. The frame gets relaxed, enfeebled, nerveless. It is not among those who sleep much and work little, that energy either of body or mind is generally to be found. It is among early risers and hard workers. I mean not, of course, workers beyond strength; for that never can contribute to health and vigour, but workers that do not grudge and spare their strength-willing workers.

I am well aware, that there are qualifications to be made here, both as to sleep and as to work. God has not given to all the same bodily constitution. And he would be a most unnatural husband-heartless and cruel, who would-I will not say require, but even expect or allow, a wife of delicate and feeble frame to apply herself to any description of labour beyond what she can bear. There are cases, in which the will outruns the ability, and in which disease and death have been the consequence of over-exertion. Still experience bears out the position, that activity contributes to health and strength; and especially morning activity. The wife before us, we have seen, is an early riser. But as to sleep, just as in regard to work,-it must be regulated by circumstances. Yet not a little depends on habit. Sleep is one of the most wonderful, and wise, and merciful provisions of the God of nature:-but it is one in which we must beware of over-indulgence. It is not intended as a mere luxury. It is designed to recruit our weary frames for fresh service-to promote health and vigour, and renew our ability for daily work. Let dutiful wives, then, see that they never make a plea of natural inability, when the ability is in reality moral,-when it is want of will more than want of power,-ever complaining of weakness, when the true object is the luxury of folding the hands together, and sitting at ease. And let husbands beware of oppression,-of overstimulating the willing spirit, and bringing the wives whom they should cherish in love to an untimely grave by excess of application.

4. We have the increased respectability of her husband from his connexion with her:-Verse Proverbs 31:23. "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land." In this there is something quite natural. The connexion is close-the closest on earth. Every thing, in consequence, that affects materially the character and reputation of the one side of the

house, has an unavoidable, though indirect, bearing on that of the other. The wife may be honoured and respected for her husband's sake, as well as the husband for the wife's; and, on the contrary, whatever lets down the dignity and respectability of the one, operates-unjustly it may sometimes be, but inevitably-upon that of the other. In the case before us,-it is quite manifest, the husband is a man who has respect and honour on his own account. His sitting among the elders of the land,-his holding a high judicial function, "being known in the gates," could never be meant as the result solely of his connexion with her. We should rather, I apprehend, take the twofold view of the case:-First, that in consequence of her rare combination of excellencies, she becomes the wife of a correspondingly eminent and deserving husband;-a husband worthy of such a wife, and one whom prince and people delight to honour:-And then, secondly, that her excellencies, thus united with his, tend to the enhancement of his respectability and admiration. He is known-not only as an elder and a judge,-but as her husband. There is an addition to the respect with which he is regarded, on her account-as the husband of such a wife. Thus the influence is reciprocal. People say, Ah! what a couple! how admirably adapted for each other! the husband is worthy of the wife, and the wife of the husband.-But it is of the wife's influence we are now speaking. Not only does a portion of the respect felt for her attach to him; but she contributes essentially to the respectability of his very appearance,-to the happy cheerfulness of his countenance and manners, and not a little, it may be, to the sober soundness of his judgment, and the judiciousness and prudence of his counsels.

Let wives bear in mind how much they have, in this respect, in their power. They necessarily appear before the world as having been the choice of their husbands. It inevitably follows, from this consideration alone, were there no other, that the characters of their husbands should, to a certain extent, be tested by theirs. If they are silly, senseless, and vain,-if they are idle untidy slatterns,-if they are scolds, or tattlers, or gossips, or given to wine,-there arises from their character a sure deduction from the respect which their husbands are themselves entitled to, and, but for them, would receive,-and a corresponding deduction from their influence and their usefulness. Yes, and the effect is not confined to the husband; it extends to the family. The very house ceases to be resorted to by those whose company would add both to its enjoyment and its honour,-who are scared away by the unamiableness and disreputableness of her who, conducting herself as she ought, should be the fond pride of her husband and her children.

5. We have as a further happy effect-pleasant reflections on the past:-Verse Proverbs 31:25. "Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come." It is the latter part of the verse especially on which I found this particular. The terms of it may simply mean, that while the idle, the extravagant, the vain, the worthless may for the time attract personal admiration, and draw about them parasitical and pretended friends, who find it their present interest to enjoy the sunshine of their favour, or who like to while away their time in frivolity and indolence,-yet are they laying up for the period of age, desertion and contempt. They have neglected those accomplishments which alone are lasting, and given themselves to what, at a later season, when the gay days of youth have gone by, can yield them no springs of inward satisfaction and joy in their own bosoms,-and can attract towards them, in the time of their decline, nothing of the respect or veneration of others. A youth of folly is the precursor to an age of fretfulness and sorrow. On the contrary, the woman of the solid, substantial, permanent excellencies here described, "shall rejoice in time to come." Her sources of enjoyment are such as will stand. They will serve for age

as well as for youth. The "light which is sown for the upright," is not the light of a passing meteor, that flashes and fades; it is light that "shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Or if, so far as this world is concerned, it must sink and set,-its sinking will be tranquil and its setting joyous. The "virtuous woman" shall "rejoice" even to the last. Her "yesterdays will look backward with a smile." The course she has in retrospect, contains in it the proofs of the reality of her religion. It has been consistent practical godliness.

There is one kind of delight in reflections on the past to such a character,-which is exquisite in proportion as the opposite is agonizing. The wife may be a widow. And I can imagine few things more pregnant with distress, than, when a husband is no more, to have busy memory ever bringing back to the heart recollections of unkindnesses and neglects; of words and looks and acts of passion; of duties which should have been done, and comforts which should have been provided, but which can now be done and provided no more; of words and acts and looks that cannot be recalled; and of neglects and unkindnesses that cannot be remedied, that cannot so much as be confessed, and forgiveness obtained. Even a kiss of proffered reconciliation refused will, in the recollection, have in it "the gall of bitterness."-How pleasant, on the contrary, to reflect on a course of conjugal endearment that leaves no such remembrances behind it;-no stings and venomed barbs for the spirit of widowhood;-on which "she who is a widow indeed and desolate," can look back, only with grief that what, through the divine blessing, was so very sweet, has come to a close!-And let not husbands forget, that the very same principle applies, in all its force, on both sides of the relation. On the one side and on the other, it ought to operate as a motive to self-vigilance,-to a jealous guardianship of the passions,-to a careful abstinence from every unkind word or look or action, to the affectionate anticipation of every wish, and avoidance of whatever might leave a painful feeling or a mistaken impression;-to the mutual cultivation inwardly of the love that should bind conjugal hearts together,-and of the outward manifestation of that love, as it flows, in word and act, sweetly and spontaneously from the heart, in all the daily intercourse of life.-Let both parties so dwell together in this daily intercourse, as that, whichsoever is taken away first, Memory may be to the survivor a whisperer of consolation, and not of woe-that, together or apart, both may "rejoice in time to come."

6. The next thing in order is-the delight afforded by the approval, the smiles, the commendation, the blessings, of those she most loves and values:-verses Proverbs 31:28-29. "Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." Ye wives-ye mothers!-what a lovely, what an enviable scene is this! How earnestly should each one of you strive to realize it in your own happy experience! Your children-affectionate, grateful, pious,-united in love to one another, and to you:-owning and commending with tears of sensibility and delight, their loved mother as the guardian, all kind and fond and faithful, of their infant years-blessing her, speaking well of her, praying for her, praising her; growing up into life a credit to her early care, and requiting that care in every kind of practical attention to the well-being of her declining, perhaps her widowed years!-And then your husbands, while they live-during your life or after your death-standing up on your behalf, with a glowing heart and a glistening eye, and pronouncing your eulogy-"Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all!"-the language of affectionate admiration-captivated by the excellencies, and forgetting the defects,-the one so outweighing and outnumbering the other, as to throw them out of the mind’s sight altogether; and a commendation

specially precious, as coming from the very quarter where the opportunity was the closest and most incessant of descrying and estimating both.-Such is the picture here brought before us. It is one on which the eye dwells with unsated and growing delight;-an affectionate and pious pair, one in the bond of nature, and one in that of grace,-hand in hand, and heart in heart,-surrounded by a group of happy children;-husband and wife, father and mother, parents and children, brothers and sisters,-all loving and loved,-all blessing and blessed,-every countenance beaming with mutual complacency,-every eye gleaming with cheerfulness and melting in love. And the chief contributor to this scene of affection, piety, and joy, is the "virtuous woman." It is the influence of the character described that in such a scene is most prominently apparent. Let every christian wife emulate the character, that she may possess and communicate the joy.

7. The last here alluded to is of the happy results-solid, substantial, lasting happiness and honour-contrasted with what is vain, deceitful, and transient:-verses Proverbs 31:30-31. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hand; and let her own works praise her in the gates." The "favour" here spoken of seems, from the connexion, to be the favour which is won by mere beauty or personal appearance; and the "beauty" of course is that by which the favour is attracted. The one is "deceitful," the other is "vain:"-that is, on the one side, the woman who trusts in the steadfastness of the favour that has been obtained by no better qualities than the symmetry of her features, the delicacy of her complexion, or the elegance of her person, will find herself disappointed-that the love on which she relied was eye-love only, not heart-love. The love that wears well must be obtained by qualities of a higher order. On the other hand, "beauty is vain." Of course the beauty here spoken of is not the beauty that consists in the expression in the countenance of mental loveliness,-of the beauties of the mind and heart. It is the beauty only of feature and of form. The man who is attracted by it, and who unites himself for life with a woman in whom he has nothing else, will ultimately discover its vanity. It is itself but a fading flower. It cannot always retain its bloom:-and circumstances may produce a fading more rapid than nature and time, in ordinary course, must do. And unless there be something more deeply-seated than "the blooming tincture of the skin," that has drawn his love, all will quickly become insipid enough; and he will sigh over the vanity of his bewitched fancy and his foolish anticipations. When he comes to feel that in a wife and a mother there are other qualities indispensably necessary, both for conjugal companionship and for the training of a family, than such as are merely external, he will despise himself as a fool for his pains, for having allowed his eye thus to mislead his better judgment. He has his reward. And while beauty may draw general attention, and obtain many a passing tribute of admiration, what is such admiration worth? How poor the praise that goes no further than the features and the complexion!-"She is certainly beautiful; every feature turned with exquisite symmetry, and all in harmonious proportion:-but (with a shrug) there’s wonderfully little in her; she has neither heart nor mind."

One quality there is which, in the eye of Lemuel’s mother, stood prominently forward, as first in the attributes of character entitling to the commendation which is here bestowed-namely true religion-"the fear of God:"-"THE WOMAN THAT FEARETH THE LORD, she shall be praised."-This is a quality neither "deceitful" nor "vain." It is the germ of all the excellencies here enumerated;-the indwelling, living principle of them all. "She shall be praised "-praised by all that know her, and by all that hear of her:-yes, and by Jehovah himself. This is God’s word; and here is

His recorded eulogy. It is His commendation of every one who bears the character. And when "the judgment shall be set, and the books shall be opened," the owner of this character will be praised before the assembled world, by the God whom she feared, and loved, and served.-It is the duty of all to praise her,-and in thus commending, to "give her of the fruit of her hands." It is no more than her just due,-no more than what she has wrought out and earned for herself. If tongues were silent, her works would speak for her. They "praise her in the gates"-praise her publicly, to the view and the admiration of all. Let her have the praise; and let the praise be coveted and emulated by women of every degree. Such women are, to a great extent, the formers of the character of a community. They frame the character of the nursery; and the character of the nursery, rising into manhood, becomes the character of the future generation. Besides:-it has become a trite and common-place remark, to what an extent the character of one sex affects that of the other; and how powerful, especially, is the influence of woman upon man. According to the place which woman holds in social life, may the character of the community, for meanness or for dignity, for hard-heartedness or sensibility, for coarseness or refinement, for sensuality or for intellectual and moral elevation, for the lightness of irreligion or the seriousness of piety, be estimated. Women in such a country as ours are little aware, in general, of the amount of their obligations to Christianity for the position in society which they occupy. O! would they but pay back to Christianity what they owe to it, by embracing its truths, imbibing its spirit, exemplifying its influence, and thus leavening domestic and social life with its holy and happy effects! Much have they in their power; for though their immediate influence is in the domestic circle-their proper and legitimate sphere,-yet thence it spreads upwards, around, and onwards,-and the whole mass of society becomes impregnated by the influence of the wives and mothers of the land. And thus, in the most enlarged acceptation of the words, "their own works praise them in the gates."

Let the children of godly and exemplary mothers think of the obligations under which they lie to providence for the privilege,-and beware of the wrong they must do to God and to society, if they fail to catch and transfuse the holy influence. Many have been the men-eminent in devotedness to God and in usefulness to the generations in which they have lived, who have imputed the germ of all their excellence and of all their beneficial working, to a mother’s instructions and example. O! let race unto race praise the Lord, and one generation tell of his wonderful works to another, while sun and moon endure!

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