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*[Those marked \* are already published.]*

THE NEW-CENTURY BIBLE  
PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES  
SONG OF SONGS

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# The New-Century Bible

GENERAL EDITOR :

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## Proverbs Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs

INTRODUCTIONS  
REVISED VERSION WITH NOTES  
AND INDEX

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THE Editor's indebtedness to various books will be found indicated in the sections on literature, and in the notes. To those who have thus afforded him so much indispensable help his thanks are gratefully rendered—not least to those from whose conclusions he has been compelled to differ. To three personal friends he wishes to express his most sincere gratitude—the Rev. Wm. Christie, of Aleppo, for valuable suggestions; the Rev. R. McKinley, M.A., New Pitsligo, for some illustrations from Scottish literature; and to H. Barnes, Esq., M.A., for the beautiful verse translation of the song quoted in the Appendix, and for many hints in the section dealing with the Song of Songs.

BRADFORD, *Sept.* 1908.

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PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES,  
SONG OF SONGS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

# PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES, SONG OF SONGS

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE three books to be discussed in this volume may be said to constitute the lighter side of Jewish literature. Two of them are strictly poetic in form, while the third contains many passages of exquisite poetic prose. We are not to suppose, however, that all the lighter literature of the Hebrews is contained in these three books. We have folk-songs, for instance, in other books of the Old Testament. Notable examples are to be found in Gen. iv. 23, 'The Song of Lamech'; Gen. xlix, 'The Blessing of Jacob'; Num. xxi. 16-18, 'The Song of the Well'; Num. xxi. 27-30, 'The Triumph over Heshbon.' Admirable examples of the popular and sometimes humorous tales are to be found in the stories of Samson, Gideon, the youthful adventures of David, and many similar narratives. Lyrics of exceeding beauty occur among the Psalms, in the pages of Isaiah, and in the Book of Lamentations, while a lovely example of a popular idyll is to be found in the Book of Ruth, and a romantic novel, founded upon fact, in the Book of Esther. Outside the borders of the O. T. there exist numerous examples of literature similar to that we have been describing in the collection of books known as the Apocrypha, where in the Books of Tobit and Judith are examples of popular tales, while Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon stand very close in thought and character to the Book of Proverbs. The three books with which we have immediately to deal are very distinct in character, the one being either a long and elaborate lyrical poem on the passion of love, or a collection of such tender lyrics. The longest of the three

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consists of many separate poems, some being epigrams that remind us of many contained in the Greek Anthology. These deal with all sorts of circumstances in daily life, being occasionally full of humour and satire, and at other moments their beauty reminds us of the description of the fitting word contained in one of them, viz. 'golden apples hid in silvery foliage.' The third book is in many ways the most difficult. It consists of the reflections of a man of philosophic temper, who, in many of his moods, seems far removed from the general character of the writers of scripture, and yet by his very strangeness is intensely attractive, since even his somewhat gloomy pessimism strikes a sympathetic note in most hearts.

In the Hebrew scriptures the books here dealt with are not classified together. They all, indeed, belong to the third great division of those scriptures, which was known by the title of 'Writings' or 'Hagiographa,' but two of them, the *Song of Songs* and *Ecclesiastes*, are contained in a subdivision of the latter called the Five *Megilloth* or 'Rolls,' which were appointed to be read in the synagogue services at certain fixed seasons—the *Song of Songs* at the Passover, and *Ecclesiastes* at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Apart from its general poetic form (a subject which will be discussed later, see pp. 13-16), there is very little within the O.T. scriptures that can be compared at all closely with the *Song of Songs*. The only direct comparison that is possible is the beautiful marriage-song contained in Ps. xlv. It is probably based in its present form upon such popular wedding-songs as we shall see underlie the *Song of Songs* itself, and much of its imagery, and even language, are to be found in that work; cf. Ps. xlv. 7:

'Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee  
With the oil of gladness above thy fellows'

with *Song of Songs* iii. 11. Again, the eighth verse of the

psalm, speaking of the fragrance of the bridegroom's garments, uses the names of the same spices that are mentioned in Song of Songs iv. 14, while the description of 'ivory palaces' and 'kings' daughters' as among the bride's attendants, and the other accompaniments of a wedding procession, remind us strongly of the longer poem. But the resemblances are most close when we come to the actual picture of the bride's own adornment as given in verses 13 and 14 of the psalm :

'The king's daughter within is all glorious :  
Her clothing is inwrought with gold.  
She shall be led unto the king, clad in embroidered  
raiment :  
The virgins her companions that follow her  
Shall be brought unto thee.'

In the beauty of its poetic imagery, as well as in the variety and sweetness of its expression, the Song of Songs is unrivalled in Hebrew literature. Born of the soil, it has been taken up by some skilful poet, and given such literary form that it has become 'a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.' There is one peculiar practice of the Arab poets, pointed out to the present writer by the Rev. W. Christie, of Aleppo, which probably throws light upon some of the most discussed passages in the poem. This is the habit, so strange as to seem almost unintelligible to us, of being quite careless about the gender of the pronouns employed, so that an Arab lover may be singing his lady-love's praises in language that to the uninitiated reader appears to be the description of male beauty and perfections.

# PROVERBS

## INTRODUCTION

AND

REVISED VERSION WITH ANNOTATIONS



# PROVERBS

## INTRODUCTION

WHEN we turn to the Book of Proverbs, we find ourselves in a different atmosphere from that of any other book in the Hebrew O.T. The nearest resemblance to it is in certain sections of the Book of Ecclesiastes, particularly parts of chaps. iv, v, and vii. But in the Greek version of the O.T. there are two books which stand in close relation with this one, namely, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and the *Wisdom of the Son of Sirach*, commonly called *Ecclesiasticus*. Many illustrations from both of these will be found in the notes contained in this commentary. The proverbial style of utterance is not common in our Western literature, but is a favourite form among Easterns. Every people has its own collection of popular proverbs, which pass from lip to lip and embody much of the current wisdom gained by experience. Some such origin may be the true one of many of the sayings in this book, but the majority of them at least emanate from the schools of professional teachers, and if they came at first from the lips of the people, they have been altered and modified so that the stamp of the professional teacher lies upon them. In English our closest resemblances to this style of writing are to be found in certain essays of Lord Bacon, and in *Some Fruits of Solitude*, by William Penn, though the aphoristic form is not absent from the pages of Emerson, and an excellent collection of both pithy and literary proverbs might be culled from the novels of George Meredith. In one case he definitely sets himself to create such a series in the famous 'Pilgrim's Scrip,' that lends a special flavour to the

*Ordeal of Richard Feverel.* But even when he is not specially setting himself to write in the form of proverbs, his style crystalizes into the type of literary expression which is most akin to them.

The book naturally possesses much less of a formal construction than any other book in the O.T., save the Book of Psalms, and it probably covers a very long period of history in the various collections that go to make it up. Traditionally, the authorship of the main part of the book is attributed to Solomon, but we have evidences within the book itself that this is not to be universally applicable even on the assumption of the editors themselves, for at the beginning of the twenty-fifth chapter a new section begins with the statement, 'These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.' Though this statement attributes the further collection thus introduced to Solomon, it also reveals the fact that the work of later editors was recognized upon it, and probably signifies that independent work was done by these later hands. Again, we have the sections contained in chaps. xxx and xxxi, which are attributed to different authors, and the anonymous section beginning at xxiv. 23. We can see, further, that some indication of other hands being at work upon the book was in the minds of the editors of it in its present form, from the beginning of chap. x, which gives the simple heading 'the proverbs of Solomon,' an unnecessary addition in the light of the first verse of the first chapter, which has already entitled the whole work 'the proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel.' Probably the oldest part of the book is the section containing proverbs proper, that extends from x. 1 to xxii. 16. In these chapters we have the best examples of the various forms of the proverb, of which we shall have presently to speak, and there is no difficulty in believing that many of them descend from a great antiquity, probably long before the days of Solomon. It is difficult to tell whether much

stress is to be laid upon his traditional connexion with the proverbial literature. We are told that in his own day he uttered 'three thousand proverbs' (1 Kings iv. 32), but this is very likely the admiring comment of a later generation about one whose phenomenal wisdom had long before become the subject of popular legend, though it is quite conceivable that Solomon had been the first to gather round him a school of sages, and may even have encouraged them to produce definite systems of teaching. The next division of the book extends from xxii. 17 to xxiv. 22, and is perfectly anonymous.

Its opening verses contain a short prefatory note (xxii. 17-21), and the bulk of the collection is concerned with counsels that relate in the main to the risks of riches and luxury, and may date, therefore, from the late period of the Greek control of Palestine. The third collection is contained in chap. xxiv. 23-34, and is simply entitled 'sayings of the wise.' It contains a few general proverbs, and the parable of the sluggard's vineyard. There is nothing in it very indicative of date, though the parable has a strong resemblance to chap. vi. 6-11, and is probably based upon it. The short collection may, therefore, be later than that chapter. Next comes the section above referred to as traditionally attributed to the days of Hezekiah in its present form, consisting of chaps. xxv-xxix. It is impossible to say whether Hezekiah had anything whatever to do with the collection, though, according to one recent writer (*Old Testament Problems*, by J. W. Thirtle), Hezekiah played a much larger part in the literary activity of the O. T. than has generally been supposed. The only certain conclusion that can be drawn from the statement, as it stands, is that, in the judgement of the editors, the collection is later than those which precede it, but even this is doubtful; for, as the notes will show, there are many parallelisms between it and the earlier chapters, and some of them show that the borrowing may more likely have been on the part of the

writers of the proverbs now found in the earlier part of the book. Chapters xxx and xxxi stand apart from the rest of the book, and are recognized by the editors as being of quite separate authorship. (For the difficulty of the interpretation of the headings see the notes on these chapters.) But it is perfectly clear from considerations of language, as well as of literary form, that they are later than the main sections of the book we have been hitherto considering. In chap. xxxi is contained an acrostic poem (verses 10-31), which has really nothing parallel to it anywhere else in the book, and may have been quite accidentally added by some scribe who felt that it embodied some of the ideals of practical wisdom that had been already inculcated, or may, indeed, have been written by some poet who was himself the final editor. We have hitherto left unnoticed the great introductory section consisting of chaps. i-ix, though there should be excluded from it two passages which seem to have been accidentally introduced into the section, probably through the carelessness of scribes, viz. vi. 1-19, ix. 7-12. This great section stands most closely allied to the later books of Wisdom above referred to, and is really a long poem upon the nature and characteristics of Wisdom, who is regarded as a person, and almost, at times, identified with the Divine Spirit. It shows, therefore, both in its language and thought, the mark of a later age, and is the finest, as it may also be the first, of those superb poems, which in a later and more reflective period of Israel's history, sang the praises of the Wisdom of God.

It will be apparent from the above sketch how difficult it is to date with any definite accuracy the various sections of the book, and, as a matter of fact, scholars differ exceedingly in their deductions from the above data. The main grounds for a decision are the obviously uncertain ones of thought and language. For the thought, the book is brought into comparison with Job and Eccle-

siastes on the one hand, and the later Wisdom books on the other, but interpreters differ as to whether we should reckon the somewhat sceptical tendencies of the other two canonical books as bearing witness to an earlier or later date than the more definite teaching of the Book of Proverbs. With the exception of the few verses in chap. xxx, the interpretation of which is doubtful, we have nothing that can be remotely suspected of the sceptical attitude in this work, and it seems more probable that there were two streams of thought that ran concurrently for several centuries, and represented different schools, to which we might apply the vivid, picturesque, and modern terminology of Professor William James, and describe them as the 'tough-minded' and 'tender-minded' thinkers of ancient Palestine, the former concerning themselves mainly with the practical questions of everyday life, and the latter apt to lose themselves in the morasses of metaphysical speculation.

The argument from language is, of course, much more subtle and difficult, and also nearly impossible to present to the English reader, and for an examination of it one must be referred to the larger commentaries that deal with the original (for example, Toy, pp. xxiv-xxx), and the English reader may regret less the absence of the discussion on being told that no very definite conclusion can be reached by its help. There are, of course, certain broad lines on which scholars have no hesitation, as, for example, in saying that in the later chapters there are many usages and words which definitely point to the later period of the Hebrew language, i. e. to the second or third centuries B. C.

The next matter to be considered is the external form of the proverbs. These are, of course, in the main poetical, though here and there, as will be indicated in the notes, prose passages occur. The significant form of Hebrew poetry is what is known as parallelism, and that is sufficiently clear to any reader on opening almost at

random any poetic book.. Take, for example, the Psalm cxix. At the fifteenth verse we read :

‘I will meditate in thy precepts,  
And have respect unto thy ways.’

Here the parallelism is exact between the two clauses, there being only a slight variation between the two verbs and the two nouns, which practically state the same truth in the balanced clauses under a slightly different form. Similar examples are found in verses 59, 105, &c.

Or, again, the parallelism consists in the second clause emphasizing one of the statements of the first, and extending it, as, for example, verse 41 :

‘Let thy mercies also come unto me, O Lord,  
Even thy salvation, according to thy word.’

For this type of verse cf. further verses 63, 89, 103, &c.

A very favourite form is that of contrast, see verse 23 :

‘Princes also sat and talked against me :  
But thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.’

See further verses 51, 61, 67, &c.

Sometimes the parallel clause contains a reason for the statement made in the first clause. See verse 50 :

‘This is my comfort in my affliction :  
For thy word hath quickened me.’

See further verses 66, 77, 91, &c.

All these types of parallelism are to be found in the Book of Proverbs, and for rapid and clear reference one may here be permitted to quote the admirable paragraph on the subject contained in Toy's Introduction, p. x: ‘The form of the parallelism varies in the different sections. In I. it may be said to be, in accordance with the tone of the discourses, wholly synonymous ; the apparent exceptions are iii. 27-35, ix. 8, all occurring in misplaced or doubtful paragraphs. II. divides itself into two parts: in chaps. x-xv the form is antithetic, in xvi-xxii. 16 the couplets are mostly comparisons and single sen-

tences, with a few antitheses. III. is made up of synonymous lines, except xxiv. 16. IV. shows a division into two parts: in chapters xxv–xxvii we find comparisons and single sentences, except in xxv. 2, xxvii. 6, 7, 12, which contains antitheses, while in chapters xxviii, xxix the two forms are nearly equal in number (thirty-three antithetic couplets, twenty-two comparisons and single sentences). In V. the parallelism is, with a few exceptions (see xxx. 12, 24–28, xxxi. 30), synonymous.’ Further kinds of parallelism have been distinguished under such names as *Stair-like* (see Ps. xxiv. 8, xxv. 1) and *Introverted* (see Ps. xxx. 9–11).

It may be said that the parallelism that we have been discussing is the fundamental principle of Hebrew poetry, and perhaps also of the poetry of other Semitic peoples, as the same phenomenon has been discovered in the poetic writings of Assyria and Babylonia, and, according to some writers, also in Egypt. But beyond the mere matter of parallelism there are also certain signs used in the Hebrew manuscripts to designate verses, that is in the technical poetical sense, very much what we should call couplets, and it seems further possible to divide these couplets in the majority of instances into their individual lines. Into the more intricate question of metre, it is impossible to go without a knowledge of the original language. Anything corresponding to our idea of rhyme is very rare, if it occurs at all, and certainly this could never have played any determining part in the form of Hebrew poetry. Budde believes that he has found the main standard of criticism in what he calls the *Kinah* measure. This means the verse in which laments were written, and is that found largely in the Book of Lamentations. It may be roughly described as a sort of elegiac verse, similar to the Latin pentameter in which so many of the poems of Ovid are written. For a more detailed account of this matter the reader is referred to the article ‘Poetry’ in the fourth volume of Hastings’ *DB*. Of the main divisions into which Budde there divides poetry, namely,

folk-poetry, the poetry of the prophets, and artistic poetry, the three books contained in this volume come under the latter head, the Song of Songs being a lyric, the Book of Proverbs being a specimen of gnomic poetry, while Ecclesiastes is described as a philosophical didactic poem, but in the latter, either through defective text or for other reasons, the poetic form is frequently defective. (The reader may further compare on this subject the article 'Poetical Literature' in *Enc. Bib.* and the Introduction to 'The Psalms' in the *Int. Crit. Com.*, by Dr. Briggs, vol. i, pp. xxxiv-xlviii, or in *Century Bible*, vol. i, pp. 30-9.)

Before proceeding to a consideration of the system of thought contained in the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, there is a further external matter in connexion with the former book requiring notice, namely, the form of the text that is represented by the LXX. The first remarkable feature about the latter is the different order in which certain sections of the book are contained in it. The following comparative table represents the differences in the arrangement of the two texts:

E. V.	LXX.
xxiv. 22.	xxiv. 22, 23. In addition to the translation of what stands as verse 22 in Hebrew and English, the LXX has additional clauses, for the translation of which see the notes on the passage.
xxx. 1-14.	xxiv. 24-37.
xxiv. 23-34.	xxiv. 38-49.
xxx. 15-33.	xxiv. 50-68.
xxxi. 1-9.	xxiv. 69-77.
xxv. 1-xxix. 27.	xxv. 1-xxix. 27.
xxxii. 10-31.	xxix. 28-49.

In addition to these large sections of variation there are frequently short additions in the LXX, the main examples of



which will be noted in the Commentary where they occur (see e.g. iii. 16, iv. 27, ix. 12). On the other hand, there are occasional verses omitted by the LXX, e.g. xviii. 23, 24, xx. 14-19. Many times the LXX varies greatly from the Hebrew, either by misunderstanding the text or by having had something different from the Hebrew we now possess. On occasions we find obvious additions or interpretations which seem clearly to be reflections of the Greek scribe, or endeavours to make clearer statements which he found obscure. In other instances the LXX inserts a verse a second time that has already appeared in an earlier part of the book. Two features of the translation are noted by Frankenberg as characteristic, and which mark it out from the LXX translation of other parts of the O.T. First, that for well-known Hebrew expressions, which are elsewhere always rendered consistently by the same Greek word, different words are employed in this book, and, secondly, the great freedom that the translator has allowed himself, so great as many times to amount to an inaccurate paraphrase. A very probable explanation of some of these features is that, while in the case of the law, and even to some extent the prophets, there existed a somewhat fixed oral tradition in the Greek language, there was nothing of that sort in the case of Proverbs, and the translator was compelled to find his own way towards a true solution of the many difficulties that beset him. The LXX version, it is well known, is that generally employed by the N.T. writers, and traces of its use in this book are not difficult to find. From a list given by Plumptre the following examples are taken:—Prov. iii. 34, cf. Jas. iv. 6; Prov. iv. 26, cf. Heb. xii. 13; Prov. xiii. 7, cf. 2 Cor. vi. 10; Prov. xxvii. 1, cf. Jas. iv. 14-16. Other examples will be found in the Commentary itself.

When we turn finally to the ideas rather than to the language of the book, we find ourselves in the realm of what is known as the Hebrew Wisdom literature. This is

represented in the main by the Books of *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Ecclesiasticus*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, *The Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*; certain of the *Psalms* show traces of the same school of teaching (notably the *Psalms* viii. 19, xix, xxix, xxxvii, xlix, lxxiii, civ, cvii, cxii, cxix, cxxxix). The chronological order of these writings is not easy to settle, but probably *Job* is the earliest, at least the original form of *Job*. Next may come some of the *Psalms*, and the earliest sections of *Proverbs*. Whether *Ecclus.* or *Eccles.* in its earliest form holds the prior place is difficult to decide, but *Eccles.* as we now know it is possibly the later of the two. To the latest age of all belong the early chapters of *Proverbs* and the Book of *Wisdom*, while some of the earliest of the *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers* mark the transition to another type of Hebrew literature, that, viz. with which we are familiar in the Talmud. The writers of the *Wisdom* literature were a recognized class in the Hebrew community, and we find them frequently referred to in the pages of the O.T. In one passage they are clearly marked off from the other two great classes of religious teachers. In *Jer.* xviii. 18 we read, 'The law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet,' from which we see that they occupied a definite and recognized position in the religious community. There seems to have been considerable rivalry between them and the prophets, or else the class of wise men referred to in the pages of the prophetic books must have been only charlatans, and have occupied a somewhat similar place in the schools to what the false prophets did in the prophetic guilds. See, for example, such references as *Jer.* viii. 8, 'How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? But, behold, the false pen of the scribes hath wrought falsely. The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what manner of wisdom is in them?' (Cf. also xxix. 8-14.)

If the latter passage is rightly dated as belonging to the period of the reign of Hezekiah, it is illuminating to remember that a section of Proverbs (see xxv. 1) is attributed to the men of Hezekiah's day, so that we may here be listening to a prophet's estimate of the worth of their work. Probably the opposition arose from similar causes to those which have given rise to misunderstanding in almost every generation between idealists and men with a purely practical outlook upon life. The philosopher has so often scorned the politician, and the man of religious fervour despised the speculative thinker, that we need not be surprised to find the same state of affairs in the society of the Jerusalem of Isaiah and his followers. On the other hand, when we turn to the testimony of the wise men themselves we find just as lofty and gracious aims and achievements among them as are discovered in the pages of the prophets. Some of the Psalms, to which reference has already been made, amply prove this, as e.g. the whole attitude of the Psalm cxix; but the most famous passage is that found in Eccles. xxxix. 1-11, which should be carefully read.

It is a passage which sets before us both the ideals and the limitations of the sages. We notice in the first place that there are certain ultimate questions with which they never dealt, for example, the existence of God. For the Hebrew sage that was regarded as a necessary axiom. Into the origin of moral evil it was also impossible for the Hebrew sage to enter, but his greatest difficulty was to reconcile the Divine government of life with the obvious inequalities in the lot of man. That is a problem that constitutes the main interest of the Book of Job, and that recurs in various forms in Eccles. The sage appears also to have been a traveller; and here we discover what some of these books indeed clearly indicate, that many of the ideas and forms of expression found in them were derived from other nations, especially from Persian and Greek sources. The practical character of his researches,

and the effect these produce in giving him excellent opportunities for self-advancement in politics and statecraft, is also referred to here, and will frequently come before us in the pages of Proverbs and Eccles. The nature of the wise man's piety is further indicated as being mainly a subjection of his own will to the Divine will, an idea which is well expressed in a verse that we shall find may be regarded as the motto of the Book of Proverbs—'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' This Eccles. passage also contains the clear consciousness of the sage that his work will be enduring.<sup>1</sup> Like the Roman poet, he is certain that he is erecting for himself a memorial which shall be more permanent than brass, a consciousness which has been common to many of the great minds of the world, and was expressed by our Lord Himself in the memorable words, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away'—a saying that may even find its origin in the very passage we are considering.

It appears as if the traditional source of the Hebrew wisdom were the land of Edom, for in Jer. xlix. 7 we read, in an oracle that refers to that nation, 'Is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the prudent? Is their wisdom vanished?' And again in Obadiah, verse 8, we have the words, 'Shall I not . . . destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau?' From this quarter also the Book of Job brings his friends who are the supporters of the traditional wisdom. Just what significance is to be attached to these hints it is not easy to determine, but if recent speculation as to the sources of the Israelitish nation being discoverable in the district to which Edom belongs are correct, then we may see in these passages a witness on the part of her teachers

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<sup>1</sup> 'Many shall commend his understanding;  
And, so long as the world endureth, it shall not be blotted out.'

to the real sources of her later knowledge. In Ezek. xxviii. 3 there is a reference to the great wisdom of Tyre, an indication that in matters of practical wisdom and commercial prudence, which are subjects largely dealt with in the Book of Proverbs, the kingdom of Tyre may well have been one of Israel's greatest instructors.

Further influences may have reached the Jewish people from Persian sources, and in this direction Ezra and his new religious movement must have played a large part. But the Scribes, who were the descendants of Ezra, were not, apparently, the same class as the sages. The latter Cheyne believes to have been organized into a guild in pre-exilic times. They appear to have been the great movers in education, so far as we can judge from the Book of Proverbs itself, and the many references that it contains to teacher and pupil, and to the education of children (see ix. 1-4, xiii. 1, &c.). In the later Book of Eccclus. we find further references to the sages as public instructors, e.g. in vi. 36 we read the counsel, 'If thou seest a man of understanding, get thee betimes unto him, and let thy foot wear out the steps of his doors.' These professional teachers may have taken fees for their instruction, as did the Greek sophists, for we find a reference in Eccclus. li. 28, which seems to indicate that such was a well-known practice, 'Get you instruction with a great sum of silver'; but that the investment was supposed to be profitable the subsequent words of the clause prove, for they read 'and gain much gold by her.' Can it be that the prophets are once more girding at their rivals when they speak as the prophet does in Isa. lv. 1, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat?'

The basis of all the teaching was, apparently; revelation and human experience, the one illuminating the other. We do not find many direct references in the work of the sages to the record of revelation, but we can see that they regarded it as the ultimate foundation. Wisdom, however,

is so practical a thing that it must be reducible to terms of everyday conduct before it can be of any value, even to the religious man. In something of the Greek spirit, knowledge and morality are identified. Thus it comes to pass that the wise man is synonymous with the practical sage, and the man of wicked life with the fool. This glorification of wisdom found a new outcome in certain sections of the literature we are now discussing. In Job xxviii it is praised in language of the highest poetry, and we are told that God alone knoweth the place thereof. In Proverbs viii Wisdom is personified and spoken of as the companion of the Almighty, and the onlooker of the Creation—as one, indeed, who may almost be described as a child with whom the Maker of all things delighted to share the joy of His work. The description in Eccclus. xxiv may be earlier than the one just quoted from Proverbs. There we are told that Wisdom is the first of the created things, and is practically identical with the Jewish law. The Book of Wisdom goes much further and describes Wisdom as ‘a breath of the power of God, a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty, an effulgence from everlasting light, an unspotted mirror of the working of God, an image of His goodness’ (cf. vii. 25, 26). In this book Wisdom is given creative functions, and is clearly the forerunner of the later idea of the Logos. We can see, therefore, the development of the idea that obedience to the Divine will can only be finally reached in a person who is absolutely at one with it. What started as an ideal of righteousness concludes with the creation of a person who embodies that ideal, and thus, we may say, prepares the way for the doctrine of Christ, who was Himself both the embodiment of the Divine righteousness and the Power who made its fulfilment possible to all who believed in Him.

It may seem to many readers a great descent from such high conceptions to the motives for righteousness so frequently set before us in the pages of Proverbs. Men

have often spoken of the book as if it were simply a series of directions as to how to get on well in business life. As a matter of fact, it accepts in the main the general O.T. creed that prosperity was the proof of Divine protection and approval, and that success in life was a sufficient motive for righteous conduct. But then we have to remember that success, thus understood, implied God's acceptance of the individual, for without such acceptance the end could not be attained. This creed, as we have seen, had many severe blows struck at it by the obvious inequalities of the lots of the righteous and the wicked, and a new creed arose in the later days of Judaism that spoke of the resurrection, and promised that the inequalities of the present life would be set right in the next. Koheleth seems to have been sceptical about the truth of this teaching, and we shall find in his pages traces of his dissatisfaction with it. But the later Book of Wisdom preaches the doctrine of immortality (see iii. 1-9, i. 13-16, &c.), and so clears the way for that belief with which the people were conversant in the time of Christ. There is one striking feature of Judaism that is altogether absent from the Wisdom literature, namely, the golden age that had been the subject of much of the prophetic teaching, and which formed the basis of the Apocalyptic visions. Apparently the sages were not impressed by this type of thought, and left it aside in all their teaching and ideas.

The majority of this group of writers might have made their own the language of Browning's painter :

‘This world’s no blot for us  
Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good :  
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.’

A general happy contentment with life appears in the pages of Proverbs, and in several passages of Eccles. Indeed, it appears to have been the latter's sanest mood, and is perhaps his most significant teaching for all time,

at life is in itself a sane and healthy thing, and that an cannot do better than make a wise use of its opportunities.

The Wisdom literature played a large part in the later story both of the Jewish and the Christian Church. In the former it gave rise to much of the Rabbinic teaching, especially its parables and paradoxes, and may very well have inspired the mediaeval Jews in their return to philosophical studies when they became for a time the leading exponents of the new learning. In the Christian Church we find its influence first most prominent in the epistle of James, but both on the lips of our Lord and in the pages of Paul traces of the Wisdom literature are not difficult to discover. Philosophical writers such as Clement of Alexandria were very familiar with it, and, in a book that he designed as a practical handbook for Christian disciples, Augustine drew from Eccclus. a larger proportion of the quotations than he did from the Gospel of Matthew itself. Augustine's great follower, Luther, had an immense admiration for the book, and reckoned it far more important than many that have a place in the canon. Many of our older English divines quote it with such familiarity, and it will not be forgotten by the readers of English fiction that it was a favourite book with Adam Bede. 'On some mornings,' writes George Eliot, 'when he read in the Apocrypha, of which he was very fond, the Son of Sirach's keen-edged words would bring a delighted smile.' The Book of Proverbs used to play a large part in the education of every Scottish youth, for it was generally learned by heart in every school, and its influence upon the Scottish character has undoubtedly been deep and lasting. Ruskin tells us that among the chapters which he was compelled by his mother to commit to memory were four from Proverbs, namely, chapters ii, iii, viii, and xii. In a letter in *Fors* (letter 53) he makes a selection from chaps. xv and xvi of the Book of Wisdom, with the introductory remark that these



verses appear to him to reach to the roots, not only of political institutions, but of many other hitherto hidden things.

[On the Wisdom literature in general the reader may profitably consult the articles on the Wisdom literature in the *Enc. Bib.*, and that on Wisdom in Hastings' *DB.*, as well as the articles in each dictionary on the individual books named. Further, the *Hebrew Literature of Wisdom*, by Genung, will be found a very interesting and suggestive introduction to the whole subject, as it consists of a series of lectures, and so maintains something of its popular character, while it is full of many excellent literary illustrations. Another good popular handbook is *The Wisdom Literature of the O.T.*, by W. T. Davison, which contains an account of the nature and teaching of the three Wisdom books contained in the O.T., and also of the Song of Songs. More advanced students should consult Cheyne's *Job and Solomon*, and for an entirely different point of view Dillon's *Sceptics of the O.T.*]

#### LITERATURE FOR PROVERBS.

The most convenient commentary for the English reader is that by Perowne in the *Cambridge Bible*. The notes are, on the whole, excellent, and many good illustrations are contained in them, besides translations of the most important additions in the LXX. In the *Speakers' Commentary* there is a very suggestive commentary, rich in illustrative material, by Plumptre. The largest and most important English commentary is that of Toy in the International Critical series. Everything requisite for the full understanding of the book can be found there. The articles in the *Bible Dictionary* should also be consulted. For illustrations from the proverbs of other nations, Malan's two volumes of *Notes on Proverbs* are invaluable. The older commentary of Delitzsch, though founded on the Hebrew text, and full of technical material,

has still much value for the ordinary reader, and many interesting points may be found in Trench's *Proverb and their Lessons*. Dr. Horton's volume in *The Expository Bible* is very suggestive on the teaching of the book and he there groups together sections that are similar in subject. Of German books the most useful are the commentaries of Nowack, Wildeboer, and Frankenberg the two latter have been found of great service in the preparation of the present work.

# THE PROVERBS

THE proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel : 1  
To know wisdom and instruction ; 2  
To discern the words of understanding ;

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i. 1. **proverbs.** On the general question of the relation of this title to the literary character of the whole book, see the Introduction, p. 10. But the word rendered 'proverbs' means something between a comparison and a parable, and in its Greek equivalent is sometimes rendered by either English word (cf. John xvi. 25 with the marginal reading). For its further use in the O. T. see Ezek. xiv. 8; Isa. xiv. 4. It will thus be seen that the word either applies to the short and pithy sentences to which we generally give the name of Proverbs, and which constitute the larger part of this book, or to longer and more fully developed similes, such as those that occur in the first nine chapters, and are found in other parts of the Bible.

2. **To know wisdom.** From verses 2 to 6 the writer gives an extended title, or, more accurately, a detailed explanation of his title, the recurring infinitives being designed to express the purpose of the Proverbs, and the words in which this is set forth are those which recur frequently throughout the book. These verses are like the overture of an opera, which suggests the themes that are afterwards to be developed in detail. In particular is 'wisdom' the central conception, not only of this book, but of the whole class of literature to which it belongs (see Introduction, p. 17 ff.).

**instruction.** The word which is rendered in the Latin version *disciplina*, and sometimes in our version 'chastening,' conveys the idea that all true knowledge involves an element of suffering—'there is no gain except by loss.'

**discern.** This gives a further idea of examining into the terms of truth, a very necessary lesson in every mental process. If words are not to remain mere counters for us, we must be skilled in clearly apprehending their respective meanings, and no lessons are better worth learning than those which come by such a process. As Perowne phrases it, 'penetration is an integral part of wisdom.'

- 3 To receive instruction in wise dealing,  
 In righteousness and judgement and equity ;  
 4 To give <sup>a</sup>subtily to the simple,  
 To the young man knowledge and discretion :  
 5 That the wise man may hear, and increase in learning ;  
 And that the man of understanding may attain unto  
 sound counsels :  
 6 To understand a proverb, and <sup>b</sup>a figure ;  
 The words of the wise, and their <sup>c</sup>dark sayings.  
 7 The fear of the LORD is the <sup>d</sup>beginning of knowledge :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *prudence*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *an interpretation*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *riddles*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *chief part*

**3. wise dealing.** In this verse we turn to the practical aspects of wisdom. In modern language to ethics, rather than to intellectual processes.

**4. subtilty.** The word is here used in a good sense, meaning 'discrimination,' and may be best illustrated, perhaps, by our Lord's words, in Matt. x. 16, of combining the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove.

**5. sound counsels.** The figure that underlies the word is that of steering a vessel, and this latter metaphor is carried out in both the Greek and Latin versions.

**6. figure.** This word only occurs once again in the O. T., Hab. ii. 6, where it is rendered 'taunting proverb,' and probably means a satire. The idea may be that it requires great wisdom properly to interpret satirical writing in order to avoid being embittered by such sayings. There is a danger lest the reader should rest satisfied with the obvious meaning of the language, and not penetrate to its underlying significance.

**dark sayings.** This is better rendered with the margin 'riddles.' We find many instances of these in the following chapters of this book, and the same word is employed in Ezek. xvii. 2, in which place it is translated 'riddle.'

**7. The fear of the LORD.** This verse may be said to constitute the motto of the whole book ; and the words occur again in ix. 10 ; Ps. cxi. 10 ; Eccles. i. 14, and in almost similar form in Job xxviii. 28. Cf. also Ps. xix. 7-9. We may say, therefore, that the thought was a fundamental one in Hebrew philosophy, and that it stands fittingly here at the outset of a treatise whose object is to set forth the great principles and practice of that

*But* the foolish despise wisdom and instruction.

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, 8

And forsake not the <sup>a</sup> law of thy mother :

For they shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head, 9

And chains about thy neck.

My son, if sinners entice thee, 10

Consent thou not.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *teaching*

system<sup>1</sup>. Wildeboer notes that a similar practice is found in Arabic collections.

**beginning.** As the margin suggests, this can also be rendered 'the chief part,' and the idea not only of priority but of primary importance is probably contained in the expression. The LXX adds here the words that are found in the second clause of Ps. cxl. 10, probably quoting that passage.

**foolish.** Here for the first time we come upon the contrast which persists throughout the book. The literal meaning of the word is 'fat,' a figure which is frequently employed in Hebrew for stupidity; see Ps. cxix. 70. Another word for fool is found in verse 22 of this chapter, the root-meaning of which is very similar, and denotes, as does this word, 'sluggishness.' The Scottish proverb puts the truth well, "*Fling-at-the gaud*" (goad) was ne'er a wise ox.'

**8. My son.** This form of address recurs constantly throughout the book, and denotes the attitude of pupil and teacher. It implies the right to instruct, and brings before us the picture of one who assumed the law as the common basis of instruction.

**9. chaplet.** This figure is again introduced in iv. 9, with which compare Song of Songs iii. 11; Ecclus. vi. 29-32. Fairer than all possible outward adornment is the inward beauty of the heart; cf. 1 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

**chains.** Cf. Song of Songs i. 10 and note.

**10. sinners.** The word has a special significance in this passage, and seems to denote the rough and rude bands of robbers who infested Palestine at every period of her history. An excellent description of their methods is found in Ps. x. 8-11. It is not possible, therefore, to use these verses as pointing to any one period of the history so as to fix the date of the passage.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. a Jewish saying, 'A man with wisdom but without the fear of Heaven is like a man with the key of an inner court, but unable to enter because he has not the key of the outer court'; see Taylor's *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, p. 49.

- 11 If they say, Come with us,  
 Let us lay wait for blood,  
 Let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause ;  
 12 Let us swallow them up alive as <sup>a</sup> Sheol,  
<sup>b</sup> And whole, as those that go down into the pit ;  
 13 We shall find all precious substance,  
 We shall fill our houses with spoil ;  
 14 <sup>c</sup> Thou shalt cast thy lot among us ;  
 We will all have one purse :  
 15 My son, walk not thou in the way with them ;  
 Refrain thy foot from their path :  
 16 For their feet run to evil,  
 And they make haste to shed blood.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the grave*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *Even the perfect*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *Cast in thy lot*

**11. for blood.** This signifies robbery with violence. The phrase 'a man of blood' is a common one in the O.T. to denote a violent man (cf. Ps. xxvi. 9, &c.), and the same phrase as is found here occurs again in xii. 6. A slight alteration in the text has been suggested, which would make it read, 'Let us lay wait for the perfect,' but this is not essential, though Toy thinks the parallelism demands it.

**without cause.** These words must be taken in close connexion with the verb, that is, the robbers have no reason for interference with those for whom they lie in wait, save, of course, their own selfish and cruel purpose.

**12. Let us swallow them up.** The destruction that the robbers plot is to be as thorough as that of the grave, and the meaning is perfectly clear, even if we place with some the word 'alive' in close connexion with Sheol, that is, as Sheol swallows up alive.

**whole.** This is to be taken as of physical perfection. Men who at one moment are in their full strength are the next to be in the realms of death.

**13. We shall find.** This verse states the temptation that the robbers present to their recruit in order to induce him to join their ranks.

**14. Thou shalt cast thy lot.** They hold out the prospect to him that he will be one with them ; but we know that the honour of thieves is a risky thing to which to trust.

**16.** This verse is omitted by the LXX, but occurs in that version

For in vain <sup>a</sup> is the net spread,	17
In the eyes of any bird :	
And these lay wait for their own blood,	18
They lurk privily for their own lives.	
So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain ;	19
It taketh away the life of the owners thereof.	
Wisdom crieth aloud in the street ;	20
She uttereth her voice in the broad places ;	
<sup>a</sup> Or, <i>the net is spread in the sight &amp;c.</i>	

in exactly this form in Isa. lix. 7, where the Hebrew adds the word 'innocent.'

**17. in vain.** The sense of these words is not quite clear. If it is taken to mean that it is foolish to spread the net in the sight of the birds because they will not then go into the snare, then that seems to contradict the purpose of the passage, for the wicked men are spoken of as if successful in their quest. It must, therefore, mean that the birds are so foolish that, though the snare is set in their sight, they fall into it ; so the wicked, though they know the risks they are running, take them, and are punished. The LXX introduces a negative, and renders 'for not in vain are nets spread for birds,' which may either represent a difference in the original text, or an endeavour to make good sense. This rendering will look forward to the statement in verse 18, meaning that the wicked fall into snares just as easily as birds do.

**18. their own blood.** The LXX also neglects the word 'own,' and has nothing to correspond with the second clause. The idea of the Hebrew is that evil-doing brings its own punishment (cf. verse 31).

**19. It taketh away the life.** This is a satirical conclusion to the purpose stated in verse 11. Those who have plotted against others are themselves destroyed. They have, as Wildeboer puts it, 'dug their own graves.'

**20. Wisdom crieth aloud.** With this verse begins a new section, which lasts to the end of the chapter. We meet for the first time with that personification of wisdom which is a prominent feature of the early sections of this book, as it is also of much of the other Wisdom literature of the Hebrews (see Introduction, p. 22), and cf. especially chap. viii of this book, and the notes there.

**the broad places.** By this phrase the writer denotes the

- 21 She crieth <sup>a</sup> in the chief place of concourse ;  
 At the entering in of the gates,  
 In the city, she uttereth her words :  
 22 How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity ?  
 And scorers delight them in scorning,  
 And fools hate knowledge ?  
 23 Turn you at my reproof :  
 Behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you,  
 I will make known my words unto you.  
 24 Because I have called, and ye refused ;

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *at the head of the noisy streets.*

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open spaces of a city, particularly those by the city gates, which were the general places of assembly (cf. Jer. v. 1 and Nahum ii. 4).

**21. the chief place of concourse.** This, as the margin indicates, should rather be, 'at the head of the noisy places' (cf. Isa. xxii. 2, 'a tumultuous city'). The phrase brings before us the sound of many people in crowded thoroughfares. The LXX reads 'on the top of the walls,' which suggests that wisdom acts as a watchman.

**Entering in of the gates** (cf. 2 Sam. xv. 2 ; Ruth iv. 1).

**22. simple ones.** In this verse are included different classes whose folly may be said to be placed in increasing ratio. First are the lovers of ignorance, of whom we have already read in verse 4 ; secondly, the scorers, who frequently meet us in the later Psalms and in this book, though the term also occurs, but not in such a technical sense, in Hosea, Isaiah, and Job. The word rendered 'fool' is confined to the Wisdom literature and to certain Psalms, and is defined by Toy as meaning 'one who is insensible to moral truth and acts without regard to it.'

The LXX destroys the interrogative form of the verse, and makes a number of other alterations, which do not seem likely to represent a better original.

**23. Turn you.** It is obvious, from the appeal that wisdom now makes, that none of those mentioned in verse 22 are regarded as hopeless, and the form of address is very suggestive, as it reminds us of the language in which the greatest promises of the N. T. are couched. Cf. Acts ii. 17.

**24. Because I have called.** The transition from the tender appeal and loving promise of the former verse to the whirlwind



I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ;  
 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, 25  
 And would none of my reproof :  
 I also will laugh in *the day of* your calamity ; 26  
 I will mock when your fear cometh ;  
 When your fear cometh as <sup>a</sup> a storm, 27  
 And your calamity cometh on as a whirlwind ;  
 When distress and anguish come upon you.  
 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer ; 28  
 They shall seek me <sup>b</sup> diligently, but they shall not find me :  
 For that they hated knowledge, 29  
 And did not choose the fear of the LORD :  
 They would none of my counsel ; 30  
 They despised all my reproof :  
 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, 31  
 And be filled with their own devices.  
 For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them, 32  
                   <sup>a</sup> Or, *desolation*                   <sup>b</sup> Or, *early*

of passion and denunciation that this verse introduces is very striking, and has given rise to the idea that we must suppose a long pause between the two verses, or that wisdom is addressing two classes of people. It has also been suggested that the words 'how long' in verse 22 indicate that wisdom has already been making many appeals, and that this is her last one—hence its terrible character ; and that it closes in the 33rd verse on a note of promise and hope. There is no denying the fact, however, that the verses which follow are filled with the thought of denunciation and judgement. There are no half-lights in the picture, and the sinner is identified with his sin. To admit this is nothing more than to say that the more profound spiritual conception of the New Testament had not yet been reached.

**28. diligently.** This is undoubtedly the proper meaning of the word, and the rendering 'early' seems to rest upon a false derivation.

**29. knowledge.** Bickell would read 'knowledge of God' here, as in *ii. 5*, but there is no evidence for it in any text, and, though it improves the balance of the clauses, it is rather too rash an innovation to venture upon.

**32. backsliding.** This is scarcely an accurate translation.

And the <sup>a</sup> prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

- 33 But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell securely,  
And shall be quiet without fear of evil.

- 2 My son, if thou wilt receive my words,  
And lay up my commandments with thee ;  
2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom,  
And apply thine heart to understanding ;  
3 Yea, if thou cry after discernment,  
And lift up thy voice for understanding ;  
4 If thou seek her as silver,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *careless ease*

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'Refusal' or 'indifference' would better express the meaning. It seems to refer to verse 23 and the neglect of the invitation.

**prosperity** would be better rendered 'negligence.'

ii. 1. **my commandments.** It has been pointed out that in this verse we have a clear instance of the difference between the prophetic and the wisdom literature. In the former the prophet always regards himself as the voice of the Lord, whereas in the latter the writer speaks in his own name. The word rendered 'commandments' is that used elsewhere for the moral and ritual directions of the Lord, but is here evidently used to describe the body of teaching received in the philosophical schools. The whole underlying conception is that of the wise man with his scholars.

2. **heart.** This Toy defines as 'the whole inward perceptive nature.' It is much more nearly represented by our word 'mind' than by 'heart.' To us the latter is the organ used to signify emotion, whereas the Hebrews employ the bowels in that sense: as they did not use the brain at all in their psychological language, the heart took its place.

3. **lift up thy voice for.** Properly 'invoke.'

4. **silver.** It is doubtful whether silver here means the precious ore, or the money that is coined from it. On the former assumption Plumptre refers to the beautiful description of mining in Job xxviii, and points out how the last verse of that chapter concludes with the same words as are found in Prov. i. 7. Of 'hid treasure' we read in Job iii. 21; Jer. xli. 8; Isa. xlv. 3, as well as in our Lord's parables, Matt. xiii. 44 and xxv. 25. The idea of effort and search rather favours the mining metaphor for the first clause, and the parallelism of the second also supports that interpretation.

And search for her as for hid treasures ;  
 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, 5  
 And find the knowledge of God.  
 For the LORD giveth wisdom ; 6  
 Out of his mouth *cometh* knowledge and understanding :  
 He layeth up sound wisdom for the upright, 7  
<sup>a</sup> *He is* a shield to them that walk in integrity ;  
<sup>b</sup> That he may guard the paths of judgement, 8  
<sup>c</sup> And preserve the way of his saints.  
 Then shalt thou understand righteousness and judge- 9  
 ment,

<sup>a</sup> Or, And a shield for &c.

<sup>b</sup> Or, That they may keep

<sup>c</sup> Or, Yea, he preserveth

**5. knowledge of God.** The name 'God' is only found in four other passages of this book, ii. 17, iii. 4, xxv. 2, xxx. 9, and this particular phrase is only found here and in Hosea.

**6. Out of his mouth.** The phrase, which is common with the prophets, is, as Strack points out, only found here in Proverbs. As God is the originator of wisdom, we can understand how He must also be the goal of every human search after it.

**7. He layeth up.** This seems also to refer to the figure of verse 4. The search cannot be fruitless, since the Lord Himself has hidden the treasure.

**He is a shield.** This comparison of the Lord to a shield is a very frequent one ; see, for example, Ps. lxxxiv. 11 ; but it is possible to translate it as meaning that wisdom is itself the shield, which also gives excellent sense.

**8. That he may guard.** The Hebrew will also allow us to translate 'that they may keep.' The rendering of the text is probably the correct one.

**saints.** The better translation is 'pious,' and it is the first occurrence in the book of a word that became famous in the history of Israel, viz. the Chasidim (see 1 Macc. ii. 42). They became the Puritans of later Judaism, and were the precursors of the Pharisees. The name also occurs in many of the later Psalms, a particularly interesting reference being Ps. lxxix. 2, which probably belongs to the time of the Maccabees. Toy considers that in this verse it is a late editorial note ; but it is possible that we may take it as an indication of the late date of the section, especially as there are other evidences of late Hebrew in this chapter.

9. Toy introduces verse 20 immediately after verse 9, on the

- And equity, *yea*, every good path.  
 10 For wisdom shall enter into thine heart,  
 And knowledge shall be pleasant unto thy soul ;  
 11 Discretion shall watch over thee,  
 Understanding shall keep thee :  
 12 To deliver thee from the way of <sup>a</sup> evil,  
 From the men that speak froward things ;  
 13 Who forsake the paths of uprightness,  
 To walk in the ways of darkness ;  
 14 Who rejoice to do evil,  
 And delight in the frowardness of <sup>a</sup> evil ;  
 15 Who are crooked in their ways,  
 And perverse in their paths :  
 16 To deliver thee from the strange woman,  
<sup>a</sup> Or, *the evil man*

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grounds that it follows more naturally after it than in its present position, and also that, standing where it does, it interrupts the connexion of thought between verses 19 and 21 ; but there is no manuscript authority for the alteration.

**12. To deliver.** The original form is a construction found only in late Hebrew.

**evil.** This seems, on the grounds of the parallelism, rather to mean 'evil men' than evil in itself, and some of the Jewish commentators understand the reference to be to the Epicureans.

**froward.** This Old-English word, which occurs frequently in Proverbs, means 'perverse,' 'wayward,' 'naughty.' It is literally 'fromward,' the opposite to 'toward' ; see article on the word in *HDB*.

**13. ways of darkness.** This rather common metaphor runs all through Jewish literature, and constitutes one of the common contrasts of the fourth gospel.

**14.** The form of this verse, though not its thought, is closely parallel to that of Job iii. 22, and some consider it an evidence that this author knew that book.

**the frowardness of evil.** A very slight change in the vocalization of the Hebrew would read 'one's neighbour,' instead of 'evil,' but the parallelism rather favours the ordinary translation.

**15. are crooked.** This may also be read as an active, 'make crooked.'

**16. the strange woman.** This is the first introduction of

Even from the stranger which <sup>a</sup>flattereth with her words ;  
 Which forsaketh the <sup>b</sup>friend of her youth, 17  
 And forgetteth the covenant of her God :  
 For <sup>c</sup>her house inclineth unto death, 18

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *maketh smooth her words.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *guide*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *she sinketh down unto death, which is her house*

a figure that is very familiar in the Proverbs. Generally, where the vice is touched upon, the temptress is an adulteress, though in certain passages, for instance in chapter v, the professional prostitute seems to be indicated. The presence of such women is indicated at almost every period of Jewish history, for we find them in Genesis (see xxxviii. 15), where the costume of her class is referred to ; Judges xi. 1 ; Joshua ii. 1, and frequent references in the prophets. Undoubtedly, however, the vice became more common in the luxurious surroundings of later centuries, and as the Jews came into touch with Greek civilization in centres like Alexandria (see Josephus, *Antiquities*, xii. 4. 6, where the woman spoken of is called 'a foreigner,' and the Jewish law is quoted that forbids intercourse with such). A vivid picture of the dangers of such communities in this respect is found in Eccus. ix. 3-9, xxiii. 16-26, &c. It must be remembered also that prostitution was part of the religious ritual of many forms of Semitic religion. Another question that arises here is as to what is meant by the epithet 'strange.' Originally the women of this class may in the main have belonged to non-Israelitish people, and the Jewish writers were accustomed to use the phrase 'Aramaean women' as synonymous with prostitutes. Some of their interpreters understand the word here as signifying Epicureans ; but of course that allegorical interpretation is impossible.

**flattereth.** Better, perhaps, 'useth cajoling speech,' for an example of which see vii. 13-21.

**17. friend.** Undoubtedly this refers to the woman's husband. The verse finds a close parallel in Eccus. xxiii. 23.

**covenant.** This denotes the marriage covenant, which probably had a religious character, though the details of it are unknown to us. See Tob. vii. 12-16.

**18. her house.** This signifies not only the building but all within it, and the figure seems to be that from the house an easy incline leads to the grave (cf. the Latin proverb *facilis descensus Avernus*). The LXX translates, not so probably, 'she has set her house by death.' Death is, of course, Sheol, not in itself a place of punishment, but indicating that such courses lead to a speedy end of life—a sound teaching which is common in the O.T.

- And her paths unto <sup>a</sup> the dead :
- 19 None that go unto her return again,  
Neither do they attain unto the paths of life :
- 20 That thou mayest walk in the way of good men,  
And keep the paths of the righteous.
- 21 For the upright shall dwell in the <sup>b</sup> land,  
And the perfect shall remain in it.
- 22 But the wicked shall be cut off from the <sup>b</sup> land,  
And they that deal treacherously shall be rooted out of it
- 3 My son, forget not my <sup>c</sup> law ;  
But let thine heart keep my commandments :
- 2 For length of days, and years of life,  
And peace, shall they add to thee.
- 3 Let not <sup>d</sup> mercy and truth forsake thee :

<sup>a</sup> Or, the shades Heb. *Rephaim*.      <sup>b</sup> Or, earth      <sup>c</sup> Or, teaching,  
<sup>d</sup> Or, kindness

**the dead.** This is here the proper name *Rephaim*, who were originally, according to the legend in Genesis, a gigantic race who dwelt in Canaan (cf. Gen. xiv. 5 ; Deut. ii. 11). In Job xxvi. 1 and Isa. xiv. 9, as here, the name is applied to the shades of inhabitants of the underworld, whether, as some suppose, because the giant races were imagined as the first inhabitants of that realm or from some element of the popular mythology, that we cannot now trace. Others have derived the title from a root meaning 'weak' or 'feeble,' but this does not seem probable.

**20.** Here, again, are evidences of late Hebrew. See note on verse 9 above for suggestion as to the probably correct position of this verse.

**21. land.** This must necessarily mean the land of Israel, as it was a central idea of the Hebrew religion that it was a sign of the Divine favour to abide in one's native country (see Ps. xxxvii. 3, 11, 29, and Matt. v. 5). The idea of reward in this verse, and of punishment in the verse that follows, is still along the line of the older Hebrew faith, which regarded the signs of the Divine favour to be declared by present gain and prosperity. As Toy points out it was a later day that introduced the idea of future compensation for present distress, as in the Book of Wisdom, chap. iii.

iii. **3. mercy.** This should rather be 'kindness,' as the idea is

Bind them about thy neck ;	
Write them upon the table of thine heart :	
So shalt thou find favour and <sup>a</sup> good understanding	4
In the sight of God and man.	
Trust in the LORD with all thine heart,	5
And lean not upon thine own understanding :	
In all thy ways acknowledge him,	6
And he shall <sup>b</sup> direct thy paths.	
Be not wise in thine own eyes ;	7
Fear the LORD, and depart from evil :	
It shall be health to thy navel,	8
<sup>a</sup> Or, <i>good repute</i> <sup>b</sup> Or, <i>make straight or plain</i>	

not so much that of compassion as of friendliness, and so the word 'truth,' which immediately follows, should rather be rendered 'faithfulness.'

**Bind.** It is a question whether the figure is taken from the wearing of amulets, of a necklace (see i. 9), or of a seal ring upon a chain (see Gen. xxxviii. 18). The first meaning would signify the truth that obedience to the commandment would ward off evil, the second that it would adorn character, and the third that they should always be ready to hand in a moment of need. The last interpretation is the most probable.

**Write.** Cf. Jer. xxxi. 33. The figure is probably taken from the practice described in Deut. vi. 8, which was the origin of the wearing of phylacteries ; and the wise man here states that it is more important to have the law within the heart than wear its precepts upon the person. For the idea thus conveyed see 2 Cor. iii. 3.

**4. understanding.** By a very slight change in the Hebrew, the meaning 'good repute' is obtained, which is certainly more intelligible.

**5. understanding.** This is a different word in the original from that translated in the same way in the former verse, but in this case the meaning is correct, and points to the importance of subjecting human judgement to Divine guidance.

**8. health.** This may be taken quite literally, seeing that obedience to the Divine laws does secure physical wellbeing.

**navel.** The change of a single letter gives the Hebrew word for 'body,' which is most probably the correct reading. (See Song of Songs vii. 2 and note.)

- And <sup>a</sup> marrow to thy bones.  
 9 Honour the LORD with thy substance,  
 And with the firstfruits of all thine increase :  
 10 So shall thy barns be filled with plenty,  
 And thy fats shall overflow with new wine.  
 11 My son, despise not the <sup>b</sup> chastening of the LORD ;  
 Neither be weary of his reproof :  
 12 For whom the LORD loveth he reproveth ;  
 Even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *refreshing* Heb. *moistening*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *instruction*

**marrow.** This should rather be rendered 'refreshment.' As Wildeboer says, the modern equivalent would be 'a tonic to thy nerves.'

**9. firstfruits.** We have here an undoubted reference to the definite precepts of the law (see Deut. xviii. 4, xxvi. 2), and it is, of course, very interesting to find the philosophers thus adapting the legal ordinances to their own teaching.

**10. barns.** Here also the promise made in Deut. xxviii. 8 is evidently in the thought of the writer, as well, perhaps, as Mal. iii. 10-12.

**11.** This and the following verse seem to constitute a short section dealing with the subject of the sufferings of the righteous, a topic that is frequently discussed in the wisdom literature. The foundation passage seems to be Job v. 17, 18, on which this passage is probably based. It is developed still further in the second chapter of Eccles. verses 1-6. In the Ps. of Sol. xiii. 8, 9 we find an interesting reference to the same teaching, and there we read, 'For he will admonish the righteous as a beloved son: and his chastening is as a man chasteneth his firstborn. For the Lord will spare his saints, and will blot out their transgressions with His chastening: for the life of the righteous is for ever'; and the Greek form of the present passage is found in Heb. xii. 5, 6, while a reference to the same thought is discoverable in Jas. i. 12.

**despise . . . be weary** may also be rendered 'reject . . . spurn.' The Greek for the latter word reads 'faint not,' either paraphrasing the original, or translating a different Hebrew word.

**12. Even as a father.** The Hebrew will allow us to translate 'and afflicts,' which the LXX translation supports (see Heb. xii. 6).



Happy is the man that findeth wisdom,	13
And the man that <sup>a</sup> getteth understanding.	
For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise	14
of silver,	
And the gain thereof than fine gold.	
She is more precious than <sup>b</sup> rubies :	15
And none of the things thou canst desire are to be com-	
pared unto her.	
Length of days is in her right hand ;	16
In her left hand are riches and honour.	
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,	17
And all her paths are peace.	
She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her :	18
And happy is every one that retaineth her.	
The LORD by wisdom founded the earth ;	19
<sup>a</sup> Heb. <i>draweth forth</i> .	<sup>b</sup> See Job xxviii. 18.

**14. merchandise.** The translations of this verse vary a good deal in the different versions, but the variation seems to arise mainly from a different understanding of the metaphor, namely, as to whether what is signified is the wealth that wisdom wins or the wealth derived from the proper use of wisdom. It is probable that this verse may lie at the basis of the parable in Matt. xiii. 45, 46.

**15. rubies.** The proper translation of the original word is very uncertain, but it seems on the whole most probable that coral is here meant (cf. Job xxviii. 18, and the articles 'coral' and 'ruby' in the Bible dictionaries). We know that coral was highly esteemed in the ancient world.

**16.** After this verse the LXX adds one which has no equivalent in Hebrew, namely, 'out of her mouth proceeds righteousness, and law and mercy she bears on her tongue' (cf. Isa. xlv. 23 and Prov. xxxi. 26). The verse may be the work of some Greek editor.

**18. a tree of life.** This figure is undoubtedly derived from Gen. ii. 9, and the figure occurs again in xi. 30, xiii. 12, xv. 4, which, perhaps, is a proof that the early legends of Genesis were much studied and interpreted by the wisdom writers. Elsewhere in the Bible there is no reference to the 'tree of life,' save in Ezek. xlvii. 12, and in Rev. ii. 7, xxii. 2.

- By understanding he established the heavens.  
 20 By his knowledge the depths were broken up,  
 And the skies drop down the dew.
- 21 My son, let not them depart from thine eyes ;  
 Keep sound wisdom and discretion ;  
 22 So shall they be life unto thy soul,  
 And grace to thy neck.
- 23 Then shalt thou walk in thy way securely,  
 And <sup>a</sup> thy foot shall not stumble.
- 24 When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid :  
 Yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.
- 25 Be not afraid of sudden fear,  
 Neither of the <sup>b</sup> desolation of the wicked, when it  
 cometh :
- 26 For the LORD shall be thy confidence,  
 And shall keep thy foot from being taken.
- 27 Withhold not good from them to whom it is due,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *thou shalt not dash thy foot.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *storm*

**19, 20.** For a discussion of the ideas contained in these verses see notes on viii. 23-31.

**21. let not them depart.** Toy suggests with great probability that the two clauses of this verse should be inverted, as it certainly seems more probable that the virtues to be retained should be named before the counsel is given to cling to them. A curious translation of the LXX is 'Do not escape,' and as the same word is employed in Heb. ii. 1, there translated 'drift away,' it is just possible that there may be a reference there to this passage.

**22. grace to thy neck** (cf. i. 9).

**23. shall not stumble.** This should probably be in the active form: 'Thou shalt not dash thy foot' (cf. Ps. xci. 12).

**24. When thou liest down.** This may possibly be, as the LXX translates, 'When thou sittest down' (cf. Ps. iv. 8, and Deut. vi. 7).

**25.** Cf. Ps. xci. 5, 6.

**26. from being taken.** The LXX translates 'from being moved'; cf. Ps. cxxi. 3.

**27.** The difference in style of the next few verses (27-35)

When it is in the power of thine hand to do it.	
Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again,	28
And to-morrow I will give ;	
When thou hast it by thee.	
Devise not evil against thy neighbour,	29
Seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.	
Strive not with a man without cause,	30
If he have done thee no harm.	
Envy thou not the man of violence,	31
And choose none of his ways.	
For the perverse is an abomination to the LORD :	32
But his <sup>a</sup> secret is with the upright.	
The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked ;	33
But he blesseth the habitation of the righteous.	
<sup>b</sup> Surely he scorneth the scorers,	34
<sup>c</sup> But he giveth grace unto the lowly.	
The wise shall inherit glory ;	35
But <sup>d</sup> shame shall be the promotion of fools.	

<sup>a</sup> Or, *counsel*    Or, *friendship*    <sup>b</sup> Or, *Though*  
<sup>c</sup> Or, *Yet*    <sup>d</sup> Or, *fools carry away shame*

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is noteworthy, and probably signifies not only a new paragraph but the work of another hand, or at any rate the insertion here of a passage which belongs to another part of the book.

**them to whom it is due.** There is a difficulty about the translation of this verse, as the Hebrew signifies literally 'possessors.' By a slight change in the word it can be translated 'neighbour.' The LXX translates 'the poor,' which is not admissible as a paraphrase of the Hebrew, and may represent a different original. Cf. Luke xi. 5, in illustration.

**29.** Security lies in the preservation of neighbourly trustworthiness of conduct.

**32. secret** is better rendered 'friendship,' the word meaning private or intimate friendship.

**34.** This verse in its Greek form is found in Jas. iv. 6 ; 1 Pet. v. 5. Cf. also Ps. xviii. 26, 27.

**35. promotion.** The original word is very difficult to render

- 1 Hear, *my* sons, the instruction of a father,  
And attend to know understanding ;
- 2 For I give you good doctrine ;  
Forsake ye not my <sup>a</sup> law.
- 3 For I was a son unto my father,  
Tender and <sup>b</sup> only beloved in the sight of my mother.
- 4 And he taught me, and said unto me,  
Let thine heart retain my words ;  
Keep my commandments, and live :
- 5 Get wisdom, get understanding ;  
Forget *it* not, neither decline from the words of my  
mouth :
- 6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee ;  
Love her, and she shall keep thee.
- 7 <sup>c</sup> Wisdom *is* the principal thing ; *therefore* get wisdom :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *teaching*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *an only one.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *The beginning of wisdom is, Get wisdom*

satisfactorily, and so all the versions have felt. Neither the rendering of the R. V. text nor that of the margin is satisfactory. Some alteration of the original seems requisite, and the simplest is that which gives the translation 'portion,' which both gives a good sense and preserves the parallelism of the verse. Bunyan quotes this verse in describing Faithful's interview with that 'bold villain, Shame.'

iv. 1-9. Here is a tender personal passage, throwing a light on the early days of the teacher. It gives us a beautiful picture of the pious household of the period, and we should be glad to be quite certain of its date. The passage has almost certainly had great influence upon later generations, and formed a model for many homes in Puritan England and the Scotland of the covenant (cf. Burns, 'Cotter's Saturday Night'). The older commentators tried to find reference to Solomon in the passage, particularly in verse 3, but this is, of course, purely imaginary and improbable.

5. **Forget it not.** This clause is considered by Toy to be an addition to the original, as it simply repeats what has already been said, and adds no new point to it.

7. **Wisdom is the principal thing.** This translation is a paraphrase rather than a representation of the original, which has the

Yea, with all thou hast gotten get understanding.  
 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee : 8  
 She shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace  
 her.  
 She shall give to thine head a chaplet of grace : 9  
 A crown of <sup>a</sup> beauty shall she deliver to thee.  
 Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings ; 10  
 And the years of thy life shall be many.  
 I have taught thee in the way of wisdom ; 11  
 I have led thee in paths of uprightness.  
 When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened ; 12  
 And if thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.  
 Take fast hold of instruction ; let her not go : 13  
 Keep her ; for she is thy life.  
 Enter not into the path of the wicked, 14  
 And walk not in the way of evil men.  
 Avoid it, pass not by it ; 15  
 Turn from it, and pass on.  
 For they sleep not, except they have done mischief ; 16  
 And their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some  
 to fall.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *glory*

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common phrase 'the beginning of wisdom,' but it is difficult to bring this into connexion with the rest of the phrase. It is possible that the verse arose, as Toy suggests, from the expansion of the marginal notes 'get wisdom and get understanding.' The verse is not found in the LXX at all, so that there is much ground for its omission.

**8. Exalt.** The sense of the word here is rather 'prize.'

**9. crown of beauty.** Cf. Ecclus. vi. 29-31 ; also i. 9 above, and the note there.

**12.** Cf. Job xviii. 7 and the note on that verse in the Cambridge Bible.

**16.** By a very strong figure of speech the writer reverses the common idea of the peaceful sleep of innocence for that of the sleep of evil-doers, who are supposed to be so eager in the

- 17 For they eat the bread of wickedness,  
And drink the wine of violence.
- 18 But the path of the righteous is as <sup>a</sup> the shining light,  
That shineth more and more unto the perfect day.
- 19 The way of the wicked is as darkness :  
They know not at what they stumble.
- 20 My son, attend to my words ;  
Incline thine ear unto my sayings.
- 21 Let them not depart from thine eyes ;  
Keep them in the midst of thine heart.
- 22 For they are life unto those that find them,  
And health to all their flesh.
- 23 Keep thy heart <sup>b</sup> with all diligence ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the light of dawn*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *above all that thou guardest*

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pursuit of wickedness that they actually are unable to sleep unless they have done some evil deed.

**17. the bread of wickedness.** This may either mean that wickedness constitutes the food and drink of such men or that they acquire their wealth by evil practices. The former is more probable.

**18.** Toy inverts the order of the verses 18 and 19, as the latter is most closely connected with verse 17, and, we might also add, that the better close thus given to the section favours the inversion.

**the shining light.** The word thus rendered seems to mean simply brightness, and there is no sufficient justification for the rendering 'dawn,' given in the margin.

**the perfect day.** The exact meaning of this expression is also uncertain, but, on the whole, the probability is in favour of its meaning 'noontide.'

**21. Let them not depart.** The LXX has an interesting translation here, 'In order that thy fountains fail not, guard them in the heart,' the reference being to the necessity of preserving springs with the utmost diligence (cf. Song of Songs iv. 12). There can be no doubt, however, that the meaning of the existing Hebrew is correctly represented by our version.

**22. all their flesh.** This signifies 'their whole being' (cf. iii. 8, and note).

**23. with all diligence,** that is, 'with all possible vigilance.'

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.  
<sup>a</sup> Make level the path of thy feet,  
 And let all thy ways be <sup>b</sup> established.  
 Turn not to the right hand nor to the left :  
 Remove thy foot from evil.

My son, attend unto my wisdom ;  
 Incline thine ear to my understanding :  
 That thou mayest preserve discretion,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Weigh carefully*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *ordered aright*

**issues** seems to mean here 'origins.' The heart, as we have seen, was used as equivalent to our word 'brain'; therefore the meaning is that spiritual life finds its source in a true grasp of, and obedience to, Divine precepts.

**25. eyelids** is here put metaphorically for 'gaze.' When a man's gaze is fixed intently upon a goal his eyelids are naturally immovable.

After verse 27 the LXX inserts two verses, 'For the ways of the right hand God knoweth, but crooked are those of the left, and He will make straight thy paths, and guide thy goings in peace.' It is impossible to decide whether these words ever had any Hebrew original, or, as some have supposed, are the work of a Christian scribe who had in mind the idea of the 'two ways' which was so familiar a conception in early Christian literature (cf. 'The Teaching of the Twelve,' c. 1).

**v. 1. my wisdom.** It is noteworthy that never elsewhere is the personal possessive pronoun used with 'wisdom' and 'understanding,' and this fact, coupled with the two further considerations that the meaning of verse 2 is not clear, and that there is no link of connexion with verse 3, leads to the conclusion that there is some original corruption of the Hebrew text. Perhaps a line has been omitted at the end of verse 2 to the effect 'that they may keep thee from the strange woman'; but it is not now possible to reconstruct the passage, and the versions do not help us.

- And that thy lips may keep knowledge.  
 3 For the lips of a strange woman drop honey,  
 And her mouth is smoother than oil :  
 4 But her latter end is bitter as wormwood,  
 Sharp as a two-edged sword.  
 5 Her feet go down to death ;  
 Her steps take hold on <sup>a</sup> Sheol ;  
 6 <sup>b</sup> So that she findeth not the level path of life :  
 Her ways are unstable *and* <sup>c</sup> she knoweth *it* not.  
 7 Now therefore, *my* sons, hearken unto me,  
 And depart not from the words of my mouth.  
 8 Remove thy way far from her,  
 And come not nigh the door of her house :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the grave*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *Lest thou find the level, &c.* Or, *Lest thou weigh carefully the path of life*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *thou canst not know them*

**3. mouth.** This is literally 'palate,' and is undoubtedly used figuratively for speech, as in chap. vii the woman is pictured as a mistress of cajoling words.

**4. her latter end**—that is, the final outcome of association with her, the word always implying 'final judgement.'

**wormwood.** The plant thus designated it is impossible to identify with certainty, though several species of it are said to be found in Palestine. To the Hebrews the idea of bitterness and poison were largely synonymous, and there is no doubt that here the double elements of unpleasantness and fatal results are combined (cf. Lev. viii. 10, 11).

**5.** Cf. ii. 18. This verse is quoted by Bunyan in his account of Madam Wanton's assault on Faithful.

**6.** The Hebrew is not quite clear, but our version represents the meaning with sufficient accuracy. The verse is obviously a contrast to iv. 26.

This chapter is also quoted (with Eccclus. xxvi) in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, iii. 2. 5. 3, where the whole passage is very striking.

**7. sons.** So the Hebrew reads, but almost certainly in error, as the address continues in the singular, and the versions all so read it.



Lest thou give thine honour unto others,	9
And thy years unto the cruel :	
Lest strangers be filled with thy <sup>a</sup> strength ;	10
And thy labours <i>be</i> in the house of an alien ;	
And thou <sup>b</sup> mourn at thy latter end,	11
When thy flesh and thy body are consumed	
And say, How have I hated instruction,	12
And my heart despised reproof ;	
Neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers,	13
Nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me !	
I was well nigh in all evil	14
In the midst of the congregation and assembly.	
Drink waters out of thine own cistern,	15

<sup>a</sup> Or, *wealth*<sup>b</sup> Or, *groan*

9-11. These verses state the results of such evil courses, and we need not seek closely to identify each point. Suffice it to say that those who are to reap the reward are the temptress and her associates, and that in the first instance the folly of such courses of life is insisted upon. A man loses his wealth, his social position, and everything that is worth having in life (cf. Hogarth's wonderful series of pictures, 'The Rake's Progress').

11. **thy flesh and thy body.** This combination may signify the whole personality, and may not be confined, as many suppose, to the physical results of such conduct.

13. 'Here, as elsewhere in the book, it seems to be assumed that more or less organized schemes of moral instruction for young men existed—incipient universities, such as appear in the second century B. C.'—Toy.

14. **I was well nigh.** The thought of the verse is apparently the sudden realization of the man that he was standing upon the brink of a precipice, and that he had just escaped censure and punishment at the hands of his own people. It is apparent that the words are meant to be a technical description of a judicial court (cf. Eccles. xxiii. 21).

15. **Drink waters.** Here the figure employed is one which was common to Oriental poetry, where the cistern or fountain signified a woman or wife (cf. Song of Songs iv. 15 ; Eccles. xii. 1, note ; Isa. li. 1). The general idea of the verse is that sufficient pleasure should be found in the hallowed intercourse of marriage.

- And running waters out of thine own well.  
 16 <sup>a</sup> Should thy springs be dispersed abroad,  
 And rivers of water in the streets?  
 17 Let them be for thyself alone,  
 And not for strangers with thee.  
 18 Let thy fountain be blessed ;  
 And rejoice in the wife of thy youth.  
 19 *As* a loving hind and a pleasant doe,  
 Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times ;  
 And <sup>b</sup> be thou ravished always with her love.  
 20 For why shouldest thou, my son, <sup>b</sup> be ravished with  
 a strange woman,  
 And embrace the bosom of a stranger?  
 21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD,  
 And he <sup>c</sup> maketh level all his paths.  
 22 His own iniquities shall take the wicked,  
 And he shall be holden with the cords of his sin.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Let*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *Go astray.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *weigheth carefully*

**16. Should thy springs.** Here the figure is continued under the idea of contrast ; the fountain that is a man's own possession should be kept to himself, and he should have no reason to long for others.

**18. blessed.** A very slight alteration of the original permits the translation of the LXX, ' thine only,' which gives a better sense.

**the wife of thy youth.** Early marriage was a practice among the Jews, and was probably in itself advocated by the sages as a safeguard against immorality.

**19. loving hind.** Such comparisons are frequent in Oriental poetry (see Dalman *passim*), though it is noteworthy that this is the only place in the O. T. where a woman is compared for beauty to any animal.

**doe** is perhaps the female wild goat, though ' gazelle ' is also possible.

**21. maketh level.** Here probably ' weighs,' that is, ' reckons up the value of.'

**22.** Bunyan pictures the man who was cast in at the door on the side of the hill ' as being bound with these cords.'

He shall die for lack of instruction ; 23  
And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

My son, if thou art become surety for thy neighbour, 6  
If thou hast stricken <sup>a</sup> thy hands for a stranger,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *thy hand with a stranger*

Chap. vi. In the first nineteen verses of this chapter are given three special illustrations of folly. In the matter of suretyship, of the life of the sluggard, and of the manners of the worthless person. Thereafter the writer returns, verse 24 ff., to the subject of sexual immorality, and leads up to the dramatic description of that particular form of vice which fills the seventh chapter.

**1. surety.** The practice of being surety for a friend, and the folly entailed by that risk, is a frequent subject of warning in this book, and the passage that deals with it most fully is this one (cf. also xi. 15, xvii. 18, xx. 16, xxii. 26, 27, xxvii. 13). The practice seems to have grown up in post-exilic Judaism, as all references to it are found in the later literature. It may have been learned from contact with the civilizations of Persia and Greece. The Book of Proverbs reflects the horror that was felt at the practice, when it was comparatively a novelty, because the later Book of Eccles. deals with it in a more worldly-wise manner (cf. Eccles. viii. 13, 'Be not surety above thy power ; and if thou be surety, take thought as one that will have to pay') and in xxix. 14-20 the practice is praised as a sign of neighbourliness, though verse 18 is not silent about its risks and penalties. Experience teaches us the general wisdom of the counsel here given, as men are frequently tempted in a moment of thoughtless generosity to put their hand to bonds whose claims they are not able to meet when called upon to do so. The word here translated 'surety,' viz. *arrhabon*, was probably of Phoenician origin, and entered not only into Hebrew but into Greek, and is familiar in Paul's epistle under the translation 'earnest' (cf. Eph. i. 14). It passed thence into Latin, where in a shortened form it became the regular term for the portion of the price paid beforehand as the seal of a contract, and is now found in dialectic English and in Scotch, in the forms of 'earls-penny' and 'arles,' as the small proportion of wages given to a servant on engagement. As an interesting literary study of the risks of suretyship, see Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.

**stricken thy hands.** As an instance of this practice see 2 Kings x. 15.

**stranger.** This fails to give the proper meaning of the original, which should really be 'another,' and is more nearly

- 2 Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth,  
Thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.
- 3 Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself,  
Seeing thou art come into the hand of thy neighbour;  
Go, <sup>a</sup> humble thyself, and importune thy neighbour.
- 4 Give not sleep to thine eyes,  
Nor slumber to thine eyelids.
- 5 Deliver thyself as a <sup>b</sup> roe from the hand of the hunter,  
And as a bird from the hand of the fowler.
- 6 Go to the ant, thou sluggard;  
Consider her ways, and be wise:
- 7 Which having no <sup>c</sup> chief,  
Overseer, or ruler,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *bestir*<sup>b</sup> Or, *gazelle*<sup>c</sup> Or, *judge*


---

synonymous with 'neighbour' than contrasted with it, as the English suggests.

**3. humble thyself.** This should rather be 'bestir thyself.' There is need for urgency, as in the similar counsel given by our Lord in Matt. v. 25.

**importune.** This, again, is hardly strong enough. 'Besiege' more nearly represents the real meaning.

**5.** For the figure, cf. Ps. cxxiv. 7.

**6.** There is a close parallel to this section in xxiv. 30-34, though there no mention of the ant is made. Both passages conclude with the words found in verses 10 and 11, which may probably have been a well-known proverb.

**ant.** These insects were much referred to by the sages of the ancient world as examples of foresight and industry. Greek writers like Plutarch and Aristotle mention them, as well as Indian, Syrian, Persian, and Chinese authors (cf. Malan's *Proverbs*, vol. i, pp. 290-300). The LXX adds a parallel passage here on the bee, and several of the Christian fathers (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* i. 6) quote it in this form. As readers of Bunyan will remember, it is with this verse that Christian was awakened as he lay asleep in the arbour.

**7. chief.** Aristotle (*De Anim.* i. 1, 11) says they had no government; but later authorities speak of their leaders, and modern scientific investigation credits them with an elaborate social organization.

Provideth her meat in the summer,	8
And gathereth her food in the harvest.	
How long wilt thou <sup>a</sup> sleep, O sluggard?	9
When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?	
Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,	10
A little folding of the hands to <sup>a</sup> sleep:	
So shall thy poverty come as a <sup>b</sup> robber,	11
And thy want as <sup>c</sup> an armed man.	
A worthless person, a man of iniquity;	12
He walketh with a froward mouth;	

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *lie down.*                      <sup>b</sup> Or, *rover*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *a man with a shield.*

**8. summer.** This is not to be taken as referring to one season, while the harvest of the next clause refers to another, but they are simply double statements of the same fact, and refer to the same season. The addition has more that is akin to Greek thought than to Hebrew, and runs, in part, thus: 'Go to the bee and learn how diligent she is and how seriously she does her work . . . though feeble in body, by honouring wisdom, she obtains distinction.'

**10. folding of the hands.** Cf. Eccles. iv. 5. The idea is the elaborate and determined preparation for a siesta.

**11. as a robber.** This presents to us the stealthy and unexpected approach or ambush of the trained highwayman. Instead of 'armed man' the LXX has 'swift runner,' and it, as well as the Vulgate, has a curious addition, which may probably have been an attempt to provide a pleasing ending to the paragraph: 'But if thou be diligent, thy harvest will come as a fountain, and want will depart as a bad runner.'

**12. A worthless person.** Literally, 'a man of Belial.' This strange and difficult phrase occurs in two other passages in this book, namely, xvi. 27, and xix. 28. It is generally taken as equivalent to 'worthlessness,' but the derivation is uncertain: and another probable one is that the word Belial does not mean 'no profit,' as this suggests, but rather 'no rising up.' Apart, however, from its derivative meaning, there is the curious use of the word as a proper name, and some suppose it to have been the designation of a deity of the underworld (see Ps. xviii. 4 R.V. mg.), and that hence the title was applied at a later time to the Antichrist (see 2 Cor. vi. 15, and the *Ascension of Is.* iii. 23 to iv. 13). In any case the phrase must signify men of vile conduct.

- 13 He winketh with his eyes, he <sup>a</sup> speaketh with his feet,  
 He <sup>b</sup> maketh signs with his fingers ;  
 14 Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth evil continually ;  
 He <sup>c</sup> soweth discord.  
 15 Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly ;  
 On a sudden shall he be broken, and that without remedy.  
 16 There be six things which the LORD hateth ;  
 Yea, seven which are an abomination <sup>d</sup> unto him :  
 17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
 And hands that shed innocent blood ;  
 18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations,  
 Feet that be swift in running to mischief ;  
 19 A false witness that <sup>e</sup> uttereth lies,  
 And he that <sup>c</sup> soweth discord among brethren.  
 20 My son, keep the commandment of thy father,  
 And forsake not the <sup>f</sup> law of thy mother :  
 21 Bind them continually upon thine heart,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *shuffleth*<sup>b</sup> Or, *teacheth*<sup>c</sup> Heb. *letteth loose*.<sup>d</sup> Heb. *of his soul*.<sup>e</sup> Heb. *breatheth out*.<sup>f</sup> Or, *teaching*

**13. He winketh with his eyes.** Cf. Eccus. xxvii. 22, and also an Arabic saying quoted by Delitzsch : 'O God, pardon us the culpable winking of the eye'; and Malan quotes from the institutes of *Manu* (an Indian work) a very appropriate parallel : 'Beware of having nimble hands and movable feet, a winking eye, of being crooked in thy ways, of having a voluble tongue, and of being clever at doing mischief to others.'

**speaketh.** Rather 'scrapes,' or 'shuffles,' the idea apparently being to make a sign to his confederates. The LXX interprets by 'makes signs.'

**16. There be six.** The form of the comparison here is that which occurs again in chap. xxx, and is a merely rhetorical way of stating something indefinite, that is, the list is not supposed to be exhausted. It is probably not original to the passage here, but has been inserted by a later hand as appropriate to what precedes. These numerical enumerations appear to have been a popular form of statement for truths that it was desired to memorize.

**20, 21.** Cf. i. 8 and iii. 3.

Tie them about thy neck.

When thou walkest, it shall lead thee ; 22

When thou <sup>a</sup> sleepest, it shall watch over thee ;

And when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.

For <sup>b</sup> the commandment is a lamp ; and <sup>c</sup> the law is light ; 23

And reproofs of instruction are the way of life :

To keep thee from the evil woman, 24

From the flattery of the stranger's tongue.

Lust not after her beauty in thine heart ; 25

Neither let her take thee with her eyelids.

For on account of a whorish woman *a man is brought to* 26

a piece of bread :

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *liest down*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, their *commandment*

<sup>c</sup> Or, their *teaching*

**22.** It will be noticed that this verse falls into three clauses, which shows that it is irregular in construction, and either the last clause should be omitted or we have to assume that a clause has been lost. Toy places verse 23 before verse 22, and understands wisdom as the subject in the latter, presuming that perhaps some clause that introduced wisdom has been dropped.

**23. the law.** The reading of the Vulgate is memorable in its striking apposition of the two words, *lex, lux*.

**24. evil woman.** The slightest alteration of the Hebrew would give the meaning 'wife of another,' and the LXX has 'married woman.' As the sin of adultery is that most generally dealt with in these sections, this is probably correct.

**25. Lust.** Cf. Matt. v. 28, where it is possible our Lord had this verse in mind.

**26. on account of.** This is not the correct meaning of the Hebrew preposition, and, as will be noticed, several words have to be introduced in order to make sense. The real meaning is 'in exchange for,' which would mean that a harlot's hire is a loaf of bread, while one pays for an adulteress with his life. A slight change of the Hebrew verb would give the same word in each verse, thus : 'A harlot hunts for a piece of bread, but the adulteress hunts for the precious life.' It is in agreement with the general view of Hebrew ethics that adultery was reckoned a greater sin than irregular sexual intercourse. There remains a further question, however, with regard to this verse, as to whether both clauses do not refer to the same woman, in which case it would only be a rhetorical intensification of the warning.

- And <sup>a</sup> the adulteress hunteth for the precious life.
- 27 Can a man take fire in his bosom,  
And his clothes not be burned ?
- 28 Or can one walk upon hot coals,  
And his feet not be scorched ?
- 29 So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife ;  
Whosoever toucheth her shall not be <sup>b</sup> unpunished.
- 30 Men do not despise a thief, if he steal  
To satisfy his soul when he is hungry :
- 31 But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold ;  
He shall give all the substance of his house.
- 32 He that committeth adultery with a woman is void of  
<sup>c</sup> understanding :  
He doeth it that would destroy his own soul.
- 33 Wounds and dishonour shall he get ;  
And his reproach shall not be wiped away.
- 34 For jealousy is the rage of a man ;

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *a man's wife*.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *held innocent*.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *heart*.

**30. Men do not despise.** This translation makes the meaning difficult to understand. The ordinary explanation is that a thief is not despised if he has hunger as the excuse for his theft : but is that true ? And certainly there cannot be adduced any evidence that the Hebrews ever took so lenient a view of the matter. It seems better, therefore, to translate as a query, 'Do not men despise ?'

**31. sevenfold.** According to Exod. xxii. 1, fivefold was the highest legal limit of restitution. It may be, however, that later laws required a larger payment, but it is more likely that the sevenfold here is merely a round number meaning ample (cf. Ps. lxxix. 12 ; Matt. xviii. 22).

**32. destroy his own soul** is simply 'destroys himself.' As compared with the thief, he is a greater fool.

**34. jealousy.** This, of course, refers to the jealousy of the husband who has been deceived. The whole force of the restraint of an adulterer seems to us to be put on very low ground (cf. Eccus. xxiii. 21), as nothing more than self-interest is appealed to, and especially is there no recognition of the woman's moral degradation. She is regarded throughout as only the evil temptress for whom not a good word is spoken. This attitude was, of course,



And he will not spare in the day of vengeance.  
 He will not regard any ransom ; 35  
 Neither will he rest content, though thou givest many gifts.  
 My son, keep my words, 7  
 And lay up my commandments with thee.  
 Keep my commandments and live ; 2  
 And my <sup>a</sup> law as the apple of thine eye.  
 Bind them upon thy fingers ; 3  
 Write them upon the table of thine heart.  
 Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister ; 4  
 And call understanding *thy* <sup>b</sup> kinswoman :  
 That they may keep thee from the strange woman, 5  
 From the stranger which <sup>c</sup> flattereth with her words.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *teaching*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *familiar friend*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *maketh smooth her words.*

common to much ancient literature, and we shall come across further traces of it in this book. Amongst the Greek authors it was Euripides who said the harshest things about women.

vii. 1. Between this and verse 2 the LXX introduces the words 'My son, fear the Lord, and thou shalt be strong, and beside Him fear no other,' which is probably the addition of some scribe or editor who wished to introduce an element of more distinctly religious counsel. Toy quotes appropriately from Racine, *Athalie*, i. 1, 'I fear God, dear Abner, and have no other fear.'

2. **the apple**, that is the 'pupil' (cf. Ps. xvii. 8), which was regarded as a symbol of the most precious and valuable things.

3. **Bind**. It is a question whether this refers to the phylacteries, the date of whose introduction is uncertain, but may be anywhere between 250 and 100 B. C. (see article, 'Phylacteries,' *HDB.*). It is just possible, therefore, that this may be the earliest literary reference to the practice. On the other hand, the words may refer to a signet-ring, though the word 'bind' would not then be so appropriate.

4. **Thou art my sister**. Here wisdom is personified, and we may assume that the sage suggests that a true attachment to this idealized figure will protect the young man from the dangerous enticements of the evil women, against whom he proceeds to warn him.

5. **strange woman** is certainly 'adulteress' here.

- 6 For at the window of my house  
 I looked forth through my lattice ;  
 7 And I beheld among the simple ones,  
 I discerned among the youths,  
 A young man void of understanding,  
 8 Passing through the street near her corner,  
 And he went the way to her house ;  
 9 In the twilight, in the evening of the day,  
 In the <sup>a</sup> blackness of night and the darkness.  
 10 And, behold, there met him a woman  
 With the attire of an harlot, and <sup>b</sup> wily of heart.  
 11 She is <sup>c</sup> clamorous and wilful ;  
 Her feet abide not in her house :

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *pupil* (of the eye).

<sup>b</sup> Or, *close* Heb. *guarded*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *turbulent*

**6. lattice.** This refers to the familiar Oriental window with its frequently elaborate lattice-work without glass that forms an effective screen from the street though permitting the watcher within to see all that is going on without (cf. *HDB*. 'House,' and Mackie's *Bible Manners and Customs*, p. 96, for illustration). The LXX represents the woman herself as being at the window, but this, of course, is not in agreement with verse 10.

**8. her corner.** That is the corner where her house is, for the next clause should be more general than our version makes it, viz. 'strolling along the road in the direction of her house.' Such aimless wandering is discountenanced in Ecclus. ix. 7.

**9. In the twilight.** Note the powerful poetical descriptiveness of this verse, as if it would cover all the hours of darkness.

**10. the attire.** Here the married woman is supposed to have dressed herself like a harlot, though, as we have already seen, it is uncertain whether any special dress distinguished the class.

**wily.** The meaning is rather uncertain, but it is derived from a root which means secret, so that probably the translation is sufficiently accurate.

**11. clamorous and wilful.** Perhaps best translated, as Toy does, 'boisterous and gadabout.' In Ecclus. xxvi. 10 it is part of a father's duty to keep a daughter from wandering as she will, but Song of Songs iii. 2 shows us that a woman's liberty even after nightfall was not generally curtailed.

Now she is in the streets, now in the broad places,	12
And lieth in wait at every corner.	
So she caught him, and kissed him,	13
<sup>a</sup> And with an impudent face she said unto him :	
Sacrifices of peace offerings <sup>b</sup> are with me ;	14
This day have I paid my vows.	
Therefore came I forth to meet thee,	15
Diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee.	
I have spread my couch with <sup>c</sup> carpets of tapestry,	16
With striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt.	
I have <sup>d</sup> perfumed my bed	17
With myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.	
Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning ;	18
Let us solace ourselves with loves.	
For the goodman is not at home,	19
<sup>a</sup> Heb. <i>She hardened her face, and said.</i>	
<sup>b</sup> Or, <i>were due from me</i> <sup>c</sup> Or, <i>cushions</i> <sup>d</sup> Or, <i>sprinkled</i>	

**13. So she caught him.** The verbs in this verse should be in the present tense, which adds to the dramatic and vivid power of the scene.

**with an impudent face.** Better 'with wanton look.'

**14. Sacrifices.** The term here employed designates the peace offerings (see Lev. vii. 11, 12), from which passage it will be seen that they provided an ample entertainment for a feast. The point of saying 'this day' is, as the passage in Leviticus indicates, that the food had to be consumed on the same day on which the offering was made. It is a terrible irony in the statement that this woman turns the religious sacrifice into the elements of a sinful orgy.

**15. Therefore.** That is, inasmuch as she is well provided with material for entertainment.

**16. carpets.** The word only occurs again in xxxi. 22, and probably means either 'coverlets' or 'cushions.' The words 'of tapestry' are an unauthorized addition.

**17. I have perfumed.** Cf. Song of Songs iv. 14. This is a practice of a later and luxurious age, as the perfumes here named are only found mentioned in post-exilic books.

**19. goodman.** This may be a somewhat slighting reference to her husband, though the Hebrew is simply 'the man.'

He is gone a long journey :

20 He hath taken a bag of money with him ;

He will come home at the full moon.

21 With her much fair speech she causeth him to yield,  
With the flattering of her lips she forceth him away.

22 He goeth after her <sup>a</sup> straightway,

As an ox goeth to the slaughter,

Or as <sup>b</sup> fetters to the correction of the fool ;

23 Till an arrow strike through his liver ;

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *suddenly*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, one in *fetters* The text is probably corrupt.

**20. full moon.** That is the next feast, probably a fortnight later than the scene here indicated.

**21. forceth him away.** Literally, 'carries him off,' that is, 'seduces him.' The verbs in both clauses are used in other passages of the O. T. for the leading away of Israel after other gods.

**22. straightway, or, with the margin, 'suddenly,'** does not make a very good sense, seeing that the description has spoken of a long persuasion as being requisite ; so that it is better to follow the LXX here, and render 'enticed,' or 'persuaded.'

**as fetters.** This clause, as it now stands, gives no clear meaning. The word rendered 'fetters' only occurs again in Isa. iii. 18, for 'anklets.' It appears as if the text is corrupt, for the LXX and other versions render 'as a dog to bonds.' By a slight alteration of the Hebrew, Toy secures the meaning 'as a calf that is led to the stall.' The most that can be said is that some such comparison to the unresisting movement of a beast to its destruction is meant.

**23. Till an arrow.** Here, again, it appears that some original corruption of the text must be supposed. The LXX and other versions read, 'as a stag shot in the liver with an arrow,' as these have understood the word rendered 'fool' in the previous verse to be the word for 'stag.'

**liver** occurs again in Lam. ii. 11 as the seat of life (cf. Job x. i. 13), an idea that was common in Babylonian and Assyrian writings. See article 'Liver' in *Enc. Bib.* The word is almost identical with the Hebrew word for 'glory,' and in several passages in the Psalms it should probably be read instead of that word (cf. Ps. vii. 5 ; xvi. 9, &c.). Further, many commentators put this clause last in the verse, and make the whole verse refer to the foolishness and destruction of the bird.

As a bird hasteth to the snare,  
 And knoweth not that it is for his life.  
 Now therefore, *my* sons, hearken unto me, 24  
 And attend to the words of my mouth.  
 Let not thine heart decline to her ways, 25  
 Go not astray in her paths.  
 For she hath cast down many wounded : 26  
 Yea, all her slain are a mighty host.  
 Her house is the way to <sup>a</sup> Sheol, 27  
 Going down to the chambers of death.

Doth not wisdom cry, 8  
 And understanding put forth her voice ?  
 In the top of high places by the way, 2  
 Where the paths meet, she standeth ;  
 Beside the gates, at the entry of the city, 3  
 At the coming in at the doors, she crieth aloud :  
 Unto you, O men, I call ; 4  
 And my voice is to the sons of men.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the grave*

**27. way.** In the original this is plural, and may probably signify that there are many ways leading to Sheol that start from her house. Again, the idea is that of premature physical death.

**chambers of death.** This phrase is probably nothing more than a parallel expression for Sheol in the previous clause.

**viii. 1. wisdom.** To pass from the last chapter to this one is like passing from a close valley full of poisonous vapour to the brilliant and sunny uplands of the mountains. The personification of wisdom that is found here may probably be based upon Job xxviii. It is certainly an advance upon that passage, and is itself most likely the foundation of two later parallels to be found in the Book of Wisdom vii. 8 to viii. 21, and Eccus. i. 1-20, xxiv.

**2. the top of high places.** Probably 'head of thoroughfares,' where the paths meet. Probably simply 'in the streets.'

**3. coming in at the doors:** more likely the entrance of the gates, meaning the elaborate gateways of the city, more or less like the double bars to be found in such a city as York.

- 5 O ye simple, understand <sup>a</sup> subtilty ;  
 And, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.
- 6 Hear, for I will speak excellent things ;  
 And the opening of my lips shall be right things.
- 7 For my mouth shall utter truth ;  
 And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
- 8 All the words of my mouth <sup>b</sup> are in righteousness ;  
 There is nothing crooked or perverse in them.
- 9 They are all plain to him that understandeth,  
 And right to them that find knowledge.
- 10 Receive my instruction, and not silver ;  
 And knowledge rather than choice gold.
- 11 For wisdom is better than <sup>c</sup> rubies ;  
 And all the things that may be desired are not to be compared unto her.
- 12 I wisdom have made <sup>a</sup> subtilty my dwelling,  
 And find out <sup>d</sup> knowledge *and* discretion.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *prudence*      <sup>b</sup> Or, *are righteousness*      <sup>c</sup> See Job xxviii. 18.  
<sup>d</sup> Or, *knowledge of witty inventions*

5. **subtilty.** See i. 4, note.  
 heart. See ii. 2 note.

6. **excellent things.** Toy considers it better by a slight change of the Hebrew word to render 'true things.'

7. **wickedness is an abomination.** By a slight change of the Hebrew we obtain the meaning of the LXX, 'false lips are an abomination to me,' which probably represents the correct form of the original.

9. **plain** should probably rather be 'true,' and, so rendered, the verse contains a very high ethical principle, the man, namely, that is willing to receive the truth shall be at once able to recognize it as such (cf. John vii. 17). The interesting question occurs as to whether Jesus Himself gained the hint of the teaching therein elaborated from this passage.

11. **rubies.** See iii. 15, note.

12. **made . . . my dwelling.** This expression, if correct, stands alone, and a slight alteration gives the better meaning 'I, Wisdom, possess intelligence.'

**find out.** Better, 'come into possession of.'

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil :	13
Pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, And the froward mouth, do I hate.	
Counsel is mine, and <sup>a</sup> sound knowledge :	14
I am understanding ; I have might.	
By me kings reign,	15
And princes decree justice.	
By me <sup>b</sup> princes rule,	16
And nobles, <i>even</i> all the judges <sup>c</sup> of the earth.	
I love them that love me ;	17
And those that seek me <sup>d</sup> diligently shall find me.	
Riches and honour are with me ;	18
<i>Yea</i> , <sup>e</sup> durable riches and righteousness.	

<sup>a</sup> Or, *effectual working*<sup>b</sup> Or, *rulers*<sup>c</sup> Many ancient authorities read, *of righteousness.*<sup>d</sup> Or, *early.*<sup>e</sup> Or, *ancient*

**13.** The verse, as now placed, interrupts the connexion between verses 12 and 14, and, further than that, the two parts of the verse do not accord, as the first clause is obviously the statement of the writer, and the second half of the verse the utterance of Wisdom. The probability is that two distinct and isolated aphorisms have here crept from the margin into the text and been combined by some scribe.

**14. I am understanding.** This translation is scarcely permissible, and should be in agreement with the other clauses, 'I have understanding.'

**16. all the judges.** Some editors follow the LXX here and render 'and rulers govern the earth,' but the Hebrew is intelligible without any alteration. The writer's conception of government is a wide and liberal one, and he is free both from national prejudice and the somewhat slavish fear of the ruler shown in Eccles. x. 20. It is interesting to compare this passage with Plato's idea that the true form of government would be reached when all kings were philosophers.

**17. seek ... diligently.** As in i. 28, the meaning is probably 'seek' alone. Again, we may compare as based upon the idea here stated the teaching of the fourth gospel (see John v. 40), and Tennyson's well-known line, 'Our wills are ours to make them Thine.'

**18. durable.** This is more likely to be correctly rendered

- 19 My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold ;  
 And my <sup>a</sup> revenue than choice silver.
- 20 I walk in the way of righteousness,  
 In the midst of the paths of judgement :
- 21 That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance,  
 And that I may fill their treasuries.
- 22 The LORD <sup>b</sup> possessed me <sup>c</sup> in the beginning of his way,  
<sup>a</sup> Or, *increase*      <sup>b</sup> Or, *formed*      <sup>c</sup> Or, *as*

'choice.' The meaning here, and 'ancient' given in the margin, though possible meanings, are not so appropriate. By the latter is supposed to be signified 'inherited riches,' and Plumptre quotes from Aesch. *Agam.* l. 43 the line which speaks of the great honour that is placed upon the riches which rulers have inherited from their remote ancestors.

**righteousness.** Here better 'prosperity.' The word has very often the significance of good fortune, and that seems to be its most appropriate meaning here.

**19. revenue.** Probably 'increase' of the margin, or 'produce,' is more in agreement with the agricultural figure employed.

**22.** With this verse begins a very fine poetical description of the creation of Wisdom and her activity before the world was brought into being. The LXX marks the transition by an explanatory introduction, which is undoubtedly a note of the scribe, and not part of the original text. The passage that follows is one of the most remarkable in the book. As we have already seen, it has close resemblances with passages in other sections of the Wisdom literature, but none of these rises to a higher level than does this section. While it begins with the thought of Wisdom as the creation of Jahweh, it is sufficiently influenced by the wider conceptions of Greek philosophy to present this personality as related to the whole universe, and as controlling the life of the race. The thought marks, therefore, a very great advance upon anything that had been previously written in Jewish circles, and has even a more philosophical grasp than some of the writings which follow it. The passage played a great rôle in subsequent thought, for it lies at the back of much of the speculation of Philo, and at a subsequent period was greatly employed by Christian theologians in support of their doctrine of the person of Christ through their identification of Wisdom in this passage with the Logos of the fourth gospel. See in particular the orations of Athanasius, Book II, chaps. xvi to xxii.

**22. possessed.** Better rendered 'created.'



<sup>n</sup> Before his works of old.

I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, 23  
Or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths, I was brought forth ; 24  
When there were no fountains abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled, 25  
Before the hills was I brought forth :

While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, 26

<sup>a</sup> Or, *The first of*

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**way.** This has the meaning 'procedure' in Job, and may be rendered here 'creation.'

**Before.** Better, 'the first of.'

Some Christian commentators are hampered by their theological presuppositions from translating this verse freely in accordance with the suggestions made above, but we must not allow the thoughts of a later time and the discussions about the person of Christ to weigh with us in frankly deciding upon the most likely meaning of a Hebrew poet. See, for example, Perowne's note on the passage.

**23. set up.** Better 'fashioned,' but the words here and in the following verses are too general to be limited to definite periods in the process of generation, as is done by some scholars.

**from everlasting.** The Hebrew words denote the time that is hidden by distance, 'indefinite,' but not, as Toy remarks, 'with the modern sense of the temporally infinite.'

**24.** To understand this and the following verses there must be a clear conception of the ideas of cosmogony that were then current. These are best obtained for the English reader in *HBD.*, article 'Cosmogony,' which contains not only an excellent discussion on the subject, but has a diagram which puts the whole matter very clearly. The earth was supposed to be floating in the great ocean, whose 'fountains' were channels that communicated between it and the solid earth, and which occasionally overflowed and flooded the world. The foundations of the mountains passed down into this great deep. The waters that were above the firmament were prevented from descending upon the earth by the solid firmament in which moved the heavenly bodies, but which was also pierced by the windows of heaven through which the rain came.

**24. depths.** This includes probably all forms of water, not only upon the earth, but the subterranean ocean that lay below it.

**25. settled.** See Ps. xviii. 7 ; Jonah ii. 6.

**26. fields.** This meaning is merely conjectural, but nothing

- Nor the <sup>a</sup>beginning of the dust of the world.
- 27 When he <sup>b</sup>established the heavens, I was there :  
When he set a circle upon the face of the deep :
- 28 When he made firm the skies above :  
When the fountains of the deep became strong :
- 29 When he gave to the sea <sup>c</sup>its bound,  
That the waters should not transgress his commandment :  
When he <sup>d</sup>marked out the foundations of the earth :
- 30 Then I was by him, *as* a master workman  
And I <sup>e</sup>was daily *his* delight,  
<sup>f</sup>Rejoicing always before him ;
- 31 <sup>f</sup>Rejoicing in his habitable earth ;
- <sup>a</sup> Or, *sum*                      <sup>b</sup> Or, *prepared*                      <sup>c</sup> Or, *his decree*  
<sup>d</sup> Or, *appointed*                      <sup>e</sup> Or, *had delight continually*  
<sup>f</sup> Or, *Sporting*

more satisfactory can be suggested. Toy is inclined to omit it altogether.

**27. circle.** This may be 'vault,' with reference to the solid firmament (see above), or if 'circle' is taken, the reference will be to the horizon of the surrounding ocean (cf. Job xxii. 14, where the same uncertainty is found). Probably 'vault' is correct in both passages.

**28. skies.** Rather, 'clouds.'

**became strong.** This ought more probably to be translated in the active, as with the LXX, 'fixed fast.'

**30. master workman.** The word so rendered is only found once again, in Jer. lii. 15 R. V. marg., where it occurs in the plural, and in slightly differing form. The meaning here given, or that of 'architect' or 'artist,' is supported by the Book of Wisdom vii. 22, where this term is applied to Wisdom, and it is thought that the writer may have derived it from this passage. A slight alteration of the Hebrew form supplies a word that occurs in Lam. iv. 5, which may be rendered 'foster-child' or 'ward,' which seems on the whole to give the best meaning here. (Cf. Book of Wisdom ix. 9.)

**I was . . . his delight.** The translation of this phrase is again uncertain, as the original may also mean 'I experienced delight,' and that is the more probable rendering owing to the context.

**31. habitable earth.** This may simply mean 'world,' and Toy considers that the following clause should be omitted alto-

And my delight was with the sons of men.  
 Now therefore, *my* sons, hearken unto me : 32  
 For blessed are they that keep my ways.  
 Hear instruction, and be wise, 33  
 And refuse it not.  
 Blessed is the man that heareth me, 34  
 Watching daily at my gates,  
 Waiting at the posts of my doors.  
 For whoso findeth me findeth life, 35  
 And shall <sup>a</sup> obtain favour of the LORD.  
 But he that <sup>b</sup> sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul : 36  
 All they that hate me love death.  
 Wisdom hath builded her house, 8  
 She hath hewn out her seven pillars :

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *draw forth*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *missetteth me*

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gether, as an obvious gloss introduced by some editor for the purpose of connecting the activity of wisdom with human life.

**36. sinneth against.** Better translated 'missetteth,' as in the margin, since that preserves the contrast with 'findeth' in the previous verse.

**his own soul** is properly 'himself.'

ix. This chapter contains two obviously contrasted pictures of wisdom and folly, between which is inserted a section of general teaching (verses 7-12), supposed by some to be an address of Wisdom, but which is much more probably a set of aphorisms drawn from some other source and put in this place by some later editor. The student should read the closely connected passages 1-6 and 13-18 side by side.

**1. house.** Wisdom is here presented as mistress of a palace, to which she invites those who would be her followers as guests at a great feast. The figure of the house has played a large part in later allegorical literature, as, for example, Chaucer's 'House of Fame,' Bunyan's 'House of the Interpreter' and 'Palace Beautiful,' and may it not be said, with reverence, our Lord's own reference to the Father's house of many mansions? The idea of the feast also and the summons thereto may very well lie at the base of the N.T. parables in Matt. xxii and Luke xiv.

**hewn out.** Probably, as with the LXX, 'erected.'

**seven pillars.** It is impossible to tell whether this number is

- 2 She hath killed her beasts ; she hath mingled her wine ;  
She hath also furnished her table.
- 3 She hath sent forth her maidens, she crieth  
Upon the highest places of the city,
- 4 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither :  
As for him that is void of understanding, she saith to him,
- 5 Come, eat ye of my bread,  
And drink of the wine which I have mingled.
- 6 <sup>a</sup> Leave off, ye simple ones, and live ;  
And walk in the way of understanding.
- 7 He that correcteth a scorner getteth to himself shame :  
And he that reproveth a wicked man *getteth* himself a blot.
- 8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee :  
Reprove a wise man, and he will love thee.
- 9 Give *instruction* to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser :  
Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Forsake the simple*

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chosen as a significant number, denoting the beauty of the house ; as a round number, denoting many ; or because seven was a customary number in the architecture of the time. The pillars spoken of are probably those surrounding the court, and it may be that in the gallery behind them was spread the feast.

2. The statements here made all signify the special preparations for a ceremonial occasion. The slaying may refer to sacrifice in the first instance (cf. vii. 14), the mixing of wine most likely to the spicing of it, or, not so probably, to the Greek custom of mingling it with water ; but cf. Ps. cii. 9.

3. **She hath sent forth.** We are reminded here of the special messengers of Matt. xxii. 3.

**she crieth.** Better, 'to cry.'

**highest places.** This may either mean places of public resort, or those so elevated that the voice of the messengers can reach far and wide.

7. See above for the general character of these verses.

**shame.** Better, perhaps, 'insult.'

**blot.** This has probably a somewhat similar meaning to the former word, and is well rendered by Toy 'reviling.'

- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom : 10  
 And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.  
 For by me thy days shall be multiplied, 11  
 And the years of thy life shall be increased.  
 If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself : 12  
 And if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.
- <sup>a</sup> The foolish woman is clamorous ; 13  
*She is* <sup>b</sup> simple, and knoweth nothing.  
<sup>a</sup> Or, *Folly*      <sup>b</sup> Heb. *simplicity*.

**10. Holy One.** Inasmuch as the Hebrew form is plural, some would render here 'holy men,' but the parallel shows almost certainly that God must be meant, and the plural form was not uncommon in later Hebrew (cf. Eccles. xii. 1, where the word rendered 'creator' is also plural).

**11. by me.** The LXX and other versions render 'by it,' which is probably correct, as there is no other evidence of personal address in this section.

**12. If thou art wise.** This verse emphasizes the teaching that is prominent in Ezekiel of individual responsibility, and of every man bearing his own burden. The doctrine here taught is found nowhere else in the book. The LXX gives a different turn to the thought, and also has a somewhat lengthy addition to the passage, reading as follows :—'If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself, and if thou art a scoffer, thou alone must bear the brunt. Who stays himself on lies feeds on wind (cf. Eccles. *passim*), and he will follow after winged birds. The ways of his own vineyard he forsakes, and wanders from the paths of his own field. He walks through a waterless waste, through a land that is desert, and with his hands he garners barrenness.' We cannot tell at all what the origin of these verses may be, but it is not likely that they have behind them a Hebrew original.

**13.** See note at the introduction of this chapter on the general character of the following verses.

**The foolish woman.** Probably this should be simply 'folly,' though the form of the original is somewhat irregular and indefinite.

**simple.** A slight alteration of the Hebrew gives the meaning 'seductive,' which is read by several versions.

**nothing.** There is again some uncertainty about the phrase, as the Greek renders 'she knows not shame,' an appropriate meaning if we could be certain that it represents the original.

- 14 And she sitteth at the door of her house,  
 On a seat in the high places of the city,  
 15 To call to them that pass by,  
 Who go right on their ways,  
 16 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither :  
 And as for him that is void of understanding, she saith  
 to him,  
 17 Stolen waters are sweet,  
 And bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant.  
 18 But he knoweth not that <sup>a</sup> the dead are there ;  
 That her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

# 10 The proverbs of Solomon.

A wise son maketh a glad father :  
 But a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.

- 2 Treasures of wickedness profit nothing :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the shades* Heb. *Rephaim*.

15. **go right.** The word 'right' should be omitted, as the signification is simply 'those who go forward.'

17. **Stolen waters.** There is no doubt that the figure here reverts to that of chapter vii, and the particular temptation of folly is regarded as being that to sexual immorality. It is possible that the term 'water' is suggested by the figure found in v. 15, 16. See the notes there.

18. **the dead.** Literally 'Rephaim.' See note on ii. 18.

Again the Greek makes a somewhat long addition in this place, but it is scarcely worth reproducing. Its main interest is that it contains the metaphor of a 'fountain' for a 'wife,' which we find also in v. 15, 18; Song of Songs iv. 12. See note on Eccles. xii. 1.

x. **The proverbs of Solomon.** This general title applies to the whole section from this verse to xxii. 16. On its significance and general relation to the book, see Introduction, p. 10. The general type of the proverbs contained in it is that of a twofold antithetic statement. On the one apparent exception see the note on xix. 7.

2. Plumptre compares with this the English proverb 'Ill got,

But righteousness delivereth from death.

The LORD will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: 3

But he thrusteth away the desire of the wicked.

He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: 4

But the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

He that gathereth in summer is <sup>a</sup> a wise son: 5

But he that sleepeth in harvest is a son <sup>b</sup> that causeth shame.

Blessings are upon the head of the righteous: 6

But <sup>c</sup> violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.

<sup>a</sup> Or, a son that doeth wisely      <sup>b</sup> Or, that doeth shamefully

<sup>c</sup> Or, the mouth of the wicked covereth violence

ill gone,' which, of course, only parallels the first clause. The second is the positive and contrasted statement.

**righteousness.** The most difficult question here to decide is whether righteousness is already limited to the meaning 'alms-giving,' which it undoubtedly had acquired by the second century B.C. (cf. Eccles. iii. 30, xxix. 12, and also Matt. vi. 1, 2). There is some indication that the latter may be the meaning here owing to the fact that the idea of treasure is introduced into the first clause, and the writer may, therefore, mean to contrast the foolish acquisition with the wise use of money.

**3. thrusteth away.** Probably better 'disappoints the evil desire.'

**4. He becometh poor.** The slightest change of the Hebrew enables us to preserve the antithesis more accurately, thus, 'A slack hand makes poor; a diligent hand makes rich.' This may be said to be a commonplace of the proverbial law of all nations, and the student will find many examples in Malan's book, of which we may only quote one Arab proverb: 'Diligence is a merchandise that yields large profits.'

**5. He that gathereth.** The meaning of this saying is obvious, and finds an interesting parallel in a line of the Greek poet Hesiod, 'Show thy servants while in the middle of summer that it will not always be summer.' The LXX varies here, and has also an additional verse.

**6. upon the head.** Cf. Gen. xlix. 26, the reference probably being to the good gifts of God.

**violence covereth.** These words occur again as the second clause of verse 11, where it is more easily understood. Here it is not obvious what the force of the contrast with the first part of

- 7 The memory of the just is blessed :  
 But the name of the wicked shall rot.  
 8 The wise in heart will receive commandments :  
 But <sup>a</sup> a prating fool <sup>b</sup> shall fall.  
 9 He that walketh uprightly walketh surely :  
 But he that perverteth his ways shall be known.  
 10 He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow :  
<sup>c</sup> But <sup>a</sup> a prating fool <sup>b</sup> shall fall.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *the foolish of lips.*      <sup>b</sup> Or, *shall be overthrown or laid low*

<sup>c</sup> The Sept. and Syr. read, *But he that rebuketh openly maketh peace.*

the verse can be, as the meaning of 'covereth the mouth' is probably 'controls the speech.' The LXX renders 'untimely grief shall cover,' which may represent the original text. The alteration is probably due to assimilation to verse 11 or to substitution of the clause in that verse for the original of this one, which has been lost.

**7. shall rot.** Frankenberg suggests that a better contrast is afforded by the alteration of one letter in the Hebrew, which would then read, 'will be cursed,' and this is a very probable emendation. Bunyan applies the verse to the fate of Heedless and Toobold in the Enchanted Ground.

**8. a prating fool.** This clause occurs again in verse 10, and a similar confusion to that noted above in verse 6 may be possible here. Both clauses are quite simple in this verse, but the contrast is not obvious, unless it be between the wise man who listens and the fool who talks, while the good fortune of the former is simply implied and the evil fortune of the latter is explicitly stated. Cf. Eccles. viii. 5.

**9. shall be known.** This represents the meaning of the original, but the necessary contrast is only implied, and not stated. We must understand it to mean that an evil man who persists in his evil courses will come to grief eventually, and so manifest his folly, but we are tempted to make the slight alteration in the Hebrew that is requisite to produce the translation of ii. 15, 'shall smart for it,' which is probably correct.

**10. He that winketh.** See vi. 13, and note.

**a prating fool.** These words, as has been noted, occur above in verse 8, but here they make no appropriate contrast whatever, and are probably introduced in error. The LXX has an entirely different translation, which makes excellent sense, and probably represents the lost original. It reads, 'He who



- The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life : 11  
 But <sup>a</sup> violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.  
 Hatred stirreth up strifes : 12  
 But love covereth all transgressions.  
 In the lips of him that hath discernment wisdom is found : 13  
 But a rod is for the back of him that is void of <sup>b</sup> understanding.  
 Wise men lay up knowledge : 14  
 But the mouth of the foolish is a present destruction.  
 The rich man's wealth is his strong city : 15  
<sup>a</sup> Or, *the mouth of the wicked covereth violence*      <sup>b</sup> Heb. *heart*.

reproves openly makes peace,' thus laying stress upon the straightforward conduct of the man who clears up misunderstandings, as contrasted with the shuffling methods of him who tries to pass by unsatisfactory conduct.

**11. a fountain of life.** This is a figure that recurs throughout the book, and may lie underneath two famous verses in the fourth gospel, John iv. 10, vii. 38.

**violence.** See note on verse 6 above. The contrast is here a clear one between the speech of the righteous and that of the wicked.

**12. love covereth.** Obviously by forgiving, and in this sense the words are quoted in a slightly different form in 1 Peter iv. 8. With a different application they are also quoted in Jas. v. 20. In neither passage are these writers following the LXX, which here has a different rendering, namely, 'hides all those who are not lovers of strife.' The proverb may have been a common one current in the form in which we find it in the N.T.

**13. a rod.** Similar words occur more appropriately in xxvi. 3. Here the difficulty is to relate the second clause quite clearly to the first. As the former is spoken of the wise speech of the prudent man, we should expect something to be said in the second clause about the foolish speech of the imprudent, instead of which we have brought before us the means of his chastisement whereby he may be led to prudence. Some alteration in the Hebrew gives the excellent meaning 'folly is in the mouth of the fool.' If we do not so read, the clause seems correct in sense but misplaced. Plumptre quotes a trenchant Egyptian proverb, 'A youth has a back that he may attend to his teacher.'

**14. a present destruction.** Better, 'an imminent destruction.'

**15. The rich man's wealth.** This clause occurs again in

- The destruction of the poor is their poverty.  
 16 The labour of the righteous *tendeth* to life ;  
 The increase of the wicked to sin.  
 17 He <sup>a</sup> is in the way of life that heedeth <sup>b</sup> correction :  
 But he that forsaketh reproof <sup>c</sup> erreth.  
 18 He that hideth hatred is of lying lips ;  
 And he that uttereth a slander is a fool.  
 19 In the multitude of words there wanteth not transgression :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *is a way*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *instruction*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *causeth to err*

xviii. 11. Perowne says well, 'We have here an instance of the candour and sobriety of the moral teaching of this book. Wealth has its advantages and poverty its drawbacks, and the fact is honestly stated.'

16. **The labour**, rather, the wages that are the fruit of labour. to sin. If we retain this reading, then we must suppose that the writer is thinking of the consequences of sin without expressing them, but a slight alteration gives the meaning 'destruction,' which is probably the word that originally stood here (cf. Rom. vi. 23, where this passage may have been in Paul's mind).

17. **erreth**, or, with the margin, 'causeth to err.' Either gives good sense.

18. **He that hideth hatred**, that is, who cloaks hatred under the semblance of friendliness (cf. xxvi. 26). The LXX gives a different meaning, namely, 'righteous lips conceal hatred,' which must represent some different Hebrew. No very satisfactory meaning is to be got out of the first clause as it stands in contrast with the second, and the LXX here affords the best meaning.

19. **In the multitude of words**. The thought of this proverb is one that is common to many people (see Malan's notes on the verse). We can only quote one Italian proverb here, 'There is little conscience in great eloquence' (cf. Eccus. xx. 8), and the teaching on the tongue in Jas. iii, where there is no doubt the writer had the Book of Proverbs in mind. We may cite our own English proverb, 'Speech is silvern, but silence is golden,' though we must not forget the truth of George Eliot's somewhat cynical addition, 'Speech is silvern, but silence does not always brood over a full nest.' There was a saying of the Jewish rabbi Jehoshua, 'Speech for a shekel, silence for two,' and another of their sayings was, 'Silence is the cure of a thing.' See further

But he that refraineth his lips <sup>a</sup> doeth wisely.  
 The tongue of the righteous is *as* choice silver : 20  
 The heart of the wicked is little worth.  
 The lips of the righteous feed many : 21  
 But the foolish die for lack of <sup>b</sup> understanding.  
 The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, 22  
 And <sup>c</sup> he addeth no sorrow therewith.  
 It is as sport to a fool to do wickedness : 23  
<sup>d</sup> And *so is* wisdom to a man of understanding.  
 The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him : 24  
 And the desire of the righteous shall be granted.  
<sup>e</sup> When the whirlwind passeth, the wicked is no more : 25  
 But the righteous is an everlasting foundation.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *is wise*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *heart*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *toil addeth nothing thereto*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *But a man of understanding hath wisdom*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more*

*Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, chaps. i and iii. Cf. Prov. xvii. 27, 28.

**22. he addeth.** As the margin indicates, there is another possible translation given by some versions and supported by many scholars, namely, 'toil addeth nothing thereto,' but the statement is neither accurate in itself nor is the thought, that human labour is of no account in relation to what God Himself gives, one found in the O.T. (cf. xiv. 23).

**23. so is wisdom.** The rendering here given means that as wickedness is amusement to a fool, so wisdom is amusement to a man of understanding; but to preserve the parallel, we should have had 'goodness' in place of 'wisdom.' Some scholars, therefore, alter the Hebrew, and render, 'but it is abomination to a man of understanding.'

**24. The fear of the wicked.** The orthodox opinion of Jewish writers is expressed in this verse, an opinion which, as Toy points out, is combated in Job iii, 25, but the problem of that book is not dealt with here. The thought of this verse is put pithily in the Scottish proverb, 'Ill-doers are ay ill-dreaders.'

**25. is an everlasting foundation.** 'Has an everlasting foundation' would better express the meaning in English (cf. Ps. xxxvii. 35-38; Matt. vii. 24-27). It is interesting to think that

- 26 As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes,  
So is the sluggard to them that send him.
- 27 The fear of the LORD <sup>a</sup>prolongeth days:  
But the years of the wicked shall be shortened.
- 28 The hope of the righteous *shall be* gladness:  
But the expectation of the wicked shall perish.
- 29 The way of the LORD is a strong hold to the upright;  
But <sup>b</sup>it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity.
- 30 The righteous shall never be removed:  
But the wicked shall not dwell in the <sup>c</sup>land.
- 31 The mouth of the righteous <sup>d</sup>bringeth forth wisdom:  
But the froward tongue shall be cut off.
- 32 The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable:  
But the mouth of the wicked <sup>e</sup>*speaketh* frowardness.
- 11 <sup>f</sup>A false balance is an abomination to the LORD:  
But a just weight is his delight.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *addeth*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *destruction shall be to, &c.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *earth*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *buddeth with*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *is*

<sup>f</sup> Heb. *A balance of deceit.*

this verse may have been in the mind of Jesus when He uttered the parable there related.

**26. As vinegar.** Proverbs of this type are found mainly in chaps. xxv and xxvi, and it is, therefore, possible that this verse may be out of place. 'It is,' says Plumptre, 'perhaps the nearest approach in the whole book to the humorous,' but he has surely forgotten such verses as xxv. 24, xxvi. 3, and 13-17. The LXX has for the second clause 'so is lawlessness to them who practise it,' which may have arisen from a misreading of the Hebrew.

**28.** Cf. 24 above.

**29. The way of the LORD.** If this be correct, then 'the way of the Lord' is used here with a unique metaphor attached to it, and it seems better to translate it 'The Lord is a stronghold to the man who is upright in his way, but destruction to the workers of iniquity.'

**30. the land.** See ii. 21, 22 and notes.

**31, 32.** It is possible that the clauses of these two verses are arranged in the figure of speech that is known as a *chiasm*, that is, the first and fourth lines correspond, and the second and third.

**xi. 1. a just weight.** Cf. the legal enactments on this matter

When pride cometh, then cometh shame : 2  
 But with the lowly is wisdom.  
 The integrity of the upright shall guide them : 3  
 But the perverseness of the treacherous shall destroy them.  
 Riches profit not in the day of wrath : 4  
 But righteousness delivereth from death.  
 The righteousness of the perfect shall <sup>a</sup>direct his way : 5  
 But the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.  
 The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them : 6  
 But they that deal treacherously shall be taken in their  
 own mischief.  
 When a wicked man dieth, *his* expectation shall perish : 7  
 And the hope of <sup>b</sup>iniquity perisheth.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *make straight or plain*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *strong men*

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in Lev. xix. 36; Deut. xxv. 15. That there was a royal standard of weights and measures is shown 2 Sam. xiv. 26. The prevalency of dishonesty among traders in the matter is suggested by the recurrence of proverbs on the subject in xvi. 11, xx. 10, 23, and in the more severe statement of Eccles. xxvi. 29. A curious comment on the passage is to be found in the Hanseatic Museum at Bergen, where the visitor will see the buying and selling weights of the old traders. It is unnecessary to say which set is the heavier!

**2. When pride cometh.** Cf. the English proverb, 'Pride goeth before a fall,' and many other parallels in Malan. Plumptre quotes a beautiful Rabbinic paraphrase of the second clause, 'Lowly souls become full of wisdom as the low place becomes full of water.'

**4. day of wrath.** With the prophets this phrase generally signifies a judgement upon the nation, but by a comparison of Job xxi. 30; Eccles. v. 4-7 we find that the Wisdom literature gives it a more individualistic reference.

**5. direct.** Rather, 'make smooth.' Cf. the fine passage in Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, descriptive of the two ways that led to the right and left at the foot of the hill Difficulty.

**6. be taken,** either as in a net or as a captured city.

**7. iniquity.** This meaning is extremely improbable, and none of the various suggestions that have been made are feasible. The LXX gives a perfectly different turn to it, which cannot be

- 8 The righteous is delivered out of trouble,  
And the wicked cometh in his stead.
- 9 With his mouth the godless man destroyeth his neighbour:  
But through knowledge shall the righteous be delivered.
- 10 When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth:  
And when the wicked perish, there is shouting.
- 11 By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted:  
But it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.
- 12 He that despiseth his neighbour is void of <sup>a</sup> wisdom:  
But a man of understanding holdeth his peace.
- 13 He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets:  
But he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.
- 14 Where no wise guidance is, the people falleth:  
But in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.
- 15 He that is surety for a stranger <sup>b</sup> shall smart for it:  
But he that hateth <sup>c</sup> suretiship is sure.
- 16 A gracious woman retaineth honour:

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *heart*.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *shall be sore broken*.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *those that strike hands*.

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obtained from the present text, nor is the idea expressed in it found in the Book of Proverbs. It reads, 'When a righteous man dies his hope does not perish, but the boast of the wicked perishes.' It seems that the original of the second clause has been lost, and that the words which now stand there constitute either a fragment of it or the segment of another proverb which is not in place here.

**8. in his stead.** This means that the wicked eventually becomes the permanent inheritor of trouble with which the righteous forms only a temporary acquaintance.

**9. through knowledge.** Probably knowledge of the wicked man's evil ways, which gives the righteous the opportunity of escaping from them.

**11.** Cf. Eccles. vii. 19.

**14.** Cf. xxiv. 6 for a special application of this more general political proverb.

**15. for a stranger** is simply 'for another.' On the general meaning of the words see note on vi. 1.

**16. A gracious woman.** The contrast here is between the

And violent men retain riches.

The merciful man doeth good to his own soul : 17

But he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.

The wicked earneth deceitful wages : 18

But he that soweth righteousness *hath* a sure reward.

<sup>a</sup> He that is stedfast in righteousness *shall attain* unto life : 19

And he that pursueth evil *doeth it* to his own death.

They that are perverse in heart are an abomination to 20  
the LORD :

But such as are perfect in *their* way are his delight.

<sup>b</sup> *Though* hand *join* in hand, the evil man shall not be 21  
unpunished :

But the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.

As a <sup>c</sup> jewel of gold in a swine's snout, 22

<sup>a</sup> Or, *So righteousness tendeth to life, and he &c.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *My hand upon it!* Heb. *Hand to hand.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *ring*

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quiet victories of a beautiful character, which consist in general honour and approval, and the rude victories of brute force, which at the best only consist in amassing and holding wealth. It is the only place in the book in which men and women are contrasted in the same verse. The LXX has a curious addition here, the origin of which it is impossible to trace, 'A gracious woman brings honour to her husband, but a woman who hates righteousness is a throne of dishonour. The slothful come to lack riches, but the manly stay themselves on riches.'

17. *his own soul*. Better, 'himself'; cf. viii. 36, and in the same way should 'his own flesh' of the next clause be translated.

18. *deceitful*. 'Delusive,' that is, 'transitory.'

21. *Though hand join in hand*. This is literally 'hand to hand,' and may be, as most suppose, a popular form of asseveration, like our phrase 'here's my hand upon it.' Thus the majority of modern editors translate 'assuredly.'

*the seed*. This is 'race,' not 'posterity.'

22. *jewel, ring*. The nose-ring was a common ornament among the Oriental women, and is referred to in various places in the O.T. (see Gen. xxiv. 47; Isa. iii. 21). For actual illustrations of the ornament, see Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, App. A, p. 571. It is uncertain whether the modern

*So is* a fair woman which <sup>a</sup> is without discretion.

- 23 The desire of the righteous is only good :

*But* the expectation of the wicked is <sup>b</sup> wrath.

- 24 There is that scattereth, and increaseth yet more ;

And there is that withholdeth <sup>c</sup> more than is meet, but *it tendeth* only to want.

- 25 The liberal soul shall be made fat :

And he that watereth shall be watered also himself.

- 26 He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him :

But blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.

- 27 He that diligently seeketh good seeketh favour :

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *turneth aside from*      <sup>b</sup> Or, *arrogance*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *what is justly due*

Western custom of putting a ring in a swine's snout to prevent it doing damage was customary in the East, but, if so, then there is even further point in the comparison here. Cf. Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, l. 785.

**discretion.** The force of the word might be better expressed by 'self-respect' or 'circumspection,' as it denotes not only an intellectual caution but a moral quality.

**23. wrath.** This word may also mean 'arrogance,' so that it is possible to understand the verse in two ways—either 'the righteous seek only that which is good, while the wicked are arrogant, and, therefore, self-seeking,' or 'the desire of the righteous brings about good results for themselves, while the desire of the wicked culminates in evil.'

**24. There is that scattereth.** This passage is obviously in the mind of Paul when he writes 2 Cor. ix. 6, and the verse forms the subject of old Mr. Honest's riddle in the Inn of Gaius :

'A man there was, though some did count him mad,  
The more he cast away the more he had.'

**more than is meet** is an incorrect rendering of the Hebrew, the margin giving the accurate translation, 'what is justly due.'

**26. He that withholdeth corn.** This proverb is possibly based upon the experience of the Jews in contact with the civilization of Greek states, where the practice here alluded to was no uncommon one.

**27. seeketh.** The second word so translated probably means 'wins.' The further question in the verse is as to whether the



But he that searcheth after mischief, it shall come unto him.  
 He that trusteth in his riches shall fall : 28  
 But the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf.  
 He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind : 29  
 And the foolish shall be servant to the wise of heart.  
 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life ; 30  
 And he that is wise winneth souls.  
 Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth : 31  
 How much more the wicked and the sinner !  
 Whoso loveth <sup>a</sup> correction loveth knowledge : 12  
 But he that hateth reproof is brutish.  
 A good man shall obtain favour of the LORD : 2  
 But a man of wicked devices will he condemn.  
 A man shall not be established by wickedness : 3

<sup>a</sup> Or, *instruction*

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favour mentioned is that of God or of men, but the latter seems more probable.

**29. inherit the wind.** See the frequent recurring phrase in Eccles., 'a striving after wind.'

**servant** is here, of course, 'slave,' and designates a fact that the foolish man will come to such poverty that he will be sold into slavery.

**30. For tree of life,** see note on iii. 18.

**winneth souls** is literally 'takes lives,' and the word rendered 'takes' is always in such connexions elsewhere equal to 'destroys'; but that meaning, of course, gives no sense here, so that it appears there must have been some original corruption of the Hebrew. The LXX translates 'from the fruits of righteousness grows a tree of life; but the lives of the lawless are taken away untimely,' and some such meaning is probably what is demanded. The present text is not only impossible in itself, but affords no antithesis.

**31. recompensed.** Here used in the definite sense of 'punished,' and the argument is an *a fortiori* one—if the righteous are punished, then the wicked will more certainly suffer. For the thought cf. Eccles. viii. 11. The LXX seems to have had a different text, as it translates, 'if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?'—the form in which the verse is quoted in 1 Peter iv. 18.

But the root of the righteous shall never be moved.

4 A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband :

But she that <sup>a</sup>maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.

5 The thoughts of the righteous are <sup>b</sup>just :

But the counsels of the wicked are deceit.

6 The words of the wicked <sup>c</sup>are of lying in wait for blood :

But the mouth of the upright shall deliver them.

7 <sup>d</sup>The wicked are overthrown, and are not :

But the house of the righteous shall stand.

8 A man shall be commended according to his wisdom :

But he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised.

9 Better is he that is lightly esteemed, and hath a servant,

Than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *doeth shamefully*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *judgement.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *are a lying in wait*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *Overthrow the wicked, and they are not*

xii. 4. **A virtuous woman.** Here we come upon a subject which is frequently referred to in the book, and specially in chap. xxxi. If evil women were painted in dark colours by the writers of these proverbs, they were also able to do justice to the noble character of the matrons who adorned Israel.

**6. are of lying in wait:** literally, 'are a lying-in-wait,' and this strong figure is well worth preserving. The words of wicked men are for the moment themselves regarded as bloodthirsty robbers (cf. i. 11). Wildeboer considers that the passage in chap. i is based upon this verse.

**them.** This word should probably be omitted, as it may be an interpretative addition of some scribe. It is more effective to leave the contrast quite general.

**7. Cf. x. 25 and note.**

**8. perverse.** This is perhaps rather too strong a word to express the thought of the original, which would be sufficiently met by such a term as 'one lacking in judgement.'

**9. lightly esteemed:** i. e. socially, the meaning being that a man is well-off who has sufficient comfort to live above poverty, even though men do not reckon him good enough to be in Society.

**honoureth himself:** better, 'pretends to riches greater than he possesses.' Some versions render the second part of the first clause 'is a servant to himself,' that is, 'does his own work'

- A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast : 10  
 But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.  
 He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread : 11  
 But he that followeth after <sup>a</sup> vain *persons* is void of  
 understanding.  
 The wicked desireth <sup>b</sup> the net of evil men : 12  
 But the root of the righteous yieldeth *fruit*.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *vain things*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *the prey*

(cf. Eccles. x. 27). This translation is obviously based on a slight alteration of the Hebrew, and may accurately represent the original.

**10. the life of his beast.** The books of the law enjoin thoughtful kindness for animals (cf. Deut. xxv. 4, &c.), and the beautiful expression in Jonah iv. 11 is memorable as revealing the Hebrew thought about God's care for them (cf. 1 Cor. ix. 9). This proverb is popularly quoted in an inaccurate form, viz. 'A merciful man is merciful to his beast.'

**tender mercies.** Better, 'heart.'

**11. 'In the second clause,'** says Toy, 'the direct antithesis would be expressed by "will lack bread," but the Massoretic (that is, traditional) form of the proverb, perhaps for the sake of variety, states not the result but the quality of mind; such variations of apophthegms were doubtless common with the sages.'

**vain persons.** More likely, 'useless pursuits,' the original simply having the adjective without any indication of gender. The LXX adds here another proverb—'He who indulges in banquets of wine will leave dishonour in his stronghold.' It is impossible to decide as to the origin of these words.

**12. The wicked desireth.** The text in this verse is extremely difficult to interpret, and no satisfactory translation can be given of it. The R.V. text translates the existing Hebrew accurately, but yields no very obvious meaning. The two clauses do not present sufficient matter in common to produce a proper contrast. The first clause, when stripped of metaphor, is merely an identical proposition, while the second is quite unintelligible. The LXX, obviously from a slightly different text, gives an intelligible meaning, but the objection is still to be made that the ideas governing the two clauses have nothing in common. It reads 'The desires of the wicked are evil, but the roots of the righteous are firm.' Many emendations have been proposed, all of them more or less speculative. We must be content to leave it as a practically insoluble problem.

- 13 In the transgression of the lips is <sup>a</sup> a snare to the evil man :  
But the righteous shall come out of trouble.
- 14 A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth :  
And the doings of a man's hands shall be rendered  
unto him.
- 15 The way of the foolish is right in his own eyes :  
But he that is wise hearkeneth unto counsel.
- 16 A fool's vexation is <sup>b</sup> presently known :  
But a prudent man concealeth shame.
- 17 He that <sup>c</sup> uttereth truth sheweth forth righteousness,  
But a false witness deceit.
- 18 There is that speaketh rashly like the piercings of a sword :  
But the tongue of the wise is health.
- 19 The lip of truth shall be established for ever :  
But a lying tongue is but for a moment.
- 20 Deceit is in the heart of them that devise evil :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *an evil snare*                      <sup>b</sup> Or, *openly*    Heb. *in the day*.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *breatheth out*.

Between verses 13 and 14 the LXX inserts another proverb, with apparent reference to those who love law-suits.

**14. satisfied with good.** 'Good' is probably an interpretative addition, and the real meaning of the words is that a man must take the consequence of his speech, thus forming an exact parallel to the second clause.

**16.** Toy's translation of this verse is good, and serves also the purpose of an interpretation of it—'A fool's anger is displayed on the spot, but a sensible man ignores an affront.'

**17. righteousness.** Possibly 'justice' would be better, and, if so, then 'injustice' rather than 'deceit' should be the translation in the second clause; but if 'deceit' is retained, then 'truth' should stand for righteousness in the first clause. The reference of the whole verse is undoubtedly to the habits of witnesses in courts of justice—a subject that is frequently alluded to in this book.

**18. rashly, or thoughtlessly.**

**health, or 'healing.'** The proverb signifies that while some men's speech wounds, the words of others are like healing balm.

**20. Deceit.** As in verse 17 above, this may also be translated 'injustice,' and the second clause may with great probability be

But to the counsellors of peace is joy.	
There shall no mischief happen to the righteous :	21
But the wicked shall be filled with evil.	
Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD :	22
But they that deal truly are his delight.	
A prudent man concealeth knowledge :	23
But the heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness.	
The hand of the diligent shall bear rule :	24
But <sup>a</sup> the slothful shall be put under taskwork.	
<sup>b</sup> Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop ;	25
But a good word maketh it glad.	
The righteous is a guide to his neighbour :	26
But the way of the wicked causeth them to err.	

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *slothfulness*.<sup>b</sup> Or, *Care*


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rendered 'to the devisers of well-being there is justice,' which makes an excellent antithesis. If the present reading be retained for the second clause, cf. xxi. 15.

21. The LXX and other versions render 'no injustice is pleasing to the righteous,' which may well be the meaning of the first clause.

23. Cf. Eccus. xxi. 26.

24. See xi. 29.

25. **good word.** Better, 'kind word,' which is more likely to be the correct meaning than is the LXX 'good news.'

26. Here again we have the difficulty of unrelated clauses, even if the translation of the R. V. could stand ; but in the first clause the rendering is very questionable. 'Is a guide to' does not really represent the original, but is a mere paraphrase. The literal translation of the Hebrew is 'searches out,' which, of course, affords no intelligible meaning in the connexion. Many translate by the alteration of one word 'the righteous searches out his pasture,' conceiving it to be a metaphor from the feeding of cattle to signify the righteous man's finding of spiritual nourishment for himself. The A. V. here follows Hebrew traditional interpreters, and renders 'the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour,' but that does not solve the difficulty. We must either decide that the original text is corrupt beyond restoration, or that two unrelated clauses have here been connected. Probably both these statements may be correct.

- 27 <sup>a</sup> The slothful man <sup>b</sup> roasteth not that which he took in hunting :

But the precious substance of men <sup>c</sup> is to the diligent.

- 28 In the way of righteousness is life ;  
And in the pathway thereof there is no death.

- 13 A wise son *heareth* his father's <sup>d</sup> instruction :

But a scorner heareth not rebuke.

- 2 A man shall eat good <sup>e</sup> by the fruit of his mouth :

But <sup>f</sup> the soul of the treacherous *shall eat violence*.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *slothfulness*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *catcheth not his prey*

<sup>c</sup> Or, is to be *diligent*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *correction*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *from*

<sup>f</sup> Or, *the desire of the treacherous is for violence*

**27. roasteth not.** All the proverbs with reference to the sluggard seem to have more or less of a humorous character, and this one signifies either that the man is too lazy to cook what he has caught, or, as the margin indicates, to catch his own game at all. The second clause of the verse is, again, a difficulty, both because it seems unrelated to the first clause, and also because the translation is difficult. Obviously the contrast intended is between sloth and diligence, but just what is said about diligence it is not easy to discover. Some follow the A. V., which renders, 'the substance of a diligent man is precious'; others 'diligence is a valuable possession to a man'; while others, again, suppose the reference to be to a slave, and read 'a precious treasure to a man is one who is diligent.' The R. V. rendering is got by the insertion of a preposition, and perhaps gives as good a meaning as can be obtained, but one in no way clearly connected with the previous clause; so that what was said of the former verse is likely to be true here also.

**28. in the pathway thereof.** The R. V. translation of the second clause is unjustifiable for several reasons. The word rendered 'no' is really a negative particle which can only qualify a verb in the imperative, but there is no verb here, and, again, 'pathway' is a mere guess, and not a legitimate translation of the Hebrew as it stands. The ancient versions all understand, instead of the negative, the preposition 'to,' which is identical in form in Hebrew, only the vowel-point being altered, and these, of course, were never written until a much later date than the origin of the version. We must suppose, therefore, that the original read, 'the way of unrighteousness leads to death.'

xiii. 2. For the first clause cf. xii. 14, with which this is practically identical. The marginal reading of the second clause

He that guardeth his mouth keepeth his life :	3
<i>But</i> he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.	
The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing :	4
But the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.	
A righteous man hateth lying :	5
But a wicked man <sup>a</sup> is loathsome, and cometh to shame.	
Righteousness guardeth <sup>b</sup> him that is upright in the way :	6
But wickedness overthroweth <sup>c</sup> the sinner.	
There is that <sup>d</sup> maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing :	7
There is that <sup>d</sup> maketh himself poor, yet hath great wealth.	
The ransom of a man's life is his riches :	8
But the poor heareth no <sup>e</sup> threatening.	
The light of the righteous rejoiceth :	9
But the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.	

<sup>a</sup> Or, *cause* shame and *bringeth* reproach

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *uprightness of way.*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *sin.*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *feigneth*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *rebuke*

is probably as nearly correct as can be obtained, viz. 'the desire of the treacherous is violence,' though the antithesis is not very obvious.

3. The special reference of the verse may be to the danger of rash speech under the despotic government of Persia and Greece.

4. Bunyan makes Christian apply the words of the first clause to the case of Ignorance.

5. *is loathsome.* The two verbs in this clause should rather be translated as actives, viz. 'acts in a loathsome and shameful manner.'

7. *maketh himself rich.* Undoubtedly the proper meaning is 'feigneth himself to be rich' (cf. xii. 9 and note).

8. *threatening.* Literally 'rebuke'; but, so translated, the second clause has no connexion with the first, nor does any of the ingenuity of commentators serve to effect a connexion. We must either suppose, therefore, that the original has been corrupted, that the verse originally read something like xiv. 20, or that two unrelated clauses have here been brought into contact.

9. *rejoiceth.* Perhaps 'shineth brightly' better expresses the meaning. 'Light and lamp' are synonyms here, and it is fanciful to suppose that each word is more appropriate to its context. Cf. xxiv. 20.

- 10 By pride cometh only contention :  
But with the well advised is wisdom.
- 11 Wealth gotten <sup>a</sup> by vanity shall be diminished :  
But he that gathereth <sup>b</sup> by labour shall have increase.
- 12 Hope deferred maketh the heart sick :  
But when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.
- 13 Whoso despiseth <sup>c</sup> the word <sup>d</sup> bringeth destruction on himself :  
But he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.
- 14 The <sup>e</sup> law of the wise is a fountain of life,  
To depart from the snares of death.
- 15 Good understanding <sup>f</sup> giveth favour :  
But the way of the treacherous is rugged.

<sup>a</sup> The Sept. and Vulg. have, *in haste*. <sup>b</sup> Heb. *with the hand*.

<sup>c</sup> See ch. xvi. 20. <sup>d</sup> Or, *maketh himself a debtor thereto*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *teaching* <sup>f</sup> Or, *getteth*

**10. well advised.** 'Those who willingly accept counsel' gives an excellent meaning, but a slight alteration of the Hebrew permits us to read 'humble' (cf. xi. 2).

**11. by vanity.** This hardly gives the correct idea of the Hebrew, which really means 'from nothing,' and this in itself might be commendable. It seems, therefore, as if the versions were right in translating 'in haste,' with which rendering of the proverb we may compare the common English one 'Light come, light go.'

**by labour.** Literally, 'with the hand,' which probably signifies 'gradually,' and again reminds us of the wise motto which applies not only to wealth, but to other matters *Festina Lente*, 'hasten slowly.'

**13. bringeth destruction.** Literally, 'has been forced to give a pledge.' The metaphor is taken from the practice of the debtor giving his creditor some article in pledge, which, were the debt not paid, became the creditor's possession.

**15. giveth.** Rather, according to the margin, 'getteth.'

**rugged.** The word so rendered is literally 'permanent,' and is used with that meaning in many parts of the O. T. This and other interpretations of it are speculative. The well-known translation of the A. V. has, of course, understood the word as metaphorical, and Bunyan quotes it in that sense in the conversation between Christiana and Greatheart at the foot of the hill Difficulty. We are bound to confess that it is impossible



- Every prudent man worketh with knowledge : 16  
 But a fool spreadeth out folly.  
 A wicked messenger falleth into evil : 17  
 But a faithful ambassador is health.  
 Poverty and shame *shall be to* him that refuseth <sup>a</sup> correction: 18  
 But he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.  
 The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul : 19  
 But it is an abomination to fools to depart from evil.  
<sup>b</sup> Walk with wise men, and thou shalt be wise : 20  
 But the companion of fools shall <sup>c</sup> smart for it.  
 Evil pursueth sinners : 21  
 But the righteous shall be recompensed with good.  
 A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's 22  
 children ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *instruction*

<sup>b</sup> According to another reading, *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *be broken.*

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to make intelligible the present text, and perhaps the LXX, when it translates 'is in destruction,' points to the true solution. Originally the text may have read, as in Eccus. xli. 10, 'the way of the treacherous is unto perdition.'

16. *spreadeth out*, that is, 'makes a display of.'

17. **A wicked messenger.** Very slight alteration of the Hebrew gives the almost certainly correct meaning 'an incompetent messenger bringeth those who send him into evil.'

19. For the first part of this verse compare the second half of verse 12 above, and for the second part xxix. 27. It is possible that we have once more a fortuitous combination of clauses not originally connected. The LXX and other versions have here quite a different form, but whether they represent the original text or not we cannot determine. They read 'The desires of the righteous gladden the soul, but deeds of the unrighteous are far from knowledge.'

22. Cf. Eccus. ii. 26.

23. The Hebrew of this verse seems to be so corrupt that there is no satisfactory meaning to be obtained from it. The ancient versions all vary in their rendering, showing that the difficulty must have been felt very early. The LXX, for instance, renders 'the righteous shall pass many years in wealth, but the unrighteous

And the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the righteous.

23 Much food *is in* the <sup>a</sup> tillage of the poor :

But there is that is destroyed by reason of injustice.

24 He that spareth his rod hateth his son :

But he that loveth him chasteneth him <sup>b</sup> betimes.

25 The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul :

But the belly of the wicked shall want.

14 Every wise woman buildeth her house :

But <sup>c</sup> the foolish plucketh it down with her own hands.

2 He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD :

But he that is perverse in his ways despiseth him.

3 In the mouth of the foolish is a <sup>d</sup> rod <sup>e</sup> of pride :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *tilled land*      <sup>b</sup> Or, *diligently*      <sup>c</sup> Heb. *folly*.  
<sup>d</sup> Or, *shoot*      <sup>e</sup> Or, *for his pride*

shall be speedily destroyed,' which, of course, makes excellent sense, but is not to be obtained from the present Hebrew. Neither do modern emendations much commend themselves, and the wisest course is to confess ourselves beaten.

**24. betimes.** There is nothing in the original corresponding with this (see note on viii. 27).

xiv. 1. **Every wise woman.** The difficulty of this verse consists in the fact that as the Hebrew now stands a concrete expression occurs in the first clause, and an abstract one in the second, viz. 'wise women and folly,' so that editors change one or other of these to balance the corresponding one; the ancient versions read 'foolish women' in the second clause. Some consider that the place here assigned to the wife is more important than that elsewhere indicated in the O. T., but it does not seem to surpass the position assigned to her in chap. xxxi. Of course, 'builds her house' would then mean 'manages her household.' A more radical suggestion is that which treats the text as analogous to ix. 1, and omits 'among women' in the first clause, and 'with her hands' in the second, and so translates the whole verse, 'Wisdom builds her house, but folly plucks it down.' The objection to this is that these two virtues are never found personified in this section of the book.

**3. rod of pride.** The word rendered 'rod' is only found again in Isa. xi. 1, where it means 'a shoot,' and the obvious metaphor is that of a fresh shoot springing from an old stem, i. e. the words of the foolish are the outcome of their self-conceit. If

But the lips of the wise shall preserve them.  
 Where no oxen are, the crib is clean : 4  
 But much increase is by the strength of the ox.  
 A faithful witness will not lie : 5  
 But a false witness <sup>a</sup> uttereth lies.  
 A scorner seeketh wisdom, and *findeth it* not : 6  
 But knowledge is easy unto him that hath understanding.  
<sup>b</sup> Go into the presence of a foolish man, 7  
 And thou shalt not perceive *in him* the lips of knowledge.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *breatheth out*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *Go from... for thou wilt not &c.*

in the second clause we omit 'them,' the two clauses give us a balanced statement of the respective effects of foolish and wise speech. Many versions and editors read 'rod for pride.' The metaphor would then point to the punishment inflicted upon himself or others by the speech of the fool, but this meaning is not so likely.

**4. clean.** This is the word translated in Song of Songs vi. 9, 'undefiled.' Elsewhere it is always used of moral purity. The difficulty with the word here is that the cleanness of the stall has nothing much to do with the point of the proverb, unless it signifies that to be over fastidious about cleanliness is foolish, when much more important matters are at stake. In Scotland there is an interesting variant—'It's clean about the wren's nest when there is nought within.' A very excellent reading is gained by a slight alteration of the Hebrew, viz. 'Where there are no oxen there is no corn.' For an interesting development of the thought suggested by the ordinary reading, see the poem on this text in Walter C. Smith's *Thoughts and Fancies for Sunday Evenings*, beginning

'Were there no oxen feeding in the stall,  
 The crib were clean :  
 But without oxen harvest would be small,  
 Housekeeping lean :  
 Wherefore, we may not be too prim and nice ;  
 There is no good that doth not cost a price.'

**6. scorner.** This man cannot find wisdom because he has not the true spirit of the seeker.

**7. Go into the presence.** The thought of this verse seems to be very much the same as that of xv. 7, viz. that from a foolish man no wisdom is to be learned ; but the exact significance of the Hebrew is very difficult to discover, and Frankenberg gives up in despair the attempt to translate it.

- 8 The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way :  
But the folly of fools is deceit.
- 9 <sup>a</sup> The foolish make a mock at <sup>b</sup> guilt :  
But among the upright there is <sup>c</sup> good will.
- 10 The heart knoweth its own bitterness ;  
And a stranger doth not intermeddle with its joy.
- 11 The house of the wicked shall be overthrown :  
But the tent of the upright shall flourish.
- 12 There is a way which <sup>d</sup> seemeth right unto a man,  
But the end thereof are the ways of death.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Guilt mocketh at the foolish*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *the favour of God*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *the guilt offering*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *is straight before*

**8. deceit.** If this word could mean 'self-deception,' as some translators take it, the thought of the proverb would be quite clear, but from the usage of the word elsewhere it seems as if it always signified deception practised on others, and perhaps there may have been some slight variation of the original, for the LXX renders 'the folly of fools leads them astray,' exactly the meaning that the clause demands.

**9. guilt.** The word thus rendered is the technical term for the 'trespass-offering,' and its use here is difficult to understand. Some have inverted it and supposed that the offering itself is personified and imagined to be mocking the offerer, but this is far-fetched and unnatural. The word may mean 'guilt,' but it cannot mean 'sin,' which would be the proper word to use were the idea that of the foolish laughing at evil. There is probably some original corruption of the text that it is not now possible to discover.

**10.** The thought of this verse is common to many peoples, as Malan's illustrations prove. Perowne quotes appropriately Keble's lines :—

'Each in his hidden sphere of joy or woe  
Our hermit spirits dwell and range apart.'

While we may remember also the words of Burns :—

'What's done they partly may compute,  
But know not what's resisted.'

The LXX translates the second line, 'And when he rejoices he has no fellowship with pride'—obviously meaning that the chastening effect of sorrow abides with a man even in days of success ; but the rendering must represent a different original.

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful ;	13
And the end of mirth is heaviness.	
The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways : 14	
And a good man <i>shall be satisfied</i> from himself.	
The simple believeth every word :	15
But the prudent man looketh well to his going.	
A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil :	16
But the fool beareth himself insolently, and is confident.	
He that is soon angry will deal foolishly :	17
And a man of wicked devices is hated.	
The simple inherit folly :	18
But the prudent are crowned with knowledge.	
The evil bow before the good ;	19
And the wicked at the gates of the righteous.	
The poor is hated even of his own neighbour :	20
But the rich hath many friends.	
He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth :	21
But he that hath pity on the poor, happy is he.	

**13. is sorrowful.** It is not certain that the statement is so definitely pessimistic. The rendering 'may be' in place of 'is' is allowable.

**14. backslider.** This translation does not give the correct significance of the Hebrew, which is simply that of a man who turns aside, not of one who deserts a path he has formerly been following (cf. i. 32, and note).

**from himself.** Rather, 'from what he does.'

**15. Cf. the common proverb, 'Look before you leap.'**

**17. a man of wicked devices.** As the Hebrew stands the proverb consists of statements about two different forms of evil, not in itself an impossible form, but certainly not the most common one; and by the alteration of one letter we can arrive at a text which the LXX read, and translate 'a wise man endures,' which makes a perfect contrast, and is probably the correct form.

**18. inherit** is too strong a word. 'Acquire' is better.

**are crowned with.** The meaning of the original word is uncertain. From other Semitic analogies it is supposed to mean 'crown,' but the evidence is not satisfactory. Probably we should understand 'acquire,' as in the former clause.

- 22 <sup>a</sup> Do they not err that devise evil?  
But mercy and truth *shall be to* them that devise good.
- 23 In all labour there is profit :  
But the talk of the lips *tendeth* only to penury.
- 24 <sup>b</sup> The crown of the wise is their riches :  
*But* the folly of fools is *only* folly.
- 25 A true witness delivereth souls :  
But he that <sup>c</sup> uttereth lies *causeth* deceit.
- 26 In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence :  
And <sup>d</sup> his children shall have a place of refuge.
- 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,  
'To depart from the snares of death.
- 28 In the multitude of people is the king's glory :  
But in the want of people is the destruction of the prince.
- 29 He that is slow to anger is of great understanding :  
But he that is hasty of spirit <sup>e</sup> exalteth folly.
- 30 A <sup>f</sup> sound heart is the life of the flesh :  
But <sup>g</sup> envy is the rottenness of the bones.
- 31 He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker :  
But he that hath mercy on the needy honoureth him.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Shall they not go astray*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *Their riches is a crown unto the wise*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *breatheth out.*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *the children of him that hath it*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *carrieth away*

<sup>f</sup> Or, *tranquil*

<sup>g</sup> Or, *jealousy*

**24. riches.** A slight change of the Hebrew, following the LXX, gives the proverb a better form, 'the crown of the wise is their wisdom; the crown of fools is their folly.'

**25. souls.** As frequently, 'lives.'

**causeth deceit.** A slight change gives the better meaning 'destroys.'

**26. In the fear.** Better, in order to preserve the form of the couplet, to translate 'he who fears the Lord has.'

**29. exalteth.** Better, 'increases.'

**30. A sound heart.** Better, 'tranquil mind.'

**31. Maker.** This is a name for God confined to the later literature of Judaism.

The wicked is thrust down in his <sup>a</sup> evil-doing : 32  
But the righteous <sup>b</sup> hath hope in his death.

Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath under- 33  
standing :

<sup>c</sup> But *that which is* in the inward part of fools is made  
known.

Righteousness exalteth a nation : 34  
But sin is a reproach to <sup>d</sup> any people.

The king's favour is toward a servant that dealeth wisely : 35  
But his wrath shall be *against* him that <sup>e</sup> causeth shame.

A soft answer turneth away wrath : 15  
But a grievous word stirreth up anger.

The tongue of the wise uttereth knowledge aright : 2  
But the mouth of fools poureth out folly.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *calamity*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *hath a refuge*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *And in the midst of fools it maketh itself known*

<sup>d</sup> Heb. *peoples*.

<sup>e</sup> Or, *doeth shamefully*

**32. evil-doing.** This follows the LXX, while the rendering of the margin, 'calamity,' is that of the Hebrew.

**hath hope in his death.** This, which accurately represents the Hebrew text, stands alone in Proverbs as expressing a hope in immortality. It is, therefore, not probable on that score alone, and, further, because it does not make a good contrast with the previous clause. The LXX, therefore, seems to represent the best text here, and we should translate in accordance with it, 'But the righteous hath a refuge in his integrity.'

**33. But that which.** As the form of the text shows, this rendering is uncertain, and neither in origin nor result very justifiable. The simplest way to make the clause intelligible is to change the word rendered 'is known' to that for 'folly,' which involves a very slight alteration of the Hebrew, and then render 'but folly resteth in the mind of fools.'

xv. 1. Malan quotes many parallels to this well-known proverb, which seems to be a common inheritance of all peoples, and we need only quote one Buddhist form of it here: 'Anger is not appeased by anger, it is appeased by meekness; and this is an eternal law.'

3. Frankenberg suggests, with great probability, that this saying is directed against the epicurean theory so well known

- 3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place,  
Keeping watch upon the evil and the good.
- 4 <sup>a</sup> A wholesome tongue is a tree of life :  
But perverseness therein is a breaking of the spirit.
- 5 A fool despiseth his father's <sup>b</sup> correction :  
But he that regardeth reproof <sup>c</sup> getteth prudence.
- 6 In the house of the righteous is much treasure :  
But in the revenues of the wicked is trouble.
- 7 The lips of the wise disperse knowledge :  
But the heart of the foolish <sup>d</sup> *doeth* not so.
- 8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD :  
But the prayer of the upright is his delight.
- 9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD :  
But he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.
- 10 There is grievous correction for him that forsaketh the way :  
*And* he that hateth reproof shall die.
- 11 <sup>e</sup> Sheol and <sup>f</sup> Abaddon are before the LORD :

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *The healing of the tongue.*      <sup>b</sup> Or, *instruction*  
<sup>c</sup> Or, *dealeth prudently*      <sup>d</sup> Or, *is not stedfast or right*  
<sup>e</sup> Or, *The grave*      <sup>f</sup> Or, *Destruction*

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from the poem of Lucretius, that the Divine power was indifferent to all human action.

4. **perverseness.** More accurately, 'violence.' For some unaccountable reason, the Latin is the only one of the ancient versions which has caught the proper sense of the second clause.

6. **trouble.** It is better to read here with the LXX 'the revenues of the wicked are destroyed.'

7. **disperse.** The alteration of one word gives another very appropriate rendering, 'preserve'; but the former is quite admissible, though elsewhere used only of dispersing evil influences.

**doeth not so.** A slight change in the text gives the much better meaning 'does not understand.'

8, 9. These two beautiful verses have many parallels in the prophets, and it is always interesting to trace connexions between the latter and the writers of the Wisdom literature. See 1 Sam. xv. 22; Isa. i. 11, &c.

11. **Sheol and Abaddon.** Here and in xxvii. 20, as elsewhere in the Wisdom literature, these two proper names are combined



- How much more then the hearts of the children of men !  
 A scorner loveth not to be reproved : 12  
 He will not go unto the wise. :  
 A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance : 13  
 But by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.  
 The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh 14  
 knowledge :  
 But the mouth of fools feedeth on folly.  
 All the days of the afflicted are evil : 15  
 But he that is of a cheerful heart *hath* a continual feast.  
 Better is little with the fear of the LORD, 16  
 Than great treasure and trouble therewith.  
 Better is a <sup>a</sup> dinner of herbs where love is, 17  
 Than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.  
 A wrathful man stirreth up contention : 18  
 But he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *portion*

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apparently as synonymous terms for the region of death. In later times (see Rev. ix. 11) Abaddon had become personified into an angel of death. According to the Wisdom literature Jahweh is represented as exercising control over Sheol, a view that is an advance upon earlier ideas. (See Isa. xxxviii. 18.)

**13. A merry heart.** For the teaching of Proverbs on this subject see verse 15 and xvii. 22, as also Eccus. xiii. 26. One wonders whether R. L. Stevenson learned his lessons of joy from these verses, and whether it is the memory of Proverbs that underlies the many beautiful petitions in his wonderful prayers—e. g. 'Give us courage and gaiety, and a quiet mind . . . give us to go blithely on our business all this day . . . give us to awake with smiles, give us to labour smiling . . . renew in us the sense of joy.' See Dunbar's poems *Of Content* and *Best to be Blythe*.

**16.** 'Mickle corn, mickle care,' says the Scottish proverb.

**17. dinner.** Better, 'dish.'

**stalled ox.** That is, a fatted ox, the fuller English expression being 'a stall-fed ox.' It is to be taken here as symbolic of luxurious feeding. Cf. the Scottish proverb 'Welcome! is the best dish in the kitchen.'

**18.** See xiv. 29, xv. 1; Eccus. viii. 16, xxviii. 8-12.

- 19 The way of the sluggard is as an hedge of thorns :  
But the path of the upright is made an high way.
- 20 A wise son maketh a glad father :  
But a foolish man despiseth his mother.
- 21 Folly is joy to him that is void of <sup>a</sup> wisdom :  
But a man of understanding maketh straight his going.
- 22 Where there is no counsel, purposes are disappointed :  
But in the multitude of counsellors they are established.
- 23 A man hath joy in the answer of his mouth :  
And a word in due season, how good is it !
- 24 To the wise the way of life *goeth* upward,  
That he may depart from <sup>b</sup> Sheol beneath.
- 25 The LORD will root up the house of the proud :  
But he will establish the border of the widow.
- 26 Evil devices are an abomination to the LORD :  
But <sup>c</sup> pleasant words *are* pure.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *heart*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *the grave*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *the pure speak pleasant words*

19. an *hedge of* should rather be 'hedged with.' Cf. Hosea ii. 6. Bunyan makes a fine use of the figure in the passage already referred to at xiii. 15 (see note there).

20. Cf. x. 1, of which the second clause here is a variant.

21. This verse may have suggested to Paul the warning contained in Eph. v. 15.

24. *upward*. This is used in contrast simply to the 'beneath' of the following clause, and has no reference to immortality, for, of course, both good and evil men ended in Sheol, but the wise man avoided a precipitate journey thither.

25. For the meaning of 'border' see Deut. xix. 14. The Jewish law took great care to preserve inviolate each man's possession in land; see xxii. 28.

*widow* stands here obviously as the most typical instance of those who required protection (cf. Luke xx. 47).

26. *pleasant words*. This clause as it stands does not afford an appropriate contrast to the first clause, neither does that of the LXX, based on different Hebrew, 'The sayings of the pure are held in honour.' Some suggest an alteration that will give the meaning 'pleasant words are well-pleasing to Him.' It appears

He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house :	27
But he that hateth gifts shall live.	
The heart of the righteous studieth to answer :	28
But the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.	
The LORD is far from the wicked :	29
But he heareth the prayer of the righteous.	
The light of the eyes rejoiceth the heart :	30
And good tidings make the bones fat.	
The ear that hearkeneth to the reproof of life	31
Shall abide among the wise.	
He that refuseth <sup>a</sup> correction despiseth his own soul :	32
But he that hearkeneth to reproof getteth <sup>b</sup> understanding.	

<sup>a</sup> Or, *instruction*<sup>b</sup> Heb. *heart*.

that the original form of the second clause has been lost, and that all that we have are attempts to supply its place.

**27. troubleth.** The word is hardly strong enough to represent the original, which is better rendered 'destroyeth.' Plumptre notes that the Aramaic paraphrase of this verse reads 'He who gathers the mammon of unrighteousness,' and wonders whether it was this verse that suggested the saying in Luke xvi. 9.

**gifts.** This no doubt signifies bribes. Bribery has always been, and still remains, one of the greatest scandals and difficulties in Oriental government.

From this point onwards to the tenth verse of the next chapter the order of the verses in the LXX varies from that of the Hebrew, there being probably some attempt to rearrange according to the connexion of ideas.

**28. studieth to answer.** The LXX, which reads the plural, translates 'meditate faithfulness,' an excellent meaning that may be correct.

**30. The light of the eyes.** Under the influence of the second clause many interpreters confine this to the light of joy shining in the eyes of the messenger of good tidings, while others generalize it as a symbolical expression for their good fortune. That may simply be a statement that as light is a joy to the eyes (cf. Eccles. xi. 7) so are good tidings the means of giving gladness to him who hears them.

**31.** This verse is well paraphrased by Toy, 'Teachableness is the key that unlocks the door of the sages.'

**32. his own soul.** That is, 'himself.'

- 33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom ;  
And before honour *goeth* humility.
- 16 The <sup>a</sup>preparations of the heart belong to man :  
But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.
- 2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes :  
But the LORD weigheth the spirits.
- 3 <sup>b</sup>Commit thy works unto the LORD,  
And thy <sup>c</sup>thoughts shall be established.
- 4 The LORD hath made every thing for <sup>d</sup>its own end :  
Yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *plans*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *Roll.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *purposes*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *his own purpose*

33. Cf. i. 7 and ix. 10, of which verses this is a significant variant. Perhaps 'instruction in wisdom' gives the meaning better. For the second clause cf. xviii. 12, xxii. 4.

xvi. 1. On the first seven verses of this chapter Plumptre remarks that, 'more than any other group in the book, they have a specially religious character impressed upon them.' The frequent repetition of the name Jahweh in these verses is remarkable.

**preparations.** As the margin shows, this is better rendered 'plans,' while the contrasted phrase in the next clause, 'answer of the tongue,' seems to mean the final outcome of thought, possibly, as has been suggested, with an allusion to defending oneself before kings. Is it possible that this verse was in our Lord's mind when He told His disciples that they were not to be anxious in the hour of trial, for the words were not their own in such an hour, but it would be the Spirit of their Father that would speak in them (cf. Matt. x. 20, Luke xii. 12)? Cf. the ninth verse of this chapter for a similar idea, differently expressed.

2. This verse recurs in almost identical form in xxi. 2.

3. **Commit.** As the margin shows, the Hebrew metaphor is that of rolling a burden upon the shoulders of some one else, a metaphor that is fairly frequent in the Hebrew poets. Cf. Ps. xxxvii. 5. These first three verses are not found in the LXX.

4. **its own end.** As the margin suggests, it is possible to render also 'his own end' or 'purpose,' but the reading of the text is probably correct, judging from the parallel clause. The thought that underlies the verse is that of God's absolute control of the universe, and that nothing can possibly happen without His controlling purpose guiding the action. Even the wicked have their place to fill in the universe, and, according to the somewhat

Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to 5  
the LORD :

<sup>a</sup> *Though* hand *join* in hand, he shall not be unpunished.

By mercy and truth iniquity is <sup>b</sup> purged : 6

And by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

When a man's ways please the LORD, 7

He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

<sup>a</sup> See ch. xi. 21.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *atoned for*

simple philosophy of this writer, they are made for the day of evil, but he does not suggest the problem as to why such a thing should be, or what is the purpose of their destruction. That evil men existed everywhere, wrought mischief, and suffered punishment, was so obvious a truth that the O. T. writers continually note it, but they did not get lost in a metaphysical bog as to free-will and determinism, seeing that it was always possible for a man to change either from good or evil to its opposite. Beyond the statement, therefore, that all reward and punishment lie ultimately in the hands of God the language of this verse does not go.

5. Cf. for the clauses of this verse xi. 20, 21 and the note on the latter verse. Between this verse and the next two verses are found in the LXX, which run as follows :

'The beginning of a good way is to do justly,

And it is more acceptable with God than to offer sacrifices.

He who seeks the Lord will find knowledge with righteousness,

And they who rightly seek Him will find peace.'

As will be noticed, parallels are to be found to these verses in verse 6 of this chapter, xxviii. 5, 1 Sam. xv. 22, Eccles. v. 1. These verses in the LXX may preserve current Hebrew proverbs that have dropped out of our present Hebrew text (see Toy).

6. The first clause of this verse represents the highest level of Hebrew thought on the subject of moral purification, and is paralleled by such famous utterances as that found in Hos. vi. 6. It may represent the more philosophical attitude of the Wisdom writers in contrast with that of the priestly class ; not perhaps that the two were so much in conflict as that they looked at the whole question of expiation from different points of view.

7. Wildeboer thinks that the writer has in mind such stories as those of Abraham and Abimelech, Jacob and Laban, and the conduct of David to his enemies recorded in 2 Sam. xix. 11-15. Whether this be so or not, we can at least illustrate this verse from such instances.

- 8 Better is a little with righteousness  
Than great revenues with injustice.
- 9 A man's heart deviseth his way :  
But the LORD directeth his steps.
- 10 <sup>a</sup>A divine sentence is in the lips of the king :  
His mouth shall not transgress in judgement.
- 11 A just balance and scales are the LORD's :  
All the weights of the bag are his work.
- 12 It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness :  
For the throne is established by righteousness.
- 13 Righteous lips are the delight of kings ;  
And they love him that speaketh right.
- 14 The wrath of a king is *as* messengers of death :  
But a wise man will pacify it.
- 15 In the light of the king's countenance is life ;  
And his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *Divination*.

8. This is the only verse among the first nine that does not contain the name Jahweh. For the idea contained in it cf. xv. 16.

9. Cf. verse 1 above, and note.

10. From this to the end of verse 15 the Proverbs deal with the conduct of kings.

It is obvious that the statements made in this verse can only refer to the ideal king, and that they could not be spoken of kings in general.

11. Cf. ii. 1 and note, and also Amos viii. 5.

**are the LORD'S.** Grätz suggests the emendation 'the king's,' and this is quite possible, as some one may have supposed the term to refer to the Divine King, and so altered it. The emended text would bring the verse into more exact accordance with the passage. The translation here 'a just balance and scales' is inadmissible, as the adjective really only goes with the second word. There seems no reason why the scales rather than the balance should be called just, and Toy suggests that the adjective should be omitted altogether.

12. Cf. xxv. 5, xxix. 14 for parallel proverbs.

14. Cf. Eccles. viii. 4. 'Will pacify it,' i. e. 'will seek to pacify it,' as being the course of true prudence.

15. For the figures here employed cf. 2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4.

- How much better is it to get wisdom than gold ! 16  
 Yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver.  
 The high way of the upright is to depart from evil : 17  
 He that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.  
 Pride *goeth* before destruction, , 18  
 And an haughty spirit before a fall.  
 Better it is to be of a lowly spirit with the <sup>a</sup> poor, 19  
 Than to divide the spoil with the proud.  
 He that <sup>b</sup>giveth heed unto <sup>c</sup>the word shall find good : 20  
<sup>a</sup> Or, *meek*                      <sup>b</sup> Or, *handleth a matter wisely*  
<sup>c</sup> See ch. xiii. 13.

Ps. lxxv. 10, and Ps. lxxii. 6, as also an Indian proverb quoted by Malan: 'The king's countenance is like the sun, it warms both eyes and hearts.'

**the latter rain.** That is, the spring rain, which was essential to the proper ripening of the crops (see S. of S. ii. 11 and note, also Job xxix. 23).

16. Cf. iii. 14 and note.

17. **is to depart**, i.e. 'consists in departing from,' but more probably the translation should be 'avoids.' The LXX somewhat expands this verse, but there is nothing original in the expansion. It simply consists of echoes of other verses of Proverbs, and is probably due to a scribe.

18. In many places in the Proverbs pride is spoken of (cf. xi. 2, xviii. 12, &c.); while the form of a proverb may be derived from the experiences of social life, the thought cuts much deeper (cf. the English form of the proverb 'Pride will have a fall,' and the Scottish 'Pride's an ill horse to ride'). Malan also quotes in illustration one of the seven sages, 'What is Zeus about? He humbles the proud, and raises the humble,' and also a Welsh proverb, 'Too full runs over, and too high falls down.' Cf. further the words of the *Magnificat*, Luke i. 51, 52, as also Job v. 11, 1 Sam. ii. 7, which probably lie behind the *Magnificat*.

19. **divide the spoil.** The metaphor may either be a military one or refer to the unjust conduct of unscrupulous judges and governors.

20. **giveth heed unto**, i.e. acts wisely with regard to. Hence arise the translation of the margin and the A. V., since the Hebrew equivalent for 'word' frequently means 'matter'; but the translation of the text is undoubtedly correct. It is not certain that 'word' here implies the Divine word; it may very well refer to the writings of the sages. Wildeboer sees in it a proof that

- And whoso trusteth in the LORD, happy is he.
- 21 The wise in heart shall be called prudent :  
And the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning.
- 22 Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it :  
But the correction of fools is *their* folly.
- 23 The heart of the wise instructeth his mouth,  
And addeth learning to his lips.
- 24 Pleasant words are *as* an honeycomb,  
Sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.
- 25 <sup>a</sup> There is a way which <sup>b</sup> seemeth right unto a man,  
But the end thereof are the ways of death.
- 26 The appetite of the labouring man laboureth for him ;  
For his mouth <sup>c</sup> craveth it of him.
- 27 A worthless man <sup>d</sup> deviseth mischief :  
And in his lips there is as a scorching fire.
- 28 A froward man scattereth abroad strife :  
And a whisperer <sup>e</sup> separateth chief friends.

<sup>a</sup> See ch. xiv. 12.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *is straight before*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *urgeth him* thereto

<sup>d</sup> Heb. *diggeth*.

<sup>e</sup> Or, *alienateth his friend*

Israel had already become 'the nation of the book,' as the Mohammedans term them, and he considers that the reference here is not only to the law, but also to the prophets.

21. **shall be called.** That is, 'esteemed.'

**learning** should perhaps rather be 'powers of persuasion,' which gives in every way a better sense.

22. For the ideas of this verse cf. x. 11, i. 2, &c.

23. This is a varying form of verse 21.

24. On the honeycomb see Song of Songs v. 1, Ps. xix. 10. Some think that the medicinal uses of honey are here referred to, but it is improbable.

25. A repetition of xiv. 12.

26. Cf. Eccles. vi. 7.

**craveth it of him.** The marginal rendering is better, 'urgeth him thereto,' that is, 'drives him to work.'

27. **A worthless man.** See vi. 12.

**deviseth** is literally 'digs,' viz. a pit to serve as a trap.

28. **chief.** This word is an interpretative addition. The idea



- A man of violence enticeth his neighbour, 29  
 And leadeth him in a way that is not good.  
<sup>a</sup> He that shutteth his eyes, *it is* to devise froward things : 30  
 He that compresseth his lips bringeth evil to pass  
 The hoary head is a crown of <sup>b</sup> glory, 31  
<sup>c</sup> It shall be found in the way of righteousness.  
 He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty ; 32  
 And he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city  
 The lot is cast into the lap ; 33  
<sup>a</sup> Or, *He that shutteth his eyes to devise froward things, that compresseth his lips, bringeth &c.*  
<sup>b</sup> Or, *beauty*      <sup>c</sup> Or, *If it be found*

of the text is almost certainly the correct one, and not the marginal rendering 'alienateth his friend.'

30. Cf. vi. 13, 14. The translation of the text seems the best, and the general sense is, as Toy says, clear enough, though there is some doubt about the exact rendering of the Hebrew. The signs here given, we learn from the earlier passage, were recognized as symbols of treacherous conduct.

31. **The hoary head.** Here is beautifully expressed an idea that was common in the O. T., and which we find also in a proverb of the Rabbis, 'To welcome an old man is like welcoming the Shekinah.' The suggested rendering of the margin that the hoary head is only honourable if found in the way of righteousness is hardly sustained by the Hebrew, though there is a beautiful expression of it in Eccles. xxv. 3-6.

32. This famous verse has a great many parallels in the literature of many people (cf. Malan, vol. ii, pp. 432-42). The Jewish fathers cited this text as the definition of the perfect hero, and English readers may remember the passage in Milton's *Paradise Regained*, book ii, lines 466 ff. :—

'Yet he who reigns within himself, and rules  
 Passions, desires, and fears, is more a king—  
 Which every wise and virtuous man attains.'

Cf. also the less-known but very fine poem of Dunbar, *Rewl of Anis Self*, with its recurring refrain, evidently suggested by this verse :—

'He rewlis weill, that weill him self can gyd.'

33. **1ot.** This method of discovering the Divine will was a common one among ancient peoples, and is referred to frequently

But the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.

- 17 Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith,  
 Than an house full of <sup>a</sup> feasting with strife.  
<sup>2</sup> A servant that dealeth wisely shall have rule over a son  
 that <sup>b</sup> causeth shame,  
 And shall have part in the inheritance among the brethren.  
<sup>3</sup> The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold :  
 But the LORD trieth the hearts.  
<sup>4</sup> An evil-doer giveth heed to wicked lips ;

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *the sacrifices of strife.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *doeth shamefully*

in the O. T., where it seems to have been employed even by the priests, though the methods of its employment are not clear. Some of the most notable uses were as follows : (1) to discover a criminal (see Jonah i. 7) ; to appoint to high office (1 Sam. x. 20) ; to divide property (Matt. xxvii. 35). See the article 'Lots' in *HBD*.

**1ap.** Cf. vi. 27. The reference is undoubtedly to the pouch formed by doubling the outer garment over the girdle in which things were kept and carried. Cf. xvii. 23, xxi. 14.

**disposing.** The result of this method of divination was regarded as expressive of the Divine will.

xvii. 1. **a dry morsel.** Cf. the Italian proverb, 'An apple eaten in peace is worth more than a partridge eaten in trouble.'

**feasting.** This is literally 'sacrifices,' but, as we have seen several times already, in ordinary practice the two things were synonymous, since the eating of the flesh offered in sacrifice involved a feast. It is further possible that by this time the word had no longer its strict ritual significance, but designated simply the slaying of animals for food.

**2. servant.** This is, of course, a slave, and we have many traces in the O.T., not only of the practice of regarding such as members of the family (cf. Gen. xxiv. 12 ; Deut. v. 14), but also of the slave becoming heir to the master (cf. Gen. xv. 3 ; 1 Kings xi. 26). As to the uncertainty of inheritance caused by foolish or wicked sons, cf. Eccles. ii. 21, x. 7, and for the general idea of this verse cf. Eccles. x. 25.

**3.** The first clause of this verse is repeated in xxvii. 21, and the figure occurs in various other places in Scripture (cf. Ps. lxi. 10-12 ; Mal. iii. 3 ; Eccles. ii. 5).

*And* <sup>a</sup> a liar giveth ear to a mischievous tongue.

Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker : 5

*And* he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished.

Children's children are the crown of old men ; 6

And the glory of children are their fathers.

<sup>b</sup> Excellent speech becometh not a fool : 7

Much less do lying lips a prince.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *falsehood*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *Arrogant*

4. **liar.** As the margin shows, this really means 'falsehood'; but probably the text is corrupt, as the form of the verse certainly requires not the abstract but the concrete noun, and the two clauses are designed to show how readily the wicked man listens to mischievous gossip. In many LXX manuscripts there is added here a verse which in the best manuscript occurs after verse 6. It runs thus :—

'To the faithful belongs the whole world of wealth,  
But to the faithless not an *obolus*' (that is, 'farthing').

The form of this saying is so distinctly Greek that it appears to have had a Greek origin. It may have been, indeed, the production of a Greek scribe.

5. Cf. xiv. 31 for the first clause.

**glad at calamity.** The only question in the interpretation of this verse is whether the calamity spoken of is to be confined to that which happens to the poor, or is to be understood of calamity in general. Cf. for the general idea of the verse Eccus. iv. 1-6.

6. **crown.** This verse expresses in beautiful and memorable language one of the great thoughts of the O.T., that children are one of the greatest of life's blessings, and the two clauses of the verse regard the relationship both from the side of the fathers and of the children. There is no doubt that, as commentators have suggested, the original motives that prompted the desire for children was in order to provide some one who would make due provision for proper religious rites being performed in honour of the dead, since the man who was without such would fare badly in the other world.

7. **Excellent.** The meaning 'arrogant,' given in the margin, is without any valid support, and there is much to be said for translating the Hebrew by 'honest' rather than 'excellent.' In the second clause the word rendered 'prince' is found again in verse 26, where it is translated 'noble,' and both in that verse and here seems to refer more to character than to social position, so it

- 8 A gift is *as* a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it :  
Whithersoever <sup>a</sup> it turneth, <sup>a</sup> it <sup>b</sup> prospereth.
- 9 He that covereth a transgression seeketh love :  
But he that harpeth on a matter <sup>c</sup> separateth chief friends.
- 10 A rebuke entereth deeper into one that hath understanding  
Than an hundred stripes into a fool.
- 11 <sup>d</sup> An evil man seeketh only rebellion ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *he*                      <sup>b</sup> Or, *dealeth wisely*                      <sup>c</sup> See ch. xvi. 28.

<sup>d</sup> Or, *A rebellious man* (Heb. *rebellion*) *seeketh only evil*

would be better to render it 'a man of noble character.' The whole force of the verse seems to be that speech should be the outward expression of the inward spirit. (Cf. James iii. 11, 12.)

**8. gift.** This word almost certainly means in the present connexion a bribe. (Cf. Exod. xxiii. 8.)

**precious stone.** Since there is no authority for introducing 'as' before these words, and without it the mere statement that the gift consists of a jewel has little significance, there is great probability that Frankenberg's suggestion to understand by the word an amulet or lucky stone is the true one.

**in the eyes of him that hath it**, i. e. in the estimation of the possessor ; but the question is whether the possessor is the bribed or the briber. There is much to be said for both, though the latter appears more probable.

**it turneth.** Instead of 'it' the 'he' of the margin is more likely. The clause could then signify that through virtue of his bribe the briber always accomplishes his purposes—a cynical proverb that throws a lurid light upon the social conditions of the period from which it emanated.

**9. covereth**, i. e. 'keeps silent about,' the meaning not being that in any guilty way he hides a crime, but that he keeps silent about heedless speeches, that, if reported, might cause heart-burning.

**10.** Some commentators quote appropriately the Latin proverb 'A noble steed is ruled even by the shadow of the whip ; a sluggish one cannot be roused even by the spur.'

**11. rebellion.** The form of the verse seems to indicate that this proverb deals solely with political conditions, and that the attempt to understand it, either of moral evil or exclusively of rebellion against God, is impossible. If this interpretation is the true one, then the cruel messenger of the second clause must mean the executor of the king's justice, and not, as the LXX supposes, the angel of the Lord.

Therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.  
 Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, 12  
 Rather than a fool in his folly.  
 Whoso rewardeth evil for good, 13  
 Evil shall not depart from his house.  
 The beginning of strife is *as* when one letteth out water : 14  
 Therefore leave off contention, before there be quarrelling.  
 He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the 15  
     righteous,  
 Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.  
 Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy 16  
     wisdom,  
 Seeing he hath no <sup>a</sup> understanding?  
 A friend loveth at all times, 17

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *heart*.

**12.** On the fierceness of the creature here named see 2 Sam. xvii. 8. The LXX has understood and probably read the Hebrew differently, and renders, 'Care may come on a wise man, but fools meditate evil.'

**14. letteth out water.** The metaphor seems clear enough, just as a slight hole in the bank of a reservoir might lead to the destruction of the whole mass and bring disaster upon the valley beneath, so it is with the first introduction of contention; cf. Eccles. xxv. 25. But the LXX gives another turn to the phrase, which is also in agreement with many other passages in Proverbs. It renders, 'The outpouring of words is the beginning of strife' (cf. x. 19).

**15.** There is a kind of alliteration in the Hebrew which Toy well represents by rendering 'he who rights the wrong and he who wrongs the right.'

**justifieth.** It is from the Hebrew word thus translated that the N.T. took the Greek expression there also rendered 'justify,' but here 'gives judgement on behalf of' conveys a better meaning.

**16. a price.** It is questionable whether this refers to fees paid in the schools to the teachers of wisdom, or whether it is simply a statement of the impossibility of purchasing wisdom by any sum, however great (cf. Job xxviii. 18; Prov. iii. 15, &c.).

**understanding.** Here the word expresses capacity, or disposition, for learning.

And <sup>a</sup> a brother is born for adversity.

18 A man void of <sup>b</sup> understanding striketh hands,

And becometh surety in the presence of his neighbour.

19 <sup>c</sup> He loveth transgression that loveth strife :

He that raiseth high his gate seeketh destruction.

20 He that hath a froward heart findeth no good :

And he that hath a perverse tongue falleth into <sup>d</sup> mischief.

21 He that begetteth a fool *doeth it* to his sorrow :

And the father of a fool hath no joy.

22 A merry heart <sup>e</sup> is a good medicine :

But a broken spirit drieth up the bones.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *is born as a brother*      <sup>b</sup> Heb. *heart*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *he that loveth transgression loveth strife*      <sup>d</sup> Or, *calamity*

<sup>e</sup> Heb. *causeth good healing*.

**17. a brother.** This probably denotes the natural relationship, but it may be an exact equivalent to 'friend' in the first clause. Elsewhere in the book brothers and friends are contrasted, not in favour of the former (see xviii. 24, xxvii. 10). The rendering of the margin, 'a friend is born as a brother,' is forced and unnecessary, the parallel of the clauses being better preserved by the translation of the text. For a large number of similar sayings see Malan, vol. ii, pp. 472-80.

**18.** Warnings on this subject are frequent throughout the book ; cf. vi. 1-5 and notes.

**in the presence of his neighbour,** i. e. 'to another,' namely, the creditor.

**19. transgression.** By a slight alteration of the Hebrew 'destruction' may be read, which gives on the whole a better sense, though, of course, the reading of the text implies that the quarrelsome spirit is itself sinful, and is quite in accordance with the teaching of the book.

**raiseth high his gate.** In illustration of this phrase commentators cite Jer. xxii. 13-19, and the story of Haman ; but it is not quite clear that the phrase ever had the significance thus attributed to it, and the alteration of one letter in the Hebrew gives the meaning 'speaks loftily,' which is better in accordance with the preceding clause, and also with many other passages of Proverbs.

**21.** Cf Eccles. ii. 18, 19.

**22. bones** no doubt represent here the whole body (cf. xv. 30, &c.).

- A wicked man taketh a gift out of the bosom, 23  
 To pervert the ways of judgement.  
 Wisdom is before the face of him that hath understanding : 24  
 But the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.  
 A foolish son is a grief to his father, 25  
 And bitterness to her that bare him.  
 Also to <sup>a</sup> punish the righteous is not good, 26  
 Nor to smite the noble for *their* uprightness.  
<sup>b</sup> He that spareth his words hath knowledge : 27  
 And he that is of a cool spirit is a man of understanding.  
 Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise : 28  
<sup>c</sup> When he shutteth his lips, he is *esteemed as* prudent.  
 He that separateth himself seeketh *his own* desire, 18

<sup>a</sup> Or, *fine*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *He that hath knowledge spareth his words : and a man of understanding is of a cool spirit*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *He that shutteth his lips is &c.*

23. gift. See note on verse 8 above.

bosom. See note on xvi. 33.

24. before the face of, i.e. 'is the goal of.' The wise man has a clear and definite idea of that towards which he is striving, whereas the foolish man dissipates his energies in many unconsidered schemes.

25. Cf. x. 1, xv. 20, and verse 21 above.

26. Also. No satisfactory explanation can be given for this word, and it looks as if this formed the conclusion to some verse that has been lost. Some have tried to account for it by inverting the clauses, but even then there is no need for so emphatic a connective.

not good means 'not seemly.'

for ... uprightness. This translation is not probable, because it does not fit in well with the preceding clause, though in itself it gives a sufficiently good meaning, as it suggests spiteful conduct. Wildeboer translates 'is not seemly,' as in the previous clause, and this makes excellent sense. On noble see note on verse 7 above. It is also possible to translate the clause 'it is not seemly to pervert justice.'

27, 28. For these verses cf. x. 19, and note.

xviii. 1. He that separateth himself, &c. The text presents

- And <sup>a</sup>rageth against all sound wisdom.
- 2 A fool hath no delight in understanding,  
But only that his heart may reveal itself.
- 3 When the wicked cometh, there cometh also contempt,  
And with ignominy *cometh* reproach.
- 4 The words of a man's mouth are *as* deep waters ;  
<sup>b</sup> The wellspring of wisdom is *as* a flowing brook.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *quarrelleth with*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *A flowing brook, a wellspring of wisdom*

very well the most satisfactory meaning that can be got out of the Hebrew ; but it is not easy to give any very clear significance to the words, nor to determine their reference. By many it is taken as descriptive of the selfish scholar who becomes annoyed with everything that interferes with his private pursuits, or of the misanthrope who, like Timon of Athens, becomes all men's enemy. Dr. Horton, taking this significance, draws an interesting parallel with the character of Richard III as delineated by Shakespeare. The Greek represents the man spoken of as being an embittered one who seeks to embitter friends, but there is no satisfactory evidence that this represents a better Hebrew text.

2. This is a rather cynical statement, but a very true result of experience. The foolish man is not only fond of speaking, but inclined to think that his speech is always wise. 'I am Sir Oracle' is his favourite attitude. It is not only egotism, but empty egotism, which marks him out.

3. **contempt.** Probably of other men for the wicked.

**with ignominy.** The second clause is difficult, as the translation of the text gives no very clear meaning. Toy alters the Hebrew to read 'on insolence follows scorn,' probably as satisfactory as anything we can get out of it, if conjecture is to be permitted.

4. Here, again, the Hebrew is difficult. As the margin suggests, each of the three metaphorical expressions should probably be taken as descriptive of words, and it is also probable that the LXX, which reads 'life' instead of 'wisdom' in the second clause, is correct, in which case the whole verse would run as follows : 'The words of the wise are deep waters, a flowing brook, a perennial fountain.' In order to make this sense it is necessary to introduce the word 'wise.' This seems necessary, since no such praise as is here given of words in general would be at all likely from Hebrew thinkers.



To accept the person of the wicked is not good,  
<sup>a</sup> *Nor* to turn aside the righteous in judgement.  
 A fool's lips <sup>b</sup> enter into contention,  
 And his mouth calleth for stripes.  
 A fool's mouth is his destruction,  
 And his lips are the snare of his soul.  
 The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels,  
 And they go down into the <sup>c</sup> innermost parts of the belly.  
 He also that is slack in his work  
 Is brother to him that is a destroyer.  
 The name of the LORD is a strong tower :  
 The righteous runneth into it, and <sup>d</sup> is safe.  
 The rich man's wealth is his strong city,  
 And as an high wall in his own imagination.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *So as to turn aside*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *chambers*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *bring contention*

<sup>d</sup> Heb. *is set on high*.

5. **to turn aside.** Better, 'to press.'

6. **enter into.** Better, 'cause him to enter into.'

**calleth for :** i. e. 'brings upon him.'

7. **snare of his soul :** i. e. 'become his own snare.'

8. **dainty morsels.** The word so translated occurs only here and in the exact parallel, xxvi. 22. This is the probable meaning, but many other interpretations have been given of it, since the word has been derived from different roots (for a full discussion of the Hebrew original see Toy's commentary, p. 359). The second clause of the verse obviously refers to food. The point of the comparison is that just as the delicate eater loves his delicacies, so the man who delights in malicious gossip gloats over it sinking into his heart (cf. Job xx. 12).

10. **name.** This commonly in the O. T. signifies the person of Yahweh. The expression is not found again in Proverbs (cf. however, xxx. 9).

**a strong tower** is an image frequent in the Psalter (Ps. lxi. 3).

11. **in his own imagination.** The Hebrew may also read 'is his riches.' The altered form of the text may have arisen from an attempt on the part of the scribe to lessen the risk of what might appear to him an unlimited praise of riches.

- 12 Before destruction the heart of man is haughty,  
And before honour *goeth* humility.
- 13 He that giveth answer before he heareth,  
It is folly and shame unto him.
- 14 The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity ;  
But a broken spirit who can <sup>a</sup> bear ?
- 15 The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge ;  
And the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.
- 16 A man's gift maketh room for him,  
And bringeth him before great men.
- 17 He that pleadeth his cause first *seemeth* just ;  
But his neighbour cometh and searcheth him out.
- 18 The lot causeth contentions to cease,  
And parteth between the mighty.
- 19 A brother <sup>b</sup> offended *is harder to be won* than a strong city :  
And *such* contentions are like the bars of a castle.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *raise up*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *injured*

12. Cf. xvi. 18 and note.

13. Cf. Eccus. xi. 8.

14. Cf. Malan, vol. ii, p. 523-30, for many parallel sayings. For example, an Indian proverb, 'What is the use of armour to one who has patience?' Toy remarks that we have a conception here, which comes nearer than any found elsewhere in the O.T., to the Greek conception of courage as a virtue.

**who can bear.** The margin renders 'raise up,' a translation which several commentators favour ; but on the whole the rendering of the text seems to be the better one.

16. **gift.** Undoubtedly the gift here referred to is a present made to a patron, a practice that was very prevalent during the Greek period of Jewish history. Toy refers for instances to Josephus, *Ant.* xii. 4. 2, and xiv. 12. 2.

17. **his neighbour :** i. e. the opposing party in the suit. The real gist of the verse is that, before a proper decision can be come to, both parties must be heard independently.

18. **the mighty.** Perhaps 'powerful' would make better sense. On the use of the lot cf. xvi. 33 and note.

19. As is shown by the words in italics, the exact translation of the Hebrew does not make any clear sense, but neither is the

A man's belly shall be filled with the fruit of his mouth ; 20  
 With the increase of his lips shall he be satisfied.  
 Death and life are in the power of the tongue ; 21  
 And they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.  
 Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, 22  
 And obtaineth favour of the LORD.  
 The poor useth intreaties : 23  
 But the rich answereth roughly.  
<sup>a</sup> He that maketh many friends *doeth it* to his own de- 24  
 struction :

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *A man of friends.*

interpretation implied in the italicized words justifiable from the form of the original. The comparisons seem to be both far-fetched and inappropriate. The LXX gives quite a different turn to the whole verse, and makes it a praise of brotherly affection and help. It is possible that parts of two different verses have here become confused, and that it is not now possible to ascertain the original meaning.

**20.** Cf. xiii. 2. The somewhat figurative form of the language does not prevent us from understanding the drift of the proverb. Once again, the importance of taking due care about one's words is insisted upon. Cf. our Lord's teaching in Matt. xii. 37.

**21. love.** This is generally taken to mean 'love the use of it,' but it must be confessed this is somewhat to strain the meaning of the Hebrew, and it is possible that there may be some corruption of the text. Cf. Eccus. xxxvii. 17, 18. Some word equivalent to 'control' may have originally stood here, and the meaning have been that to control the tongue is evidence of the greatest possible wisdom and strength. Cf. Jas. iii. 7, 8.

**22. a good thing.** Rather, 'good fortune.' Some versions read 'a good wife,' but the Hebrew general form is undoubtedly correct, as the writer conceives of the marriage relation in its ideal conditions. The limitation may have been suggested by the later passage, Eccus. xxvi. 1-3. For the description of the ideal wife as then conceived, cf. chap. xxxi. In Malan's notes many similar proverbs are quoted. The LXX has a weak addition to the verse, which is clearly the reflection of a scribe.

**23.** This verse does not give a very attractive picture of the manners of the time or of the considerateness of the rich for the poor. Compare the expansion of the saying in Eccus. xiii. 3, where the moral value of such conduct is pointed out.

**24. He that maketh.** As the margin shows, the literal

- But there is a <sup>a</sup> friend that sticketh closer than a brother.  
 19 Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity  
 Than he that is perverse in his lips and is a fool.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *lover*.

rendering is 'a man of friends,' and this has been taken by the majority of commentators to mean a man with many friends. However, the Hebrew word translated 'man' may with the slightest alteration mean 'there are,' in which case the clause would run: 'There are many friends that bring ruin,' which makes an excellent sense and a good contrast with the clause that follows. But a combination of this reading with the translation given in the A. V. produces also an excellent sense, which is followed by Toy, namely, 'There are friends who only seek society.' If this latter meaning is taken, a close and illuminative parallel is to be found in Ecclus. vi. 5-17, and xxxvii. 1-6. Cf. also Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, Act ii, sc. 2, lines 11-17a ff., and Act iii, sc. 6, ll. 110 ff., also the famous words of Polonius in *Hamlet*, Act i, sc. 3, ll. 60-5. Further, different words for friend are used in the two clauses, though it is uncertain whether the difference that has been sometimes found between them really inheres in the words themselves.

**that sticketh closer.** Cf. xvii. 17 and note. The words have often been interpreted of the Messiah in the first instance and so specifically of our Lord, but it can only be said that He is the conspicuous instance of the general truth. The world's history is rich in historic examples of friendships which prove the truth of this proverb, and some of these have been enshrined in the finest English poetry. Cf. Milton's *Lycidas*, Shelley's *Adonais*, Matthew Arnold's *Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis*, and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. One of the most beautiful uses of the verse in recent English literature is in Swinburne's sonnet, dedicated to Theodore Watts, the closing lines of which are as follow:—

'There is a friend that, as the wise man saith,  
 Cleaves closer than a brother: nor to me  
 Hath time not shown, through days like waves at strife,  
 This truth more sure than all things else but death,  
 This pearl more perfect found in all the sea,  
 That washes toward your feet these waifs of life.'

xix. 1. **fool.** In xxviii. 6 this verse occurs again with a slight alteration of the second clause, which there reads, 'He that is perverse in his ways though he be rich,' which is probably the correct reading in this passage, since the parallel demands some contrast to the poor of the first clause.

Also, <sup>a</sup> that the soul be without knowledge is not good ;  
 And he that hasteth with his feet <sup>b</sup> sinneth.  
 The foolishness of man subverteth his way ;  
 And his heart fretteth against the LORD.  
 Wealth addeth many friends :  
 But <sup>c</sup> the poor is separated from his friend.  
 A false witness shall not be unpunished ;  
 And he that <sup>d</sup> uttereth lies shall not escape.  
 Many will intreat the favour of <sup>e</sup> the liberal man :  
 And every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *desire without knowledge is not good*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *missetteth his way*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *the friend of the poor separateth himself from him*

<sup>d</sup> Heb. *breatheth out*.

<sup>e</sup> Or, *a prince*

**2. Also that the soul.** For the word 'also' cf. the note on xvii. 26. It is probably out of place here. The rendering of the text in the following words cannot be correct. The margin, 'desire without knowledge,' is better, but has no parallel elsewhere in Proverbs. Wildeboer's suggestion, 'keenness without knowledge' (cf. Rom. x. 2, 'zeal not according to knowledge'), gives a better sense, but the possibility of the translation is not quite certain. Probably the best that can be made of it is to suppose that the word rendered 'soul' is a corruption, and that the words mean 'to act without reflection is not good.'

**sinneth.** The margin, 'missetteth his way,' is better. Cf. the Japanese proverb, 'If you are in a hurry, go round.'

**3.** Cf. Eccus. xv. 11-20; Jas. i. 13-15.

**4.** For the idea cf. xiv. 20. The rendering in the margin is also possible, and makes excellent sense, viz. 'the friend of the poor separateth himself from him,' that is, because of poverty the one who has been formerly his friend cools off.

**5.** Cf. vi. 19 and verse 9 of this chapter, and also the Scottish proverb, 'A bribe enters everywhere without knocking.'

**6. the liberal man.** Probably the reading of the margin, 'prince,' is to be preferred (cf. xxix. 26), and we have here a reference to the importance of gifts wisely distributed, a practice that has been frequently spoken of throughout the book (cf. xviii. 16 and note). The rendering 'prince' suggests to us the atmosphere of the courts of the Greek period, to which frequent reference has been made.

- 7 All the brethren of the poor do hate him :  
 How much more do his friends go far from him !  
<sup>a</sup> He pursueth *them with* words, *but* they are gone.
- 8 He that getteth <sup>b</sup> wisdom loveth his own soul :  
 He that keepeth understanding shall find good.
- 9 A false witness shall not be unpunished ;  
 And he that <sup>c</sup> uttereth lies shall perish.
- 10 Delicate living is not seemly for a fool ;  
 Much less for a servant to have rule over princes.
- 11 The discretion of a man maketh him slow to anger ;  
 And it is his glory to pass over a transgression.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *He pursueth after words, which are nought.*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *heart.*      <sup>c</sup> Heb. *breatheth out.*

7. The first two clauses of this verse are closely parallel in meaning to the fourth verse above, but there is a third clause which creates great difficulty. In the first place, this is the only instance in this section of the Book of Proverbs where there are three clauses in a verse. It is almost certain, therefore, that the third clause is a fragment of a lost verse, and that, therefore, any attempt to link it to the preceding clauses must be futile. The literal rendering of the clause, not given either by the text or the margin, is 'he who pursues words they are not,' but the Hebrew margin has also a reading, 'they belong to him,' that is, one supposes, the man that is eagerly in search of words gets words alone for his reward ; and it may have originally belonged to a proverb dealing with a favourite theme in the book, viz. the vanity of speech and the danger of putting confidence in it. The LXX has either had some quite different text or has made some attempt at a conjectural emendation. At all events, it contains a complete proverb, which runs as follows :—'He that does much harm perfects mischief, and he that uses provoking words shall not escape.'

8. *his own soul*: i. e. 'himself,' as frequently (cf. xv. 32).

9. Cf. verse 5 above, of which this is only a stronger variation.

10. The first clause is apparently a proverb based on the absurdity of the *parvenu*, who, in the old world, as well as in our own day, was a favourite subject for the satire of the poet and dramatist. On the second clause cf. Eccles. x. 7 and Eccles. xi. 5.

11. Cf. xiv. 29, and note in the second clause the lofty teaching on forgiveness.

The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion ;	12
But his favour is as dew upon the grass.	
A foolish son is the calamity of his father :	13
And the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.	
House and riches are an inheritance from fathers :	14
But a prudent wife is from the LORD.	
Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep ;	15
And the idle soul shall suffer hunger.	
He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his soul :	16
<i>But</i> he that <sup>a</sup> is careless of his ways shall die.	
He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD, 17	
And his good deed will he pay him again.	
Chasten thy son, seeing there is hope ;	18
And set not thy heart on <sup>b</sup> his destruction.	

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *despiseth*.<sup>b</sup> Heb. *causing him to die*.

12. For the metaphor of the second clause cf. Hosea xiv. 5.

13. The first clause reverts to a subject that has been frequently dealt with (cf. x. 1, &c.), and the second clause finds an echo in xxi. 9 : cf. also Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, ll. 278-80.

'Thou seyst that dropping houses, and eek smoke,  
And chydying wives maken men to flee  
Out of hes owen hous : a ! *ben'cite* !'

14. The philosophy of this verse is of the popular order, and the contrast must not be taken too strictly.

15. soul : i. e. man.

16. soul in this case means 'life.'

of his ways. A very slight alteration of the Hebrew gives the meaning 'of his words,' which is perhaps more appropriate in this connexion.

shall die. The rendering of the Hebrew text is 'shall be put to death,' which certainly seems to imply disregard of the injunctions of the State. The rendering of our text comes from the Hebrew margin.

17. The high ethical teaching of this verse finds its most perfect statement in the parable of our Lord contained in Matt. xxv. 31-46.

18. Cf. xiii. 24 and also xxiii. 13. As long as youth lasts there is the hope of improvement and of settling character, so that all discipline is wise and fruitful.

on his destruction. In early days the legislation of Israel

- 19 A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty :  
 For if thou deliver *him*, thou must do it yet again.  
 20 Hear counsel, and receive <sup>a</sup> instruction,  
 That thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.  
 21 There are many devices in a man's heart ;  
 But the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.  
 22 <sup>b</sup> The desire of a man is *the measure* of his kindness :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *correction*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *That which maketh a man to be desired is his kindness*

probably gave the power of life and death to the father, as was also the case in early Roman law. We find in Exod. xxi. 15, 17 that certain sins against parents were punished with death. In Deut. xxi. 18-21 the son who would not yield to the voice of his parents was brought before the judges, and they had power both to condemn him to death and to carry the sentence into effect.

19. This verse, with our present knowledge, is almost an insoluble riddle. The word 'great' is introduced from the Hebrew margin, while the corresponding word in the text probably means 'frequent,' that is, a man who is often angry. The second clause is almost hopeless to interpret, and the many attempts at explaining it are not so much translations as guesses. Some translators get a meaning out of it by altering the original text, and of these attempts Frankenberg's is probably the best. He renders, 'A man who is fined is very angry, but if he show contempt of court he has to pay more.' It must be confessed, however, that though the meaning thus obtained is quite clear and consistent, the proverb in such a form is very improbable.

20. **thy latter end.** This phrase generally refers to the end of life, but here probably to the future career of the man who has wisely listened to instruction. Wildeboer considers that the words have this meaning, but are further to be understood in a special sense of progress in the schools of learning. The Syriac version reads 'in thy ways,' an excellent meaning, but it may be rather an interpretation than an authority for altering the text.

21. Cf xvi. 1, &c.

22. **The desire of a man.** Here is another clause which remains a riddle to the interpreter. The literal translation of the Hebrew is not difficult, but what is meant by it it is impossible to say. The interpretation of the R. V. is that a man is to be judged by his intention rather than by his actual success in carrying out his purposes of kindness, but this goes further in the way of an interpretation than a translation ought to do. The LXX renders



- And a poor man is better than a liar.  
 The fear of the LORD *tendeth* to life : 23  
 And he *that hath it* shall abide satisfied ;  
 He shall not be visited with evil.  
 The sluggard burieth his hand in the dish, 24  
 And will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.  
 Smite a scorner, and the simple will learn prudence : 25  
 And reprove one that hath understanding, *and* he will  
 understand knowledge.  
 He that <sup>a</sup>spoileth his father, and chaseth away his mother, 26  
     <sup>a</sup> Or, *violently entreateth*

with an altered text 'mercy is fruit to a man,' that is, merciful conduct brings gain, which gives a good meaning, but has no connexion with the second clause. Others render, 'what is attractive in a man is his friendliness,' but the best of renderings are speculative, and the original meaning remains uncertain. The second clause must surely belong to some other proverb, and, even as it stands, evidently lacks some word, for the bare contrast between a poor man and a liar is not very intelligible.

23. As this verse stands in the text, it appears as if, like verse 7 above, it had also three clauses. This is not, however, really the case, for the second clause should read as with one subject, 'he shall abide satisfied, unvisited by evil.' The difficulty of the second clause is that the personal pronoun has no antecedent, so that there must have been some original corruption of the text either by omission or otherwise. Delitzsch and others render 'he shall rest quietly through the night, fearing no evil.' Obviously the reference is to the man who possesses the fear of the Lord.

24. Cf. xxvi. 15 for an almost exact repetition of this saying, which is full of humour and satire.

**dish.** Many ancient versions read 'bosom,' obviously the slit of the garment which would form a natural resting-place for the hand. The modern equivalent would be the 'loafer who perpetually has his hands in his pockets, and is too lazy to take them out.

25. **Smite a scorner.** By such an object-lesson the moral simpleton will learn wisdom, but, on the other hand, a man who is morally enlightened will only need reproof in order to become more amenable to instruction.

26. **spoileth** should rather be translated, with the margin, 'violently entreateth.'

Is a son that causeth shame and bringeth reproach.

27 Cease, my son, to hear instruction

*Only* to err from the words of knowledge.

28 A worthless witness mocketh at judgement :

And the mouth of the wicked swalloweth iniquity.

29 Judgements are prepared for scorers,

And stripes for the back of fools.

20 Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler ;

**27. Cease, my son.** This is the only place in this section of the book where this form of address, so common in the earlier section, occurs. Not only for this reason, but because of the difficulty of interpreting the verses, it is probable that it is an interpolation here. The present form of the Hebrew does not yield any satisfactory meaning, for the words cannot be, as some have supposed, ironical, that is, 'Cease to hear and you will soon err,' nor can it mean a perversion of the good instruction, that is, 'Cease to hear if all you are going to do with your knowledge is to abuse it'; so that some alteration of the text seems essential, either as Toy suggests, 'He who ceases to listen will wander,' or a double negative, 'Do not cease to hear and do not wander.'

**28. swalloweth.** Some would alter the original so as to render 'uttereth,' but this is not essential, and the strong figure contained in the word of the text is probably better in accordance with the form of the proverb, the wicked eagerly drink down iniquity as a pleasant draught. One is reminded of the language in which Ibsen, as a youth, describes his eager reading of Sallust and Cicero. 'I gulped them down,' he says.

**29. Judgements.** The change of one letter in the Hebrew enables us to read with the LXX 'rods,' which stands in closer connexion with the second clause.

**xx. 1. mocker.** This either means that the wine causes men to scoff and brawl, or that the wine itself acts towards men as scoffers and brawlers do. The Scottish proverb says, 'When ale is in, wit is out.'

**strong drink.** This was probably made from other fruits than the grape (cf. Song of Songs viii. 2), and is spoken of in various parts of the O. T. as intoxicating. It was forbidden to priests and Nazirites, but was apparently a favourite drink of the people (see Deut. xiv. 26).

And whosoever <sup>a</sup> erreth thereby is not wise.  
 The terror of a king is as the roaring of a lion : 1  
 He that <sup>b</sup> provoketh him to anger sinneth *against* his  
 own <sup>c</sup> life.  
 It is an honour for a man to <sup>d</sup> keep aloof from strife : 3  
 But every fool will be quarrelling.  
 The slothful will not plow by reason of the winter ; 4  
<sup>e</sup> Therefore he shall beg in harvest, and have nothing.  
 Counsel in the heart of man is *like* deep water ; 5  
 But a man of understanding will draw it out.  
<sup>f</sup> Most men will proclaim every one his own kindness : 6

<sup>a</sup> Or, *reeleth*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *angereth himself against him*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *soul*.

<sup>d</sup> Or, *cease*

<sup>e</sup> *Therefore when he seeketh in harvest, there shall be nothing*

<sup>f</sup> Or, *Many a man will meet one that is kind to him*

**erreth**, literally 'reeleth,' probably stands as an equivalent for is 'intoxicated.'

**is not wise**. Either 'does not act wisely in partaking of these things,' or 'cannot act wisely, when he has partaken of them.'

2. For the metaphor see xix. 12. The second clause of the verse suggests our own common proverb, 'Discretion is the better part of valour.'

3. Cf. the higher teaching, perhaps based on this verse, of Matt. v. 9.

4. **of the winter**. This should rather be 'in autumn'; the deterring cause is not the cold, as our version suggests, but the sluggard's own laziness. He is too idle to do his work at the proper time, and, therefore, finds himself in poverty, when those who have worked have plenty. The second clause is better rendered by the margin, 'Therefore when he seeketh an harvest there shall be nothing.'

5. The figure contained in this verse is found in our own employment of the word 'deep' to designate a man who is either subtle in conduct or profound in wisdom.

6. The first clause may be more simply rendered 'Many men profess friendship,' which is its exact meaning (cf. xviii. 24). Some versions translate, from a slightly varying Hebrew, 'Many a man is called kind,' which gives a good sense. Cf. Malan, vol. ii, pp. 657-67 for parallels.

But a faithful man who can find?

- 7 A just man that walketh in his integrity,  
Blessed are his children after him.
- 8 A king that sitteth on the throne of judgement  
    <sup>a</sup> Scattereth away all evil with his eyes.
- 9 Who can say, I have made my heart clean,  
I am pure from my sin?
- 10 <sup>b</sup> Divers weights, and divers measures,  
Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.
- 11 Even a child maketh himself known by his doings,  
Whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.
- 12 The hearing ear, and the seeing eye,  
The LORD hath made even both of them.
- 13 Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty;  
Open thine eyes, *and* thou shalt be satisfied with bread.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Winnoweth*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *A stone and a stone, an ephah and an ephah.*

7. Of all the inheritances a man can leave, there is nothing so valuable as his good name, and further, the O. T. writers believed that the blessing of the righteous descended also to their children.

8. *Scattereth*. Rather, 'winnoweth,' as in verse 26 below, the metaphor arising from the fact that the king is supposed carefully to examine and sift the evidence in person. This gives a clearer and more appropriate meaning than the translation of the text, which means 'dissipates.' This latter function could not be so appropriately referred to the eyes.

9. This utterance stands alone in the Book of Proverbs, though of course the inherent sinfulness of the heart is implied in many verses. The thought is common to all periods of Hebrew literature, though it becomes more prominent in the later and more reflective writings (cf. 1 Kings viii. 46, Ps. li. 5, Eccles. vii. 20, as typical passages).

10. Cf. xi. 1 and note.

11. *Even a child*. The study of modern psychology has made the truth of this verse much more clear than ever before.

*right*. A very slight variation of the Hebrew would give the meaning 'bad,' which better preserves the requisite contrast.

13. Cf. vi. 9-11 for warnings against laziness.

It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer :	14
But when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.	
There is gold, and abundance of <sup>a</sup> rubies :	15
But the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.	
Take his garment that is surety for a stranger ;	16
And <sup>b</sup> hold him in pledge <i>that is surety</i> for <sup>c</sup> strangers.	
Bread of falsehood is sweet to a man ;	17
But afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.	
Every purpose is established by counsel :	18
And by wise guidance make thou war.	

<sup>a</sup> See Job xxviii. 18.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *take a pledge of him*

<sup>c</sup> Another reading is, *a strange woman*.

14. This practice of the market-place has remained to the present day, and is enshrined in the pithy Italian proverb, 'If he finds fault he means to buy.'

15. On rubies see iii. 15, note.

a **precious jewel**: or 'vessel,' for the original word applies both to articles of household use, such as vases or dishes, and to jewellery employed in personal adornment. The translation of the whole verse, as given in our text, is not clear. The first clause in this form stands alone as a bare statement, and in the second clause, by implication, a precious jewel must be regarded as more valuable than the gold and rubies of the first clause. It is better, therefore, to regard, as Toy does, the three comparisons as metaphorically descriptive of lips of knowledge, or to suppose that the text is corrupt, and that originally the verse stated that lips of knowledge are better than all the precious things here named (cf. viii. 11).

16. **stranger**, in both clauses, is simply equivalent to 'another' (cf. ii. 16, &c.). On the law that permitted a garment to be taken in pledge see Deut. xxiv. 10-13. In the second clause 'hold it in pledge' is more probable than 'him,' though, if the latter be read, we may either understand, in accordance with Nehemiah v. 5, the person of the creditor, or translate 'hold him to his bargain.'

17. '**Bread of falsehood**' is 'gained by fraud.'

18. Perhaps it is better to assimilate the form of the first clause to that of the second, and translate 'establish every purpose by counsel.' The second clause shows that the proverb belongs to a period when war was a common occupation. Probably, therefore, it emanates from kings' courts (cf. Luke xiv. 31).

- 19 He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets :  
Therefore meddle not with him that openeth wide his lips.  
20 Whoso curseth his father or his mother,  
His lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness.  
21 An inheritance *may be* gotten<sup>a</sup> hastily at the beginning ;  
But the end thereof shall not be blessed.  
22 Say not thou, I will recompense evil :  
Wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.  
23 Divers weights are an abomination to the LORD ;  
And <sup>a</sup> a false balance is not good.  
24 A man's goings are of the LORD ;  
How then can man understand his way ?  
25 It is a snare to a man <sup>b</sup> rashly to say, *It is holy*,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *a balance of deceit*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *rashly to utter holy words* Or, *to devour that which is holy*

19. **openeth wide his lips**: i. e. 'is a gossip.'

20. Cf. note on xix. 18.

21. The words in italics should be omitted, and the second clause read 'shall not be blessed in the end.'

**gotten hastily** is the rendering of the Hebrew margin, the word in the text not being intelligible.

22. Cf. xxiv. 29. Note the frequent use of these words in the N. T.

23. Cf. v. 10 above and also chap. ii. 1.

24. For the first clause compare Ps. xxxvii. 23, which some consider to be the origin of the words here. The writer apparently suggests that, after all that philosophy and reflection can do, there must be much mystery in human life, and probably the inference is that the truest wisdom is shown in ultimate and childlike trust in the Divine guidance.

25. **It is holy**. All that stands in the Hebrew text is 'holy' or 'consecrated,' and the reference apparently is to the habit of declaring certain gifts to be the inalienable property of the Temple by consecrating them to sacred uses. See the laws given in Lev. xxvii. A somewhat similar practice, that of Corban, is referred to by Jesus, and its abuses rebuked in Mark vii. 21. There, however, it appears that the gift was made with the evil design of cheating a man's parents out of what was their due, and also of cheating God at the same time.

And after vows to make inquiry.

A wise king winnoweth the wicked, 26

And bringeth the *threshing* wheel over them.

The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, 27

Searching all the innermost parts of the belly.

Mercy and truth preserve the king : 28

**make inquiry.** The phrase so rendered is not quite definite in meaning, though this is, perhaps, as near the significance as we can reach. Frankenberg understands it in the same sense as the phrase in Lev. xxvii. 33, where we read of the man's making search among the animals in his flock as to which he will give to the Temple. If so translated the meaning would then be that the man endeavoured to substitute a less valuable for a more valuable gift. The meaning is excellent, but it is doubtful whether the word will bear it. The general significance is, at any rate, that a man must carefully count the cost of his offerings before he makes them, and once they are made, gladly accept whatever sacrifice is involved (cf. Eccles. v. 4-6, and the notes there on the risks of hasty vows).

**26. wheel.** This refers to the threshing-cart which was driven over the grain on the hard surface of the threshing-floor (see Isa. xxviii. 27, 28).

**27. The spirit of man.** This which, according to the O. T. conception, was breathed into man by God Himself, is to be taken as the equivalent of our word conscience, and is regarded here as being God's vice-regent of the soul. Bishop Butler's famous utterance on conscience might well be derived from this verse: 'Had it strength as it has right, had it power as it has manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world' (Sermon II).

**innermost parts.** 'Parts' should rather be 'chambers' (cf. xviii. 8), and the whole phrase denotes the recesses of the inward life (cf. 1 Cor. ii. 10). Toy places this verse after verse 28 on the ground that the latter is closely linked with the thought of verse 26, but that is hardly sufficient ground for the alteration of order.

**28. Mercy and truth.** For the application of these two terms to a king and his government cf. Isa. xvi. 5. There may be more than a casual connexion between the two passages. The prophet may be there recalling a popular proverb, or, less probably, the writer here derives from the prophetic utterance. That the second clause of the verse should name only the quality mercy is strange, and probably the LXX is right when it reads 'righteousness' instead.

And <sup>a</sup> his throne is upholden by mercy.

29 The glory of young men is their strength :

And the beauty of old men is the hoary head.

30 Stripes that wound cleanse away evil :

And strokes *reach* the innermost parts of the belly.

21 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD as the water-courses :

He turneth it whithersoever he will.

2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes :

But the LORD weigheth the hearts.

3 To do justice and judgement

Is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

4 An high look, and a proud heart,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *he upholdeth his throne*

29. Cf. xvi. 31.

30. **Stripes that wound.** The whole of this verse is very difficult to translate because of the uncertainty of the meaning of the Hebrew and the variations that exist in the versions. 'Stripes that wound' evidently stands for severe chastisement, and the second part of the verse presents the same idea under different form, when it states that physical punishment has a good moral effect upon the inward life. The general meaning, therefore, is clear enough, but uncertainty arises when we examine in detail individual words. For example, the word rendered 'cleanse' is found as a noun in the Book of Esther with the meaning of 'cosmetics,' and some have rendered here 'cosmetics purify the body, and blows the soul,' but that is rather a free paraphrase, with a doubtful basis, than a translation. We must be content, therefore, with the general meaning of the verse, and decide, with Frankenberg, that it is impossible to translate the first clause with accuracy. For the idea cf. Eccclus. xxii. 19.

xxi. 1. **watercourses.** These are the artificial canals used for irrigation, which were common both in Babylonia and Egypt, and are referred to in Isa. lviii. 11, and Deut. xi. 10. Just as the irrigators had full control over the supply of water admitted to the field, so the Lord is regarded as having full control over the mind and heart of the king.

2. Cf. xvi. 2, of which this is practically a repetition.

3. Cf. xv. 8 and note, and 1 Sam. xv. 22.



<sup>a</sup> *Even* the lamp of the wicked, is sin.

The thoughts of the diligent *tend* only to plenteousness : 5

But every one that is hasty *hasteth* only to want.

The getting of treasures by a lying tongue

6

Is a vapour driven to and fro ; <sup>b</sup> they *that seek them* seek death.

<sup>a</sup> Or, And the tillage

<sup>b</sup> Or, according to some ancient authorities, they are *snares of death* or, into the snares of death

**4. Even the lamp.** As the two clauses of this verse stand they do not seem to have any obvious connexion, and, therefore, some editors consider that we have fragments of two proverbs. The margin of the R. V. gives 'tillage' instead of 'lamp,' but the form of the word read in order to produce this translation rather means 'the breaking up of fallow ground,' though Delitzsch understands it to refer to the whole fruit of the soil. With either of these translations the only way to make sense of the verse is to understand some connective words, and render in this fashion, 'A high look and a proud heart, these lead to the harvest of the wicked, which is sin'; or, in the other case, comparing xiii. 9, we should say, with Wildeboer, 'In haughtiness of vision and pride of heart is the good fortune (i. e. lamp) of the wicked, but it ends in sin.' On the whole, however, it seems best to decide that the verse consists of two unrelated fragments, and that no solution of the problem, with our present material, is possible.

**5. The thoughts of the diligent.** The thought of the verse is fairly clear, but the form of it difficult, for example, 'every one' does not answer well to 'thoughts' in the first clause, and 'thoughts' is probably better rendered by 'methods.' Again, 'hasty' is not a good contrast to 'diligent,' and it may be better to follow the Latin version and read 'slothful,' especially as the sluggard is so prominent a figure in the book (cf. xiii. 4).

**6. The getting of treasures.** We have already read, in x. 2, of the profitlessness of 'treasures of wickedness,' and here they are compared with a fleeting vapour. It is the last part of the second clause that affords the great difficulty here. The Hebrew literally is 'seeking death,' but it hardly seems possible to apply this to the vapour and its extinction. The majority of commentators are, therefore, inclined to follow the LXX and read 'snares of death.' In this case there will be two metaphors used to describe the evil result of attempting to gain treasure by false means. It will be intangible as a vapour, deadly as a snare. Cf. xxiii. 5.

- 7 The violence of the wicked shall sweep them away ;  
Because they refuse to do judgement.
- 8 The way of him that is laden with guilt is exceeding crooked :  
But as for the pure, his work is <sup>a</sup> right.
- 9 It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop,  
Than with a contentious woman in <sup>b</sup> a wide house.
- 10 The soul of the wicked desireth evil :  
His neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.
- 11 When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise :  
And <sup>c</sup> when the wise is instructed, he receiveth knowledge.
- 12 <sup>d</sup> The righteous man considereth the house of the wicked ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *straight*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *a house in common* Heb. *a house of society*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *when one considereth the wise*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *One that is righteous ... he overthroweth the wicked &c.*

**7. sweep them away.** The metaphor contained in the original is presumably that of a sweep-net rather than of a besom, as the English seems to suggest.

**8. his work is right.** Better, 'his conduct is straight.'

**9.** This verse is repeated in xxv. 24, and there should also be compared with it xix. 13, v. 19 of this chapter, and xxvii. 15.

**the corner of the housetop.** It was no uncommon thing to sleep on the housetop, and sometimes extra chambers were built there (cf. 1 Kings xxii. 19), but to be confined to such a space would certainly be irksome. Some suppose the phrase to mean 'pinnacle,' and that the reference is to the danger of the situation ; but this is unlikely.

**a wide house.** The literal meaning of the Hebrew is 'house of a companion,' which is generally taken to be equivalent to 'in company,' but may probably be interpreted as in the English text, which certainly preserves the requisite contrast.

**10. findeth no favour.** Rather, 'exciteth no kindly feeling.' The evil that is spoken about in the verse is that of excessive selfishness, a man being so self-centred as to leave no thought of kindness for his neighbour.

**11. simple.** That is, as commonly in the book, the man who is morally undisciplined, who is here said to receive instruction from witnessing the punishment of the scorner. The second clause of the verse shows the progress made in real knowledge by the discipline of a man's own life.

**12. The righteous man.** This, as the margin shows, should

*How* the wicked are overthrown to *their* ruin.

Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, 13

He also shall cry, but shall not be heard.

A gift in secret <sup>a</sup> pacifieth anger, 14

And a present in the bosom strong wrath.

It is joy to the righteous to do judgement; 15

<sup>b</sup> But it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity.

The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding 16

Shall rest in the congregation of <sup>c</sup> the dead.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *bendeth*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *But destruction shall be to &c.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *the shades* Heb. *Rephaim*.

rather be translated 'the righteous One,' that is, God (cf. xxiv. 12). For the second clause of the verse should read 'and overturns the wicked to ruin.' This could not be said of the righteous, and the translation given in the English version is improbable, if not impossible. The difficulty about the phrase is that it is nowhere else applied to God in the O. T., save in Job xxxiv. 17, and consequently many regard it as an impossible rendering here. Wildeboer illustrates the indefinite usage from Arabic, and supports the reference to God. If it is not to be understood of God, then some alteration of the text is necessary. Hitzig suggests that we might read 'the righteous man considers his house, but wickedness hurls the wicked to ruin,' in which case the connexion of the two clauses is not clear, though some light may be gained from a passage quoted by Frankenberg, namely, Ps. of Sol. vi. 8, 'The righteous man maketh inquisition continually in his own house, that he may put away iniquity.'

**13. cry.** The reference is to an appeal to his fellow men, not to God as has sometimes been understood. 'Heard' is here used in the sense of 'answered' (cf. Eccus. iv. 1-6).

**14. Cf. xvii. 8, and note.** The LXX has, for the second clause, 'he who withholds a gift excites strong wrath,' but this does not seem justified by the Hebrew.

**15. do judgement.** More probably, 'the doing of judgement,' that is, 'the carrying out of judgement,' for this meaning better preserves the contrast of the second clause.

**destruction** may also be translated 'dismay,' which contrasts better with joy, but, on the other hand, 'destruction' is a stronger word.

**16. the dead.** On the word so rendered see the note on ii. 18. Probably the whole of this verse refers to the premature death of the wicked, an idea we have met with several times.

- 17 He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man :  
 He that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.  
 18 The wicked is a ransom for the righteous ;  
 And the treacherous *cometh* in the stead of the upright.  
 19 It is better to dwell in a desert land,  
 Than with <sup>a</sup> a contentious and fretful woman.  
 20 There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of  
 the wise ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *a contentious woman and vexation*

**17. wine and oil.** These are here put for extravagant luxury, and the whole verse may be compared with our common proverb 'Waste not, want not.'

**18.** For the general idea of this verse cf. xi. 8. The teaching of the verse is obviously a not uncommon one in Hebrew literature, that the wicked man is punished, while the righteous escapes, though it is here stated in the very strong form of the wicked's being actually a substitute for the righteous.

**19. desert land.** The idea is, of course, the solitariness, not the barrenness of the place. This verse gives the idea of verse 9 in a stronger form. The second clause in the Hebrew really reads 'than with a contentious woman and vexation,' that is to say, that the two are equivalent, but the Hebrew form of statement is more picturesque than the English.

**20. precious treasure and oil.** In the LXX the word 'oil' is omitted, and it certainly seems a curious combination, and probably the word may have been introduced from verse 17 above. A further difficulty arises from the fact of attributing precious treasure to the possession of the wise man as such. As Frankenberg says, when the subject in question is the wisdom of the sage, we expect some other proof of it than the fact of a well-stocked cellar and kitchen. Probably the expressions are to be taken as figurative for the treasures of wisdom. A further difficulty is introduced by the text of the LXX, which reads 'precious treasure will rest on the mouth of the wise man,' which would, of course, refer to the wise words he uttered, and in this case the swallowing of the treasure by the fool might be supposed to refer to his gulping down, as it were, the words of the sage without any reflection as to what they may mean. This would be a humorous picture in agreement with others in the book. The same idea may be taken from the translation of our own text by assuming that the reference is to treasures of wisdom offered to the foolish man, which he cannot

But a foolish man swalloweth it up.	
He that followeth after righteousness and mercy	21
Findeth life, righteousness, and honour.	
A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty,	22
And bringeth down the strength of the confidence thereof.	
Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue	23
Keepeth his soul from troubles.	
The proud and haughty man, scorner is his name,	24
He worketh in the arrogance of pride.	
The desire of the slothful killeth him ;	25

appreciate, and will in that case remind us of our Lord's warning not to cast pearls before swine.

**21. righteousness.** It will be noted that this word occurs in both clauses of the verse, but in the second position it is questionable on two grounds. First, because it is unlikely that the first clause should contain two elements, and the second three, and, further, because it is not probable that it should be said that to pursue righteousness wins righteousness, unless that were stated in another sense altogether from that of the verse. Life and honour, this proverb states, are the rewards that come from the pursuit of righteousness and mercy.

**22. scaleth the city.** Cf. Eccles. ix. 15 for the superiority of wisdom over mere strength in matters of warfare. Cf. also Prov. xx. 18, xxiv. 5-6; but, as Plumptre reminds us, the proverb is capable of wider application, and may refer to all the victories of intellectual and spiritual strength over forces that seem to the casual observer to be much more powerful. Plumptre also points out that the LXX version here may have suggested to Paul the language of 2 Cor. x. 4.

**23.** Cf. xiii. 8 and xviii. 21. Toy suggests that the troubles here referred to are probably social and legal ones, and compares Eccles. x. 20.

**24.** Toy is probably right in his contention that we should make the scorner the subject of this verse, and translate 'scorner is the name of the proud, arrogant man,' and he further proceeds as follows: 'If this interpretation be correct, it appears to point to the existence of a precise philosophical form of instruction in the schools, and to the distinct recognition of a class of arrogant disregards of moral law, both of which facts suit the time when the Jews came under Greek influence.'

**25.** We here find a further reference to the slothful (see

For his hands refuse to labour.

26 There is that coveteth greedily all the day long :

But the righteous giveth and withholdeth not.

27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination :

How much more, when he bringeth it <sup>a</sup> with a wicked mind !

28 A false witness shall perish :

<sup>a</sup> Or, to atone for wickedness

xix. 24, &c.), who is now described as practically committing suicide by his inordinate love of ease.

**26. There is that coveteth.** This is rather a desperate attempt to give a meaning to words that in the original are very difficult to translate, and it is impossible to decide whether the first clause refers to the sluggard of the previous verse or not. It may be that there is here a further reference to his continual desire for ease, but, if so, the text must be corrupt. Some have emended it so as to read 'the sluggard desires, but has not.' This, however, in addition to being an improbable alteration, does not give a clear connexion with the second clause. It may, on the other hand, be an equivalent form of the first clause of verse 10 in this chapter. The second clause would then be a positive statement of the saying that is given negatively in the second clause of the tenth verse.

**27. The sacrifice of the wicked.** This clause is repeated from xv. 8, where, however, the words 'to the Lord' are added. They might just as well be found here, but there is no manuscript evidence for them. Obviously the words contemplate a wicked man, who imagines that the sacrifice will in itself placate God without any change in the life of him who offers the sacrifice (cf. Ps. l. 16-21).

**with a wicked mind.** It is difficult to see how this clause adds much to the previous one, for the wicked man is supposed to offer the sacrifice with a wicked mind, unless, indeed, the first clause thinks only of sacrifices offered in thoughtlessness, while the second contemplates sacrifices offered with the definite purpose of attempting to bribe the Deity. The distinction scarcely seems probable. It is better, therefore, to read with the margin, 'to atone for crime,' which would reveal an idea as to sacrifice that is not uncommon to many popular religions, viz. that a sacrifice would induce the Deity to wink at evil practices, even perhaps to give countenance to them. The whole verse throws a rather lurid light upon much of the popular religious practice of the times.

**28. A false witness.** The first clause is a slightly stronger

But the man that heareth shall speak <sup>a</sup>unchallenged.  
 A wicked man hardeneth his face : 29  
 But as for the upright, <sup>b</sup>he ordereth his ways.  
 There is no wisdom nor understanding 30  
 Nor counsel against the LORD.  
 The horse is prepared against the day of battle : 31  
 But <sup>c</sup>victory is of the LORD.  
 A *good* name is rather to be chosen than great riches, 22

<sup>a</sup> Or, *so as to endure*

<sup>b</sup> Another reading is, *he considereth his way.*      <sup>c</sup> Or, *deliverance*

form of that found in xix. 5 and 9. The second clause, in the present condition of the text, is so obscure that more than one modern editor leaves it untranslated. The literal rendering of the Hebrew is 'a man who hears shall speak for ever,' which does not seem either intelligible or desirable. Some refer it to the quality of the hearing, understanding it to mean 'the man who is careful of how and what he hears,' so as to become a trustworthy witness; but the word does not seem to bear that meaning, neither is the second part of the clause any clearer. The 'shall speak unchallenged' of our text is without authority. The text has been so altered as to read 'a man of truth will be remembered for ever,' but the alteration is somewhat violent, and the meaning not very satisfactory.

**29. hardeneth his face.** This phrase has already occurred in vii. 13, and, as in that passage, it refers to the impudent bearing of the wicked, who will brazen out any statement they make utterly irrespective of its truth or falsehood.

**ordereth his ways.** This is one possible translation of the Hebrew, but the rendering of the margin 'considers his ways' is probably better. Unlike the wicked man, the righteous is not reckless as to what he says and how he acts.

**30.** For the thought of the second clause cf. Job v. 12, 13.

**31. prepared** is really 'caparisoned.'

**victory** is properly 'deliverance,' as that is the special aspect of the delivery here considered. (Cf. for the thought of the passage Ps. xxxiii. 16—21.) Horses seem to have been a comparatively late introduction into the war methods of the Hebrews, and the early prophets objected to them partly as a foreign custom, and partly perhaps on conservative grounds of prejudice against innovations (see Deut. xvii. 16).

**xxii. 1. A good name.** Cf. for the thought Eccles. vii. 1 and Eccles. xli. 12.

And <sup>a</sup> loving favour rather than silver and gold.

2 The rich and the poor meet together :

The LORD is the maker of them all.

3 A prudent man seeth the evil, and hideth himself :

But the simple pass on, and <sup>b</sup> suffer for it.

4 The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD

Is riches, and honour, and life.

5 Thorns *and* snares are in the way of the froward :

He that keepeth his soul shall be far from them.

6 Train up a child <sup>c</sup> in the way he should go,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *favour is better than &c.*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *are mulcted.*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *according to his way.*

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**loving favour.** This is better rendered 'to be well thought of,' to be, as Toy says, a '*persona grata*.' The general meaning of the verse may either be to point to the value of a good reputation in bringing respect to its owner, or it may refer to the inward satisfaction it affords to the man who has it.

2. The thought of this verse is a fairly frequent one in later Jewish literature (cf. Eccus. xi. 14).

3. The meaning of this verse is obvious, and is in line with much of the teaching of the book, which frequently commends prudence and forethought. The LXX gives a different rendering of the first clause, evidently borrowed from xxi. 11, and must have either misunderstood this, or had a different text. Its translation is 'a shrewd man who sees the wicked severely punished is greatly instructed thereby.'

**humility and the fear of the LORD.** The 'and' is not part of the Hebrew text, though the majority of editors introduce it. It is possible, however, to translate in two other ways, either 'the reward of humility is the fear of the Lord,' or 'the reward of humility which is the fear of the Lord,' that is, humility is then defined as practically equivalent to piety. If the general sense of the term is taken, however, we may compare xv. 33.

5. **Thorns.** If we retain the reading so translated, this must refer to the hedges which bar the path, and which the man who strays from it must encounter. But an alteration of the Hebrew gives 'traps' as an alternative. With this reading the clause has been well translated 'snares are hidden in the path of the froward.'

**keepeth his soul.** As has frequently been noted already, this phrase should mean 'he who has regard to himself.'

6. The only point about this well-known verse that requires any



And even when he is old he will not depart from it.  
 The rich ruleth over the poor, 7  
 And the borrower is servant to the lender.  
 He that soweth iniquity shall reap <sup>a</sup> calamity : 8  
 And the rod of his wrath shall fail.  
 He that hath a <sup>b</sup> bountiful eye shall be blessed ; 9  
 For he giveth of his bread to the poor.  
 Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out ; 10  
 Yea, strife and ignominy shall cease.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *vanity*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *good*.

elucidation is the exact significance of the phrase 'in the way he should go.' As the margin shows, the literal rendering of the Hebrew is 'according to his way,' and it is not safe to interpret this as necessarily meaning the way of righteousness. It more probably implies the way of destiny, it being assumed that the parents will have determined on a proper way in which to lead their offspring.

7. Parallel passages to the thought of this verse have occurred several times in the book (cf. xi. 29, xii. 24, &c.). Whether servant, that is, slave, of the second clause is to be taken literally or not, is questionable. It was possible (as 2 Kings iv. 1 and other passages prove) for the creditor to make a slave of the debtor, but whether the reference is to that practice or not is here uncertain.

8. **Calamity.** As the margin shows, this may also be translated 'vanity,' or even 'naught' or 'nothingness,' and, in light of what is to be said of the probable meaning of the second clause, this translation is preferable.

**rod of his wrath.** This rendering is doubly improbable. First of all, wrath is not so likely a translation of the Hebrew as is 'insolence,' in which case, of course, rod would be taken as the emblem of power, which the insolent man abuses. The translation of the text refers to rod as to the instrument of punishment. A slight alteration of the Hebrew text suggested by Frankenberg gives the meaning 'produce of his tillage,' which fits in admirably with the figure of the previous clause, and gives a very intelligible meaning to the whole passage.

9. **a bountiful eye,** i. e. 'a kindly disposition.'

10. The meaning of this verse is clear enough, but the LXX gives it a very special significance, though it is difficult to decide whether their translation is a free paraphrase of the text, another

- 11 He that loveth <sup>a</sup> pureness of heart,  
     <sup>b</sup> For the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.  
 12 The eyes of the LORD preserve *him that hath* knowledge,  
     But he overthroweth the words of the treacherous man.  
 13 The sluggard saith, There is a lion without :  
     I shall be <sup>c</sup> murdered in the streets.  
 14 The mouth of strange women is a deep pit :  
     He <sup>d</sup> that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein.  
 15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child ;  
     *But* the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

<sup>a</sup> Another reading is, *the pure of heart.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *Hath grace in his lips* Or, *That hath grace in his lips*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *slain* <sup>d</sup> Or, *against whom the LORD hath indignation*

and more special proverb introduced in place of it, or a rendering of some different Hebrew original. It translates 'cast the scorner out of the assembly, and strife will depart with him, for so long as he remains seated in a council he insults every one.'

11. The difficulty of this verse is that the syntax of the original is defective, there being no word to govern the phrase 'the grace of his lips.' A most probable interpretation is 'on whose lips is grace,' and on the whole that gives the best meaning.

12. **preserve.** This word offers great difficulty, because its usage does not permit it to govern directly the abstract word 'knowledge' which follows it, and, as the italics show, the interpolated words are a conjectural addition. Probably some alteration of the text is requisite, which will give the meaning 'are on the righteous,' as in Ps. xxxv. 15. In that case we should have an exact contrast to the second clause.

13. This verse is another humorous hit at the slothful, and recurs with the slightest variation in xxvi. 13. The LXX introduces 'murderers' into the second clause, but the Hebrew understands the lion to be referred to in both clauses.

14. **strange women.** The word is the one frequently employed in the first nine chapters, and is properly 'adulteresses.'

**that is abhorred.** Better, 'with whom the Lord is indignant.' Bunyan applies the proverb to Madam Wanton in the *Pilgrim's Progress*.

15. Corporal punishment was an almost universal practice in the ancient world, and Toy quotes the saying of Menander, 'He who is not flogged is not educated' (cf. xiii. 24).

He that oppresseth the poor to increase his *gain*, 16  
*And* he that giveth to the rich, *cometh* only to want.

Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, 17  
 And apply thine heart unto my knowledge.  
 For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee, 18  
 If they be established together upon thy lips.

16. As will be seen from the italics in this verse, the translation is very uncertain, because the connective words in the Hebrew are not clear. Of the large number of interpretations that have been offered, Toy's is perhaps as satisfactory as any. He would alter 'oppresses' to 'gives to,' though he confesses that it is not easy to understand how the corruption could arise, and then renders 'he who gives to the poor it is gain to him, he who gives to the rich it is only loss.' The latter part of the clause obviously refers to gifts given to the wealthy in order to secure their favour.

17. With this verse begins a new section of the book, which continues to the end of chapter xxiv. It is marked by the introduction of the author's personality in this verse ('my knowledge'), by the altered form from couplets to strophes, and by the recurrence of the words 'my son,' which was characteristic of the earlier chapters of the book. In many ways it reminds us, even more intimately than other sections, of the Book of Ecclesiasticus. It has affiliations with the style of the first nine chapters, but has also certain clear distinctions, which mark it out as being from a different hand. In this first section, verses 17 to 21, which is most interesting from its revelation of the personality of its author, the text is peculiarly difficult. It is obviously corrupt, and the LXX varies very much from the Hebrew. It seems as if the present Hebrew text were something of a paraphrase of an earlier one. In this verse it is doubtful whether the words 'of the wise' should be part of the text or not. If it read 'my words' it would form a better contrast to the second clause.

18. *pleasant*. This word is also doubtful, as it is hardly appropriately applied to the keeping in mind of knowledge, and so the majority of editors are inclined to substitute some word to signify 'profitable,' though of course there is no manuscript authority for it. The Greek seems to add the word to the previous verse, reading there 'apply thy mind that thou mayest know that they are good.'

If. This should rather be 'so that,' and for 'be established together' a better reading would be 'abide,' or perhaps 'be always at hand,' the reference probably being to the readiness of a man who is well stocked with wisdom.

- 19 That thy trust may be in the LORD,  
 I have made *them* known to thee this day, even to thee.  
 20 Have not I written unto thee <sup>a</sup> excellent things  
<sup>b</sup> Of counsels and knowledge ;

<sup>a</sup> The word is doubtful. Another reading is, *heretofore*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *In*

**19. this day.** So far as the words stand in the verse, they are clear enough, but in connexion with the words that follow they are not quite so clear, because, as we shall see immediately, the translation of the next verse is very uncertain, and if it refers to teaching that has been given formerly, the contrast is not clear. This verse as it stands seems to be an emphatic statement of a reiteration of the great fundamentals of spiritual wisdom to an individual pupil here addressed.

**20. excellent things.** The word rendered 'excellent' is extremely uncertain in meaning. Many translate 'formerly,' but the word is really only part of the Hebrew equivalent to that adverb, and, as has already been said, the contrast thus introduced is not clear. There is an alternative word given in the Hebrew text, which means 'officers,' and is translated 'captains' in 2 Sam. xxiii. 8 and elsewhere. It is supposed to be used metaphorically here of leading or governing ideas, but the usage is not supported by any valid example. As the root of the word is the numeral 'three' the meaning 'formerly' arises from the thought of three days ago, that of 'officer' from his being the third man in the chariot, so the LXX and other versions render 'triply' here. This latter translation played a large part in earlier exegesis; Origen, for example, taking it as a support of his favourite theory of the threefold sense of Scripture, namely, the literal, allegorical, and spiritual, while other interpreters have understood it to refer to the threefold division of the Hebrew scriptures into law, prophets, and sacred writings.<sup>1</sup> The LXX, however, alters the text further so as to read 'do thou transcribe them triply for thyself.' Among all these conflicting views it is impossible to discover any certainty, and we are compelled to declare the Hebrew text inexplicable, and to come to the conclusion that it is either hopelessly corrupt or that we must be satisfied with the very general meaning of some reference to written wisdom. The reference to written words at all points to a very late origin for the passage (cf. Eccles. xii. 10 and 12).

<sup>1</sup> This verse is quoted in the Jewish controversy about the canonicity of the Book of Esther to prove that the threefold division is already made, and so no fresh book is admissible.

To make thee know <sup>a</sup>the certainty of the words of <sup>21</sup> truth,

That thou mayest carry back words of truth to them that send thee?

Rob not the poor, <sup>b</sup>because he is poor, 22

Neither <sup>c</sup>oppress the afflicted in the gate:

For the LORD will plead their cause, 23

And despoil of life those that despoil them.

Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; 24

And with a wrathful man thou shalt not go:

Lest thou learn his ways, 25

And get a snare to thy soul.

Be thou not one of them that strike hands, 26

Or of them that are sureties for debts:

If thou hast not wherewith to pay, 27

Why should he take away thy bed from under thee?

<sup>a</sup> Or, of a certainty the words &c.      <sup>b</sup> Or, for      <sup>c</sup> Or, crush

**21. certainty.** This is the same word as that translated 'truth' later in the clause, and it may probably have crept in here and in the second clause through error, as both clauses read better without it. ?

**them that send thee.** The LXX is followed by a large majority of editors in giving the undoubtedly better sense 'them who question thee.' The idea may be compared with that in 1 Peter iii. 15, 'ready to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason.' Cf. also Eccles. viii. 9, xxxix. 6-9.

**22.** With this verse begins the new section to which the preceding paragraph serves as a preface.

**oppress the afflicted.** Better, 'crush the poor.'

**the gate.** This, of course, stands for the place of justice (cf. i. 21).

**23. despoil.** This word is only found elsewhere in Malachi iii. 8, 9, where it is translated 'rob,' but it seems to have something of the meaning of 'cheat' about it.

**25. get a snare to thy soul.** This is rather 'bring destruction on thyself.'

**26. strike hands.** See note on vi. 1.

**27. take away thy bed.** For the laws which mercifully limited

- 28 Remove not the ancient landmark,  
Which thy fathers have set.
- 29 Seest thou a man <sup>a</sup> diligent in his business? he shall stand  
before kings;  
He shall not stand before <sup>b</sup> mean men.
- 23 When thou sittest to eat with a ruler,  
Consider diligently <sup>c</sup> him that is before thee;  
2 <sup>d</sup> And put a knife to thy throat,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *skilful*<sup>b</sup> Heb. *obscure*.<sup>c</sup> Or, *what*<sup>d</sup> Or, *For thou wilt put*

the exaction of pledges, see Deut. xxiv. 10-13, and for a practical application of these ideas see Job xxxi. 19, 20.

**28. landmark.** Here again we have reference to the legal directions, and the verse is closely parallel to Deut. xix. 14, while other passages in the O.T. denounce the practice here forbidden (see Job xxiv. 2), &c. Among many ancient peoples these landmarks were considered as sacred things. This first clause is found again in xxiii. 10. Mr. Hull says, with respect to this subject, in *HBD.* iii. 246: 'In Palestine these landmarks are scrupulously respected; and in passing along a road or pathway one may observe from time to time a stone placed by the edge of the field from which a shallow furrow has been ploughed, marking the limits of cultivation of neighbouring proprietors.'

**29. diligent.** Better, with the margin, 'skilful.'

**stand before,** i. e. 'enter the service of.'

**mean,** i. e. 'obscure.' This verse is engraved upon the frame of Maddox Brown's famous picture entitled 'Work,' and has proved an incentive to many distinguished careers.

**xxiii. 1. a ruler.** This is an obvious reference to the tyranny and uncertain temper of Eastern potentates, and the warning is directed against anything like self-indulgence while in their presence.

**him that is before thee.** It might also be read 'what is before thee,' and in this case would refer to making a wise choice of food; but the meaning is not so probable.

**2. And put a knife.** This is probably a figurative expression for self-restraint. Some understand it, however, as introduced by 'for' instead of 'and,' and read 'for thou wilt put a knife,' &c. In this case it would be a statement of the ruin that would follow upon negligence of conduct in such dangerous company. Cf. with the whole passage Ecclus. ix. 13.

If thou be a man given to appetite.	
Be not desirous of his dainties ;	3
Seeing they are deceitful meat.	
Weary not thyself to be rich ;	4
Cease <sup>a</sup> from thine own wisdom.	
<sup>b</sup> Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not ?	5
For <i>riches</i> certainly make themselves wings,	
Like an eagle that flieth toward heaven.	
Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye,	6

<sup>a</sup> Or, by reason of thine own understanding

<sup>b</sup> Or, *Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it ? it is gone* : Heb. *Shall thine eyes fly upon it and it is not ?*

**3. Be not desirous.** This clause, it will be noticed, recurs as the second clause of verse 6, and some editors consider that it is out of place here, seeing that, in the second clause, the Hebrew employs the singular, though the E. V. has altered it to plural, and also because 'deceitful meat' is not considered by them appropriate to the subject under discussion. This latter objection, however, is scarcely valid, as the tyrant may be deceitful as well as capricious.

**4. from thine own wisdom.** The rendering of the text can only mean that the man's wisdom consists in the desire to become rich, and, as the verse stands, it must be confessed the two clauses are practically identical in meaning. It may be better, therefore, to follow the suggestion of the margin and render 'let thine own wisdom (i. e. 'common sense') teach thee a better way.' Some would alter the text so as to render 'wisdom' instead of 'purpose.'

**5. Wilt thou set, &c.** This rendering of the first clause is inaccurate, and the correct translation is that of the margin, viz. 'Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it, it is gone,' which is a strong way of stating the fact that the hunt for riches is delusive. There may be some corruption of the text, and originally the first and second clauses may have been united into one sentence, but it is not possible with certainty to restore the text. The meaning is clear enough.

**6. an evil eye.** In this connexion the phrase means 'niggardly,' and is found again in xxviii. 22, the only other occurrence of it in the O. T. In the *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, v. 19, we find the four characters of alms-givers described as follows : 'He who is willing to give, but not that others should give, his eye is evil towards the things of others : that others should give, and he should

- Neither desire thou his dainties :
- 7 For <sup>a</sup> as he reckoneth within himself, so is he :  
 Eat and drink, saith he to thee ;  
 But his heart is not with thee.
- 8 The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up,  
 And lose thy sweet words.
- 9 Speak not in the hearing of a fool ;  
 For he will despise the wisdom of thy words.
- 10 <sup>b</sup> Remove not the ancient landmark ;  
 And enter not into the fields of the fatherless :

<sup>a</sup> Or, as one that reckoneth

<sup>b</sup> See ch. xxii. 28.

not give, his eye is evil towards his own : he who would give and let others give is pious : he who will not give nor let others give is wicked.' Cf. by way of contrast Prov. xxii. 9, and for a reference to the evil eye in this sense in the N. T., Matt. vi. 23, and xx. 15.

7. *as he reckoneth*, &c. This translation is by no means certain, nor are any of the suggested emendations very satisfactory. Toy emends so as to read 'he deals stingily with these as with himself,' but nothing satisfactory can be made out of the present text.

8. *The morsel*, &c. The meaning of this verse is very obscure, and no satisfactory connexion can be established between the two clauses. Toy makes the second clause of verse 3 take the place of the second clause here, and understands the verse to refer to the disgust of the guest at his host's insincerity, following Pinsker. He also attaches the last clause of this verse to the end of verse 9, where it certainly makes good sense, but such treatment of the text is purely conjectural, and somewhat radical.

*sweet words*. In taking the text as it stands the majority of commentators understand by this expression the courteous words of thanks used by the guest, but it is very difficult to give any intelligible meaning to the expression so interpreted, and the only course open to us seems to be to confess that the whole condition of the text is too uncertain to interpret.

9. For the thought of this verse cf. Matt. vii. 6. See also note on previous verse.

10. Cf. xxii. 28, and note. For 'ancient' a slight alteration of text enables us to read 'landmark of the widow.' This corresponds better with the second clause, and the Hebrew law was particularly careful of the rights of the widow.



For their redeemer is strong ;	11
He shall plead their cause against thee.	
Apply thine heart unto <sup>a</sup> instruction,	12
And thine ears to the words of knowledge.	
Withhold not correction from the child :	13
For <sup>b</sup> if thou beat him with the rod, he shall not die.	
Thou shalt beat him with the rod,	14
And shalt deliver his soul from <sup>c</sup> Sheol.	
My son, if thine heart be wise,	15
My heart shall be glad, even mine :	
Yea, my reins shall rejoice,	16
When thy lips speak right things.	
Let not thine heart envy sinners :	17
But <i>be thou</i> in the fear of the LORD all the day long :	
For surely there is a <sup>d</sup> reward ;	18

<sup>a</sup> Or, correction<sup>b</sup> Or, though<sup>c</sup> Or, the grave<sup>d</sup> Or, sequel    Or, future    Heb. latter end.

**11. redeemer.** This is the technical Hebrew term *goel*, for whose duties as regards land see Lev. xxv. 25, and also the story of Ruth. The thought here is that God Himself is the *goel* of these afflicted ones, and will satisfactorily plead their cause. (Cf. Ps. lxxvii. 5.)

**13.** Cf. xix. 18, xxii. 15.

**15. My heart.** This means, as we have seen on former occasions, 'I myself.'

**16. my reins.** This has the same significance as 'my heart' in the previous verse, as according to Hebrew psychology the heart and kidneys were the sources of intellectual and emotional life.

**17. be thou in the fear.** A slight alteration of the text avoids the insertion of any words, and enables us to render 'fear the Lord.'

**18. For surely.** Literally, 'for if.' If the Hebrew text is allowed to stand, then there is a difficulty about the translation, since a conditional first clause does not give a good meaning for the second. Probably the 'if' should be omitted, and the statement of both clauses be read as an assurance.

**reward.** This is literally 'latter end,' and is generally sup-

- And thy hope shall not be cut off.
- 19 Hear thou, my son, and be wise,  
And guide thine heart in the way.
- 20 Be not among winebibbers ;  
Among gluttonous eaters of flesh :
- 21 For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty :  
And drowsiness shall clothe *a man* with rags.
- 22 Harken unto thy father that begat thee,  
And despise not thy mother when she is old.
- 23 Buy the truth, and sell it not ;  
*Yea*, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.
- 24 The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice :  
And he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him.
- 25 Let thy father and thy mother be glad,  
And let her that bare thee rejoice.
- 26 My son, give me thine heart,

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posed to mean 'hope.' The closest parallel is perhaps that of Jer. xxix. 11, 'Thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you a latter end and hope.'

**19. in the way.** This suggests the famous figurative use of the word that became common in the early days of Christianity (cf. Acts xix. 9, 23), and it is also a term employed in certain other religions. This form of expression stands alone in Proverbs, and some have consequently questioned its accuracy here, but apparently without reason. It may very well have been an expression current in the schools.

**20.** The close combination of the two words here reminds us of the reproach cast at our Lord, which He Himself quotes (see Matt. xi. 19). It may be from this proverb that the combination was found familiarly on the lips of the people.

**21. drowsiness.** In the *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, iiii. 16, we find morning sleep and midday wine associated as two of the means of destruction.

**22. thy father that begat thee.** Toy notes that this form of expression is frequent in Assyrian inscriptions. On the reverence that is due to elders see Ecclus. iii. 12-16.

**23. Buy the truth.** Cf. our Lord's proverb in Matt. xiii. 44, and also Isa. lv. 1.

**26. give me thine heart.** This means nothing more than 'pay

And let thine eyes <sup>a</sup> delight in my ways.  
 For a whore is a deep ditch ; 27  
 And a strange woman is a narrow pit.  
 Yea, she lieth in wait <sup>b</sup> as a robber, 28  
 And increaseth the treacherous among men.  
 Who hath <sup>c</sup> woe ? who hath <sup>d</sup> sorrow ? who hath con 29  
 tentions ?  
 Who hath complaining ? who hath wounds without cause ?  
 Who hath <sup>e</sup> redness of eyes ?  
 They that tarry long at the wine ; 30

<sup>a</sup> Another reading is, *observe*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *as for a prey*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *Oh !*      <sup>d</sup> Heb. *Alas !*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *darkness*

attention to my teaching.' Some have thought that the figure here introduced is that of Wisdom, as in chap. ix, and that she is contrasted with the 'evil woman' of the following verse ; but there is no evidence of such a thing, and no need to suppose it.

**delight in.** The R. V. margin gives the rendering of the Hebrew margin, which is followed by many versions and editors, namely, 'observe.' Both meanings are good, but the second is more common in this book.

**27. narrow pit.** Perhaps rather 'well,' the straitness of which would make it very difficult to get out again if a man fell in. Probably the 'for' with which the verse opens is not original, but may be the insertion of an editor who wished to connect it closely with the preceding verse.

**28. increaseth the treacherous.** As this stands, it must mean that the adulteress is a great cause of the increase of sin. Some editors alter the text with the purpose of bringing it into closer connexion with the first clause, and then render 'she commits many acts of plunder against men'; but this is not necessary, as the word translated 'treacherous' can mean sinners in general, and, therefore, the meaning given above may stand.

**29. woe . . . sorrow.** As the margin shows, these two words are really interjections in Hebrew meaning respectively 'Oh' and 'Alas!' so that the questions are very dramatic. The following questions, of course, refer to the frequent quarrels and difficulties into which drunkenness brings a man.

**redness.** This is perhaps better translated 'dullness,' and refers to the well-known effect upon the eyes of constant indulgence in intoxicants.

They that go to <sup>a</sup> seek out mixed wine.

- 31 Look not thou upon the wine when it is red,  
When it giveth its colour in the cup,  
When it <sup>b</sup> goeth down smoothly:

- 32 At the last it biteth like a serpent,  
And stingeth like <sup>c</sup> an adder.

- 33 Thine eyes shall behold <sup>d</sup> strange things,  
And thine heart shall utter froward things.

- 34 Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of  
the sea,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *try*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *moveth itself aright*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *a basilisk*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *strange women*

**30. seek out.** Literally, 'test,' the probable reference being to the connoisseur, the man who prides himself in being well versed in brands of liquor.

**mixed wine.** See note on xx. 1, and also ix. 2.

**31. giveth its colour.** Better, 'gleameth.' The whole description is that of wine at its best, when its very beauty is attractive.

**goeth down smoothly.** Cf. Song of Songs vii. 9 and note. Some consider this clause to be a gloss introduced by some scribe. On the other hand, the suggestion has been made that we should take this clause with the one that follows, perhaps introducing other words from the parallel in the Song of Songs, and render 'At first it glides smoothly over lips and throat, but at last it biteth, &c.'

**32. adder.** The real character of the serpent thus translated is unknown. Elsewhere the word is translated in the R.V. 'basilisk,' in the A. V. 'cockatrice,' both of which creatures are, of course, fabulous, and the Hebrew word gives us no assistance in identification. From Isa. xiv. 22 it would appear that the word denoted a more venomous reptile than the ordinary serpent, but more than that we cannot learn.

**33. strange things.** Almost 'mad things,' the reference being to the distorted fancies of the drunkard. The 'strange women,' by which the margin renders it, arises from the fact that in the original the form is feminine, but the connexion between drunkenness and lust, though very real, does not appear to be here in question.

**froward things** is rather 'queer or distorted things,' a reference to the irresponsible speech of the drunkard.

**34. midst of the sea.** This, of course, means 'on the high seas,' not 'in the water itself,' as some have understood it.

Or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.

They have stricken me, *shalt thou say*, and I was not hurt ; 35

They have beaten me, and I felt it not :

When shall I awake ? I will seek it yet again.

Be not thou envious against evil men, 24. ✓

Neither desire to be with them :

For their heart studieth oppression, 2

And their lips talk of mischief.

Through wisdom is an house builded ; 3

**mast.** The word only occurs here, and comes from a root which means 'to bind.' It is supposed, therefore, to be the look-out basket on the mast-head, but that is purely conjectural, and the Greek and other versions render either as 'a pilot' or 'sleeping sailor in a storm.' In that case there is no point in the comparison 'sleeping,' unless the reference be to the heavy sleep of drunkenness compared to the deep slumber of seamen indifferent to danger, but the real explanation is perhaps impossible to discover.

**35. They have stricken me.** This and the following clause refer to the drunkard's utterance on awaking from his drunken sleep, when he congratulates himself upon the happiness of his insensibility to blows, the infliction of which he remembers.

**When shall I awake ?** This question seems to be the half-stupid utterance of returning consciousness, followed by the terrible resolve to return to his debauchery whenever he has the power.

**I will seek it.** The 'it' has no immediate antecedent, but obviously refers to his wine-drinking. Some editors insert the words in the previous question, 'When shall I awake from my wine?' but without any manuscript authority.

**xxiv. 1. evil men.** The emphasis seems to lie upon conduct rather than character, or more properly, perhaps, character expressed in conduct.

**2. oppression.** This is the particular form of evil conduct selected, and probably reflects the condition of society at the time, in which robbery was the most prominent form of evil deeds.

**3, 4. wisdom.** The words in this and the following verse have reference to the practical aspect of wisdom as seen in the shrewdness and common sense of the man of affairs, and there is probably no reference to the metaphorical sense of house-building, as in Ps. cxxvii. 1, but to the literal building and furnishing of the home (cf. xxxi. 18-22 ; xiv. 1).

- And by understanding it is established :  
 4 And by knowledge are the chambers filled  
 With all precious and pleasant riches.  
 5 A wise man <sup>a</sup> is strong ;  
 Yea, a man of knowledge <sup>b</sup> increaseth might.  
 6 For by wise guidance thou shalt make thy war ;  
 And in the multitude of counsellors there is <sup>c</sup> safety.  
 7 Wisdom is too high for a fool :  
 He openeth not his mouth in the gate.  
 8 He that deviseth to do evil,  
 Men shall call him a mischievous person.  
 9 The thought of <sup>d</sup> the foolish is sin :

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *is in strength*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *victory*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *strengtheneth might*.

<sup>d</sup> Heb. *foolishness*.

**5. A wise man.** This praise of the wise man's real strength is found again in xxi. 22, and Eccles. ix. 16. Toy would give this passage the form of the latter verse, and render both clauses by a comparison, thus, 'A wise man is better than the strong, and a man of knowledge than the mighty'; but the ordinary text gives very good sense.

**6. For by wise guidance.** This verse may form the germ of the parable in Luke xiv. 31, and, indeed, it is just possible that verses 3 to 6 underlie Luke xiv. 28-32. The second clause of the verse has already occurred in xi. 14.

**7. too high.** This meaning of 'unattainable' is got by a slight alteration of the Hebrew. The word that stands in the text must be translated 'corals' or precious stones of some kind, which does not seem at all applicable here, for silence is not generally reckoned the distinctive mark of a fool (see xviii. 6, 7), though the statement of xvii. 28 must not be forgotten. It is possible that the meaning of the verse may be something of this sort:—Since wisdom is out of a fool's reach, he is compelled to hold his tongue in the presence of wise counsellors. But the text is probably too corrupt to restore with certainty.

**8, 9.** There is a play on words in the Hebrew which the English translation cannot easily imitate. The comparison exists between the last word in verse 8 and the word rendered 'thought' in verse 9. The man that deviseth evil is called a 'master of evil thought,' and a word from the same root is employed to express 'thought' in the next verse. It might be

And the scorner is an abomination to men.

If thou faint in the day of adversity, 10

Thy strength is small.

Deliver them that are carried away unto death, 11

And those that are <sup>a</sup>ready to be slain <sup>b</sup>see that thou hold back.

If thou sayest, Behold, we knew not <sup>c</sup>this: 12

Doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it?

And he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it?

And shall not he render to every man according to his work?

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *tottering to the slaughter.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *forbear thou not to deliver*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *this man*

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rendered somewhat thus, 'Men call him a master of mischief, and (in verse 9) sin is mischief,' for it is better to make sin the subject rather than the predicate of the clause.

**10. If thou faint, &c.** Here, again, the meaning is uncertain, probably because the text is not in the best condition. The Hebrew suggests that once more a play upon words is intended, and Toy proposes the rendering 'In the day of straits, strait is thy strength'; but it may be that a clause has fallen out of the original, and that some contrast between conduct in the time of prosperity and of adversity was originally meant.

**11. see that thou hold back.** This really means, as the marg. suggests, 'forbear not to deliver,' and the reference is either to men who are in danger of death at the hands of persecutors or of cruel oppression at the hand of illegal rulers. It is not possible to decide between these interpretations, but it is at all events certain that the general meaning is an injunction to deliver the oppressed.

**12. we knew not this.** The whole of the rest of the verse suggests that the verb should be in the singular, that is, 'I knew not this,' and it seems better to follow the LXX, and render it by the singular. It is a question whether 'this' refers to the subject mentioned in the previous verse. If it does, then the reference is not an exact one, for there is no strict antecedent. The Latin version has 'It is not in my power,' which gives a very good meaning. The excuse will then be a lack of ability which is not true, or rather which is only a cloak for laziness. Some think that the whole verse is a scribe's comment upon the preceding one.

- 13 My son, eat thou honey, for it is good;  
And the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste:  
14 So shalt thou know wisdom to be unto thy soul:  
If thou hast found it, then shall there be a <sup>a</sup> reward,  
And thy hope shall not be cut off.  
15 Lay not wait, <sup>b</sup> O wicked man, against the <sup>c</sup> habitation of  
the righteous;  
Spoil not his <sup>d</sup> resting place:  
16 For a righteous man falleth seven times, and riseth up  
again:  
But the wicked are overthrown by calamity.  
17 Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth,  
And let not thine heart be glad when he is overthrown:

<sup>a</sup> See ch. xxiii. 18.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *as a wicked man*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *pasture*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *fold*

**13. eat thou honey.** From xvi. 24 and Ps. cxix. 103, and elsewhere we learn that wise words were compared to honey, and here, apparently, the latter is used metaphorically for 'words of wisdom' (cf. xxv. 16 and Eccclus. xxiv. 20).

**14. then shall there be a reward.** This latter part of the clause is repeated from xxiii. 18, where see the note. Here the words are probably not original, but have been copied from the former passage, either as being, in the estimation of the editor, an appropriate conclusion, or because the words of the original have been lost.

**15. O wicked man.** This form of address seems out of place here, as the whole section consists of injunctions to the pupil of the wise, but it may probably be a later insertion. The form of counsel in the verse seems to indicate a period when there was a danger of popular uprising in a city, and may also be an indication of the lateness of the date of the passage.

**16. seven times.** This is, of course, a figurative number, indicating completion, as is often found in both the O. T. and the N. T. 'By calamity' may also be rendered 'in time of calamity.'

**17. Rejoice not.** This negative form of counsel approaches the positive form of Matt. v. 44, 'Love your enemies,' and may be another indication of our Lord's use of this book. (See the present writer's article in *D.C.G.*, vol. ii, on 'Our Lord as a Student of the O.T.')



Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, 18  
 And he turn away his wrath from him.  
 Fret not thyself because of evil-doers ; 19  
 Neither be thou envious at the wicked ;  
 For there will be no <sup>a</sup> reward to the evil man ; 20  
 The lamp of the wicked shall be put out.  
 My son, fear thou the LORD and the king : 21  
*And* meddle not with them that are given to change :  
 For their calamity shall rise suddenly ; 22  
 And who knoweth the destruction <sup>b</sup> of them both ?

<sup>a</sup> See ch. xxiii. 18.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *of their years*

**18. from him :** i.e. 'lest the Lord turn His anger from the wicked man to you.' The wicked man is certain to receive punishment at the hands of the Lord ; but if the good man acts also wickedly, he in turn will not escape the Divine displeasure.

**19.** Cf. verse 1 of this chapter and Ps. xxxvii. 1, of which this seems to be a reminiscence, if not a quotation.

**20. reward** is literally 'end' (see xxiii. 18 and note). 'Future' is probably the best meaning here, the idea being that wickedness shuts a man off from all hope of participation in the blessing that lies ahead for the righteous.

**The lamp of the wicked.** See xiii. 9 and xx. 20 with notes.

**21. My son.** Probably these words are here the additions of scribes, as their position is unnatural in the original.

**that are given to change.** That is, apparently, the men that are fond of change, possibly 'revolutionaries,' against whom the wise man's pupil is here warned as dangerous characters. Frankenberg alters the text so as to read 'Do not behave yourself proudly in presence of either of them,' that is, of the Lord or of the king, so as to bring the verse into parallel form with the succeeding one. The LXX renders 'Do not disobey either of them,' so that there is some evidence that the original text has varied.

**22. their calamity.** Probably the calamity of destruction spoken of in the verse is that inflicted by God and by the king. This seems the most probable explanation. The translation of the margin, 'the destruction of their years,' is taken from the Syriac version, but is in itself an improbable and otherwise unparalleled phrase, and, if it were correct, must refer to the revolutionaries of verse 21.

- 23 These also are *sayings* of the wise.

To have respect of persons in judgement is not good.

- 24 He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous ;  
 Peoples shall curse him, nations shall abhor him :  
 25 But to them that rebuke *him* shall be delight,  
 And a good blessing shall come upon them.

The LXX has, from this point onwards, a different order of the chapters from the Hebrew (see Introd., p. 16). It also at this point introduces a few verses which have no equivalent in the original, but may be rendered as follows:—‘A son, who regardeth the word of the Lord, shall be far from evil, for it is a protection to the man that receives it. Let no false word be spoken of the king, nor any false speech proceed from his lips. The tongue of the king is as a sword of the spirit, upon whomsoever it falleth, he shall be destroyed. If the king’s wrath is kindled, he will slay men with his weapons ; and destroy their bones, burning them as a fire ; so that they are not even food for the young vultures.’

**23. These also are sayings of the wise.** This shows that the few verses which follow in this chapter may be regarded as an appendix to the collection which commenced at xxii. 17, and was probably added by a later editor, and may represent material that he had found prior to his final task of editing, and which he inserts here because of the similarity of the subjects dealt with to that contained in the preceding section. Some of the sentences are in prose and not in verse, as is common in the rest of the book, which may also point to a lateness of origin.

**To have respect of persons.** If this clause is taken by itself, it is a simple and clear statement of the evil of partiality, but some have tried to connect it with what follows, so as to give a poetic form to the original. In that case the words ‘not good’ have to be omitted, and the words translated, ‘He who has respect of persons in judgement says to the wicked,’ &c.

**24.** For the thought of this verse cf. xvii. 15.

**25. rebuke.** It is uncertain whether this word is to be taken absolutely, or whether ‘him’ should be inserted, as the R. V. does. The former usage is without parallel in the book, but inasmuch as this is a late addition, that objection is not fatal. The best meaning seems given by understanding it as ‘reproving’ in general.

**good blessing.** Literally, ‘a blessing of good,’ that is, which consists in getting good fortune.

He <sup>a</sup> kisseth the lips 26  
 That giveth a right answer.  
 Prepare thy work without, 27  
 And make it ready for thee in the field ;  
 And afterwards build thine house.  
 Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause ; 28  
<sup>b</sup> And deceive not with thy lips.  
 Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me ; 29  
 I will render to the man according to his work.  
 I went by the field of the slothful, 30  
 And by the vineyard of the man void of understanding ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *kisseth with the lips*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *And wouldst thou deceive with thy lips ?*

**26. He kisseth the lips.** These words seem to be equivalent to 'he is a true friend.' This is the only place in which kissing the lips is definitely mentioned in the O. T., the ordinary form of salutation being to kiss the cheek ; but there may be a reference to the practice in Song of Songs iv. 11, and v. 1 (see notes on these passages). Herodotus tells us that the practice was a Persian one, and from that source the Hebrews may have borrowed it.

**27. Prepare thy work.** Cf. verses 3 and 4. Apparently the reference is to the careful agriculturist, who is advised to get his land well in order, and have a definite source of income from his crops and herds before he thinks of building a house and founding a home. It is the natural order of affairs that has to be followed by all settlers in new countries.

**28. without cause.** The LXX understands this as equivalent to false witness, but it is possible that the idea may rather be a warning against maliciousness, interpreting acts of a neighbour wrongfully, and making complaint against him, which is not properly justified.

**And deceive not.** As the margin shows, the Hebrew is in the form of a question, but the imperative better fits the context, and is supported by the LXX.

**29. Say not, &c.** Cf. xx. 22, and xxiii. 17. This verse forms a very interesting stepping-stone between the law of retaliation as contained, say, in Lev. xxiv. 19, 20, and the law of love given in Matt. v. 38-42.

**30-34.** Cf. vi. 6-11, the last two verses in each passage being identical.

- 31 And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns,  
The face thereof was covered with <sup>a</sup> nettles,  
And the stone wall thereof was broken down.
- 32 Then I beheld, and considered well :  
I saw, and received instruction.
- 33 <sup>b</sup> Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,  
A little folding of the hands to sleep :
- 34 So shall thy poverty come as a robber  
And thy want as an armed man.
- 25 These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men  
of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out.
- 3 It is the glory of God to conceal a thing :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *wild vetches*

<sup>b</sup> See ch. vi. 10, 11.

**30. understanding.** The word might here be rendered common sense.

**31.** The triplet form of this verse is uncommon, but there seems no way of altering it without unduly violent conjecture. We cannot tell exactly what plants are meant by those here translated 'thorns and nettles.' The first only occurs in this passage, and the second probably means 'vetches.' Mr. Poste (see article 'Nettle,' *H. D. E.*) thinks that the word is a general one for 'brushwood,' and says that various species of thorn are to be found in all waste places in Palestine, and thinks *brushwood* would better express its meaning in all the Biblical passages.

**stone wall:** Cf. Isa. v. 5.

**34. a robber.** The Hebrew literally means a 'walker,' but a slight alteration gives the satisfactory meaning of the text.

**xxv. 1. These also are proverbs.** On the general relation of this section with what has gone before, and as to the validity of the title, see the Introduction, p. 11.

**copied out.** More properly, 'transcribed.' The word in this sense is a very late one, and is itself indicative of the period at which this editorial note was written.

**2. the glory of God.** This is here seen in the mysterious ways of creation and Providence, and with the manner of the Divine working is contrasted the proper conduct of a king, which is to do his utmost to act openly in all matters of government. The word

But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.  
 The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, 3  
 And the heart of kings is unsearchable.  
 Take away the dross from the silver, 4  
 And there cometh forth a vessel for the finer :  
 Take away the wicked *from* before the king, 5  
 And his throne shall be established in righteousness.  
<sup>a</sup> Put not thyself forward in the presence of the king 6  
 And stand not in the place of great men :  
 For better is it that it be said unto thee, Come up hither ; 7

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *Glorify not thyself.*

is probably a protest against the underhand dealings of many Eastern courts.

**3. unsearchable.** This may be taken as the complementary truth to that stated in the preceding verse. The superior wisdom of kings is an accepted axiom of the writer, and there may also be a reference to the fact that even in the best and truest counsel there must necessarily be an element of secrecy.

**4. the dross.** Cf. xvii. 3 and xxvii. 21 for references to the processes of the workers in precious metal.

**a vessel for the finer.** Or 'for the smith.' The commentators in illustration of these words cite Exod. xxxii. 24, where Aaron says, 'I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.' But it is obvious that more is requisite for the production of a silver vessel than the mere work of the refiner ; and if we are to read 'smith,' the verse will still remain a very abbreviated account indeed of the process of his art. It appears, therefore, that the reading of the LXX is preferable. It renders 'and it will be purified entirely pure,' depending, of course, upon a different form of the Hebrew text, but probably it here represents the correct form.

**5. righteousness.** For this phrase cf. xxiv. 16 and note, where contrarily 'by calamity' is read by the R. V., while it renders 'in righteousness' here. The phrase may even preferably be rendered 'by righteousness.'

**6. Put not thyself forward.** Here, again, we may have a reference to the period at which this section of the book is written, for the counsel is not only one of general seemliness of conduct, but of special guidance in circumstances of danger.

- Than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of  
 the prince,  
 Whom thine eyes have seen.  
 8 Go not forth hastily to strive,  
<sup>a</sup> Lest *thou know not* what to do in the end thereof,  
 When thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.  
 9 Debate thy cause with thy neighbour *himself*,  
<sup>b</sup> And disclose not the secret of another :  
 10 Lest he that heareth it revile thee,  
 And thine infamy turn not away.  
 11 A word <sup>c</sup> fitly spoken

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Lest it be said in the end thereof, What wilt thou do ? when &c.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *But*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *in due season*

**7. Come up hither.** The scene is obviously that of a public feast in a palace, and has a close resemblance to the parable in Luke xiv. 8-11, and that passage is probably based on this.

**Whom thine eyes have seen.** These words form a very unsatisfactory conclusion to the verse, and it is much better to attach them, with many of the ancient versions and modern commentators, to the following verse, to which we now turn.

**8. Go not forth.** If we make the last clause of the previous verse the first clause of this one, as has been suggested, then we shall read, 'What thine eyes have seen, go not forth hastily to'—and then some word will be requisite signifying 'utter' or 'proclaim.' The Hebrew word, however, as read means 'strive,' but a slight alteration will give the requisite significance, and then the two clauses fit in most appropriately with the verses that follow.

**Lest thou know not.** The Hebrew word translated 'lest' seems impossible in the context, and many rather desperate attempts have been made to interpret it. The simplest way is to follow some recent scholars, and alter 'lest' to 'for,' and turn the whole into a question, 'For what wilt thou do in the end?' &c., the obvious reference being to the confusion that will fall upon the man, when he has disclosed what ought to have been kept secret, an injunction which is simply enforced in verses 9 and 10.

**9. the secret of another.** This might also be read 'the secret to another.'

**11. A word fitly spoken.** This is probably better expressed

Is *like* apples of gold in <sup>a</sup> baskets of silver  
 As <sup>b</sup> an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, 12  
*So is* a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.  
 As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, 13  
*So is* a faithful messenger to them that send him ;  
 For he refresheth the soul of his masters.  
 As clouds and wind without rain, 14  
*So is* he that boasteth himself <sup>c</sup> of his gifts falsely.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *filigree work*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *a nose-ring*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *in a gift of falsehood.*

as 'a word in due season,' the meaning 'fitly' being rather an inference than a certainty. Cf. xv. 23. The famous comparison which follows is one of the most difficult clauses in the whole book. It is only necessary to look at the large number of interpretations found in any of the greater commentaries to discover how conjectural the rendering is. The one thing that is certain about it is that real gold must be meant, and not something like gold, so that all such translations as 'oranges,' and so on, must be put out of court. The word rendered 'baskets' when it occurs elsewhere means either 'carved work' or 'frescoes' (see Eccus. xxii. 17), but no interpretation is satisfactory as giving any real illustration of the idea the verse expresses. Probably the thought is the beauty of an appropriate speech, but just what kind of beauty is described we must content ourselves without discovering. It seems most probable that the reference is to some peculiarly famous kind of jewellery, since the next verse quite clearly refers to that class of art.

**12. earring.** This may also mean 'nose-ring'; see xi. 22.

**ornament.** Better, 'necklace.' See Song of Songs vii. 1.

**13. the cold of snow.** It is the coldness that is the point of the comparison, not the snow, for a fall of snow in harvest would be detrimental (see xxvi. 1), and not an object of praise. The reference apparently is to the practice of rendering drinks cool by means of snow brought from the mountains, which is still done in the East.

**For he refresheth.** This third clause spoils the parallelism of the verse, and is so apparently an unnecessary explanatory gloss that we may put it down to a scribe.

**14. boasteth himself of his gifts.** Obviously, from the illustration employed, this means 'of the gifts he is about to give,' and is another illustration of the grim humour so frequently found in the book.

- 15 By long forbearing is a <sup>a</sup> ruler persuaded,  
And a soft tongue breaketh the bone.  
16 Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for  
thee;  
Lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.  
17 Let thy foot be seldom in thy neighbour's house;  
Lest he be <sup>b</sup> weary of thee, and hate thee.  
18 A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour  
Is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *judge*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *full of thee*.

**15. By long forbearing.** Literally, the clause should be translated 'by slowness to anger is a prince or judge befooled,' but this does not seem to give any intelligible meaning, unless it is an extreme form of stating the truth, elsewhere expressed as 'a soft answer turning away wrath,' and so it is here said that the man of patient spirit outwits the machinations of the unjust judge or the tyrannous ruler. The same idea seems to be expressed by the second clause, which is certainly to be paralleled by xv. 1, while the strange metaphor may find an illustration in the proverbial expression about the continuous drop which wears away the stone.

**16. Hast thou found honey?** See xxiv. 13 and note. Here the danger of the cloying food causing nausea may be a metaphorical warning against rushing impetuously into learning, and so devouring it at first as to breed a disgust of it at a later time. The proverb may be taken as a general counsel toward moderation, not only in the luxuries, but in regard to all the goods of life. See Eccclus. xxxvii. 27-31.

**17.** Cf. Eccclus. xiii. 9, though the verse there has rather more worldly wisdom in it than this one.

**18. A man that beareth false witness.** Here, again, we have one of those frequent warnings against a sin which seems to have been a very common one amongst the Jews. The phraseology is that of the Decalogue, and its place in that primitive collection of laws shows how necessary the counsel was felt to be.

**maul.** This is the only place where the word occurs in the Hebrew Bible, and also the only place where it is so translated in the English version. It is sometimes spelt 'mall,' and denotes a large and heavy hammer, generally of wood, used for driving wedges or similar purposes. It may here refer to a club as a weapon of warfare, or as the weapon of defence carried by the



Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble 19  
 Is *like* a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.  
 As one that taketh off a garment in cold weather, *and as* 20  
 vinegar upon <sup>a</sup> nitre,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *soda*

Eastern shepherd. In this verse and the next the R. V. curiously, and unnecessarily, has followed the A. V. in inverting the proper order of the clauses. The picturesque illustrations should come first in each case, thus: 'A maul, &c., is a man,' and 'a broken tooth, &c., is confidence.'

**19. Confidence in an unfaithful man.** This is a mistranslation of the Hebrew, which should be rendered 'an unfaithful man's confidence,' that is, 'when trouble comes the evil man (i. e. the irreligious man) has no ground of hope,' or 'the ground of hope which he has is certain to play him false, as does a broken tooth or a sprained foot when you come to rely upon them.'

**20. As one that taketh off a garment.** There are many difficulties about this verse, and they begin with the first clause. As it stands, the meaning of the verb rendered 'taketh off' is uncertain. It usually means 'adorn,' and in the form which only occurs here might possibly mean 'take off.' But, whether it means 'to put on' or 'to take off,' it does not seem applicable to the case. To 'take off' a garment is only imprudent, but something more than that seems to be meant by the words which follow, while 'to adorn oneself' with a garment does not seem particularly reprehensible even in cold weather, unless it be supposed that stress is laid on the adornment rather than the utility. A much more radical treatment of the clause is probably the true solution. The letters are almost identical with those which form the last clause of the previous verse, and when they were written without any vowels, as was the practice, a scribe might easily have copied them twice over and at a later time some one have made the slight alterations that are requisite to get the present translation out of it. The best thing to do with it, therefore, is to omit the clause altogether and begin the verse with the next words.

**as vinegar upon nitre.** The word rendered nitre should really be 'natron,' which is practically equivalent to what we ordinarily call washing soda. The effect of vinegar poured upon this substance is, first of all to make it effervesce, and, secondly, to destroy its specific qualities. Neither of these effects seems very applicable in the present connexion, though some have supposed that the effervescence is taken as a figure of the irritation pro-

So is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.

- 21 If <sup>a</sup> thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat ;  
 And if he be thirsty, give him water to drink ;  
 22 For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,  
 And the LORD shall reward thee.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *he that hateth thee.*

duced by the action described. This seems rather far-fetched, and a solution seems to be discoverable in another quarter. The LXX renders 'as vinegar for a wound,' the first effect of which, of course, is to make it smart severely, and this may be the point of the parallel. We are told that the Egyptians use vinegar and natron as a cure for toothache. If we could suppose this to be the reference, we might then fancy that the whole teaching of the verse is that it is a wise and kindly thing to do to sing songs to a heavy heart, and is a remedy for grief and for the gnawing pains of sorrow. This is a very attractive solution of the problem, but it must be confessed that it has not been the ordinary one, and that a parallel passage in Eccclus. xxii. 6 rather supports the ordinary reading. It is the incongruity of mirthful songs in sorrowful surroundings that apparently strikes the writer, and we may illustrate the idea from the pathetic effect of the fool's song in the 'Yeomen of the Guard.' A very noteworthy use of the verse is that it suggested to Holman Hunt his striking picture entitled 'The Awakened Conscience.' He tells us, 'My desire was to show how the still small voice speaks to a human soul in the turmoil of life' (cf. *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, vol. i, p. 347).

**21. thine enemy.** This is, perhaps, even stronger than the original, which has 'he that hateth thee.'

**bread to eat.** The 'bread' and 'water' of the Hebrew are omitted from the LXX, as also in Paul's quotation from the passage in Rom. xii. 20. They may, therefore, possibly have been explanatory additions.

**22. heap coals of fire.** The usage of the phrase in Ps. cxi. 10, and later in several passages in Ecclesiasticus, e.g. xxxvi. 9, seems to indicate that the expression denotes vengeance; but there is a difficulty in so understanding it, since it would then seem that the counsel is to take vengeance upon him in a more sure and certain manner than by rougher methods; and the closing words of the verse, which promise the reward of the Lord, do not make it easier. The general explanation given is that such conduct will first cause the enemy burning shame, which will eventuate in the blessing of love; but this seems rather forced, and to be the

The north wind bringeth forth rain :	23
So doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance.	
<sup>a</sup> It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop,	24
Than with a contentious woman in a wide house.	
As cold waters to a <sup>b</sup> thirsty soul,	25
So is good news from a far country.	
As a <sup>c</sup> troubled fountain, and a corrupted spring,	26
So is a righteous man that <sup>d</sup> giveth way before the wicked.	

<sup>a</sup> See ch. xxi. 9.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *weary*  
<sup>d</sup> Or, *is moved*

Heb. *trampled*.

outcome of later ideas. Whether such gracious vengeance and the high ethical quality it indicates was present to the mind of the writer is a little doubtful.

<sup>7</sup> **The north wind.** The west wind (see Luke xii. 54) was generally supposed to be the harbinger of rain, but it may also come from the direction here named, and, again, the phrase may not be perfectly exact. The point of the comparison is that of the certain sequence of a particular effect upon a particular cause.

**24.** This is an exact repetition of xxi. 9.

**25. a thirsty soul.** This would be more accurately rendered 'a weary soul,' and the beauty of the comparison is obvious.

**26. a troubled fountain.** Literally, 'trampled' (see Ezek. xxxii. 2), from the practice of men and beasts entering the fountain and defiling it.

**a corrupted spring.** This may either mean that the water has been spoiled, as in the former case, or, more probably, since the word can be rendered 'ruined,' it designates a fountain whose surrounding wall has been broken down, and, the stones having fallen into the well, it is impossible any longer to reach the water.

**giveth way before.** This is generally understood to mean that the righteous man has been destroyed by the devices of the wicked, but such an interpretation would rather demand the picture of some beautiful and noble building that had fallen into ruin, and, therefore, the interpretation which sees in this a reference to moral failure is more probable. Lange quotes an interesting application of the proverb by Lord Bacon, who applies it to the legal decisions of a judge, and writes: 'One foul sentence doeth more hurt than many foul examples; for these do but corrupt the stream, the other corrupteth the fountain.'

- 27 It is not good to eat much honey :  
<sup>a</sup> So *for men* to search out their own glory is *not* glory.  
 28 <sup>b</sup> He whose spirit is without restraint  
 Is *like* a city that is broken down and hath no wall.  
 26 As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest,  
 So honour is not seemly for a fool.  
 2 As the sparrow in her wandering, as the swallow in her  
 flying,  
<sup>a</sup> Or, *But for men to search out their own glory, is glory* The  
 Hebrew text is obscure.  
<sup>b</sup> Or, *He that hath no rule over his spirit*

27. it is not good, &c. Cf. verse 16 above.

**So for men.** This clause is very difficult. The words 'for men' are introduced as an attempt at explanation, as is also the negative, which has no equivalent in Hebrew. By a slight change of the Hebrew the meaning is obtained 'to search out difficult things is glory'; but the reading is uncertain, and the meaning not very appropriate. Another alteration gives the meaning 'to search out difficult things is weariness,' which is in agreement with the teaching of Ecclesiastes, but has no parallel in Proverbs. Frankenberg ingeniously renders, 'therefore be sparing in complimentary speech,' which would involve a comparison of the nauseating effect of honey and flattery, but it is difficult to get this meaning satisfactorily from the existing Hebrew. Of the attempted translations, these here noted are the best, but, again, we have probably to confess that the original text is beyond our reconstruction with any certainty. As it stands, there is a play upon words in the original, well rendered by Plumptre, as follows: 'To search into weighty matters is itself a weight.'

**28. He whose spirit.** That is, the man without self-control. Here, again, our version needlessly inverts the order of the clauses. See note on verse 18 above.

xxvi. 1. Cf. xxv. 13. Here the reference to unseasonable snow and rain are regarded as symbolical of the unsuitability of an incompetent person for high and important offices. During the harvest season in Palestine there is no rainfall; consequently, if such a thing should occur it would be quite abnormal. See 1 Sam. xii. 16-18.

**2. wandering.** Perhaps 'flitting' is a better word, the reference being to the quick and constant moving of the sparrow, as in the line of Catullus's famous poem:

'Sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc.'

So the curse that is causeless <sup>a</sup> lighteth not.  
 A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass,  
 And a rod for the back of fools.  
 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 <sup>b</sup> his own conceit.  
 He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool  
 Cutteth off *his own* feet, and drinketh in damage.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *cometh not*.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *his own eyes*.

**the curse.** Here we have a reference to a very widespread belief among many peoples that curses have a kind of independent existence, and follow those against whom they are uttered until they strike them. (See Judges xvii. 2.) According to this verse the curses that are uttered without any reasonable cause have no power to hurt those against whom they are aimed. A later and purer faith did away with all possibility of cursing as a religious act (cf. Matt. v. 44; Rom. xii. 14). On the idea of the Divine cursing see Mal. ii. 2.

**lighteth not.** According to the Hebrew marg., this should be translated 'lighteth upon him.' The two words in Hebrew are very nearly alike, but the meaning suggested by the illustration in the former part of the verse is that the curse does not reach its object rather than that it returns upon the person who uttered it, though the latter idea is one familiar to folklore, as in the English proverb, 'Curses are like chickens; they come home to roost.'

**3. whip . . . bridle.** We may either suppose that the change in the words is for purely rhetorical purposes, or imagine that the whip was more appropriate for horses, while the gentler and more patient ass, the ordinary riding animal, could be sufficiently guided by the bridle. The point of the proverb is clear enough (cf. xix. 22).

**4, 5.** These verses form a complement one to the other, and Plumptre notices that the Pythagoreans had maxims of similar form. We are reminded in verse 4 of the saying of our Lord in Matt. vii. 6. Cf the line of M. Drayton:

'Fools as we met, so fools again we parted.'

**6.** As noted several times in the former chapter, our translation here inverts the order of the Hebrew clauses.

**Cutteth off . . . feet.** This is generally understood to mean the

7 The legs of the lame hang loose:

So is a parable in the mouth of fools.

8 <sup>a</sup> As a bag of gems in a heap of stones,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *As one that bindeth fast a stone in a sling*

fect of the man who sends the message; that is to say, that to send a fool is equivalent to sending no messenger at all; but the phrase is admittedly difficult to understand. Some would render it 'cuts off the legs of his messenger,' but the result and meaning is much the same.

**drinketh in damage.** This phrase is also difficult, since the Hebrew word means 'wrong wrought with violence,' and that is rather strong for the context. The metaphor 'to drink in violence' is likewise a curious one, but the general meaning is pretty obvious.

**7. The legs of the lame.** The translation of this line is very uncertain, seeing that the verb is not clear. It may either mean 'to draw up,' 'to take away,' or 'to hang loose,' and translations have been based on each one of these significations (see the A. V. for the third, and the LXX for the second, since it translates 'take away the power of locomotion from the lame'). Some have altered the text so as to make it a humorous proverb which compares the parable in the mouth of fools to the leaping of the lame. It seems that we must content ourselves with the general idea of the words, namely, that a fool can make no better use of a wise saying than a lame man of his limbs.

**8. As a bag of gems.** This first line is notoriously difficult to translate, because the words in the Hebrew are several of them very uncertain in meaning. Hence the translation of the A. V. and R. V. marg., 'As he who binds a stone in a sling,' is so very different. Let us take the translation of the text first. Even if the words may mean what they are here represented as meaning, there seems no appropriateness about the metaphor. What would be the effect of putting a bag of gems on a stoneheap? It could only mean a somewhat far-fetched metaphor for doing a foolish act, and that is the significance that is given to it. In a similar way is the rendering of the A. V. understood. A sling is meant to discharge stones, not to hold them, and so if a man binds a stone into a sling he destroys its purpose. Some translators, reading simply 'to fit a stone into a sling,' understand the meaning to be that just as swiftly as a stone leaves a sling does honour pass from a fool, so that to bestow honour upon him is useless. Cf. the English proverb, 'A fool's bolt is soon shot.' More far-fetched still is the translation of the Vulgate, based upon a late Hebrew tradition, that the reference here is to the casting

So is he that giveth honour to a fool.

*As a thorn that goeth up into the hand of a drunkard,* 9

So is a parable in the mouth of fools.

<sup>n</sup> *As an archer that woundeth all,* 10

So is he that hireth the fool and he that hireth them that pass by.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *A master worker formeth all things ; but he that hireth the fool is as one that hireth them that pass by* The Hebrew text is obscure.

of a stone upon the cairns that were sacred to Mercury. The comparison would then be with the foolishness of heathen superstition, but the explanation is probably too far-fetched to be likely. Perhaps the original text is corrupt, and we cannot now ascertain its original form.

9. *goeth up.* This is generally understood to mean 'pierces,' but the Hebrew word will not bear that meaning. Its real sense is 'growing,' but this, of course, is quite inappropriate in the connexion. Delitzsch, therefore, suggests, on the analogy of a late Hebrew construction, that the word may mean 'gets possession of,' so that the idea would then be 'like a drunken man who gets possession of a branch of a thorn-tree, so is a fool with a proverb.' He will do more damage to other people with it than even to himself. We may picture in our minds a drunken Irishman with a shillelagh. On the ordinary assumption that the reference is to the injury a man may do himself, cf. Eccles. xix. 12.

10. This verse is probably the most obscure and difficult in the whole book, and it is certain that the original text must be corrupt. A literal translation of the Hebrew will show to the English reader better than anything else how little we have to build upon. 'Much produces (or wounds) all, and he who hires a fool and he who hires passers-by.' Further, the word rendered 'much' may also mean 'master,' and has by some been translated 'archer.' This is all that can be said with certainty about the verse, and the witness of the versions shows that from the very earliest times attempts at emendation have been made, for they are obviously based upon slightly altered forms of the Hebrew. Many of them are very forced, and cannot be justified by any rules of Hebrew grammar. Neither is their sense appropriate in itself, as may be seen from one specimen, namely, the Syriac, which, based upon the Greek, renders 'The flesh of fools suffers much, and the drunken man crosses the sea.' Amongst emendations those of Luther and Delitzsch are probably as good as any. The former renders 'A good master makes all right, but he who hires a

- 11 As a dog that returneth to his vomit,  
So is a fool that repeateth his folly.
- 12 Seest thou a man wise in <sup>a</sup> his own conceit?  
There is more hope of a fool than of him.
- 13 <sup>b</sup> The sluggard saith, There is a lion in the way;  
A lion is in the streets.
- 14 As the door turneth upon its hinges,  
So doth the sluggard upon his bed.
- 15 <sup>c</sup> The sluggard burieth his hand in the dish;  
It wearieth him to bring it again to his mouth.
- 16 The sluggard is wiser in <sup>a</sup> his own conceit  
Than seven men that can <sup>d</sup> render a reason.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *his own eyes*.

<sup>b</sup> See ch. xxii. 13.

<sup>c</sup> See ch. xix. 24.

<sup>d</sup> Or, *answer discreetly*

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bungler ruins the matter,' and the latter 'Much produces all (i. e. to him who hath shall be given), but the fool's hire and he who hires him pass away.' We must be content to leave the verse in its original obscurity, and follow the example of the wiser commentators, who content themselves without attempting to translate it.

11. This powerful, if inelegant, proverb is quoted in the N. T. in 2 Peter ii. 22 in a form that shows us it was a common popular saying, and Delitzsch produces evidence that the thought of it was familiar in Aramaic popular speech. The LXX adds a verse here which is identical with Eccles. iv. 21, but out of place in this context.

12. This is the one verse in the book, with the single exception of xxix. 20, which answers in form to this, where the fool is regarded as in any way giving us ground for hope concerning himself. The verse is quoted by Bunyan in his description of Ignorance.

13. Cf. xxii. 13, and the note there. Whenever the sluggard is introduced into the Proverbs we are immediately in an atmosphere of humorous portraiture.

14. The lazy man gets no further than the door, which always seems to offer the hope of going further, but continually returns upon itself.

15. Cf. xix. 24, and note there.

16. **render a reason.** The translation of the margin, 'answer discreetly,' better expresses the sense of the original.



- <sup>a</sup> He that passeth by, *and* vexeth himself with strife 17  
 belonging not to him,  
 Is *like* one that taketh a dog by the ears.  
 As a madman who casteth firebrands, 18  
 Arrows, and death ;  
 So is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, 19  
 And saith, Am not I in sport ?  
 For lack of wood the fire goeth out : 20  
 And where there is no whisperer, contention ceaseth.  
 As coals are to hot embers, and wood to fire ; 21  
 So is a contentious man to inflame strife.  
<sup>b</sup> The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, 22  
 And they go down into the innermost parts of the  
 belly.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *He that vexeth himself . . . is like one that taketh a passing dog &c.*

<sup>b</sup> See ch. xviii. 8.

17. Again in this verse there is an inversion of the clauses of the original.

**He that passeth by.** These words, which are represented by an adjective in the original, are probably an addition to the text. When retained they can apply either to the man or to the dog, but in neither case have they much appropriateness, and the full meaning of the verse is even more clear without them.

18, 19. These verses do not, perhaps, refer so much to what we call practical joking as to some false tale told about a neighbour, not maliciously, but thoughtlessly. Cf. the well-known saying 'More evil is wrought by want of thought,' &c.

20, 21. Like verses 4 and 5, these are complements one of another, and their comparisons are very striking and significant.

**As coals are to hot embers.** This gives, of course, a very good meaning in itself, namely, that added fuel increases the fierceness of the heat, but by a slight alteration of the Hebrew the word 'bellows' can be read, which, of course, gives also an excellent meaning. There does not appear, however, to be sufficient reason to make the change.

22. Cf. xviii. 8, of which this is an exact repetition.

- 23 Ferment lips and a wicked heart  
 Are *like* an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross.  
 24 He that hateth dissembleth with his lips,  
 But he layeth up deceit within him :  
 25 When he speaketh fair, believe him not ;  
 For there are seven abominations in his heart :  
 26 Though *his* hatred cover itself with guile,  
 His wickedness shall be openly shewed before the congregation.  
 27 Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein :

23-25. These verses have been thus paraphrased by one of the early Scottish poets :

‘Ane fals intent under ane fair pretence,  
 Hes causit mony innocent for to de,  
 Greit folie is to gif ower sone credence,  
 To all that speikis fairlie unto thee.  
 Ane silken tonguc, ane hart of crueltic,  
 Smytis more sore than ony schot of arrow.’

HENRYSON.

23. Here, as we have noticed frequently in recent chapters, the order of the original clauses is inverted in our translation.

**Ferment.** By the change of a single letter in the original we obtain the meaning ‘flattering,’ which is probably better.

**silver dross.** This seems to mean the refuse left after the process of refining is over, with which, apparently, common pottery was glazed over to give it the appearance of silver. In this way a very excellent parallel is obtained to the inherent falseness of the specious flatterer.

24. **layeth up.** More accurately ‘nourisheth.’

25. **seven.** This number is doubtless used here as an equivalent for completeness or fullness, that is, ‘his heart is full of all manner of evil.’ It is this verse that gives the origin of Bunyan’s town of Fairspeech, from which Mr. Byends came.

26. **congregation.** The word here probably applies to the jurisdiction of any one civil community, which in the later period of Judaism had in each place authority for administering justice.

27. **Whoso diggeth.** The thought of this verse is perfectly clear, but for the striking parallel see Eccles. xxvii. 25-29, and Delitzsch quotes French and German proverbs that are identical with the first clause. Cf. also Eccles. x. 9.

And he that rolleth a stone, it shall return upon him.  
 A lying tongue hateth those whom it hath <sup>a</sup> wounded ; 28  
 And a flattering mouth worketh ruin.  
 Boast not thyself of to-morrow ; 27  
 For thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.  
 Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth ; 2  
 A stranger, and not thine own lips.  
 A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty ; 3  
 But a fool's vexation is heavier than them both.  
 Wrath is cruel, and anger is <sup>b</sup> outrageous ; 4  
 But who is able to stand before jealousy ?  
 Better is open rebuke 5  
 Than love that is hidden.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *crushed*.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *a flood*.

**28. whom it hath wounded.** This rendering is not probable. In fact, as it stands it is almost certainly incorrect. The adjective thus rendered really means 'oppressed,' and to say that a liar hates the oppressed is not very clear. Many commentators have followed the R. V., interpreting it as hating the people whose ruin has been wrought by it. Probably we must alter the text so as to read 'brings about ruin,' on the analogy of the second clause. The LXX, perhaps following some other original, reads 'hateth truth,' and others have suggested 'deceives its possessor,' but the conjecture already given seems most likely.

xxvii. 1. Cf. Jas. iv. 13-14.

**2.** Delitzsch quotes appropriately the German proverb, 'Eigenlob stinkt, Freundes Lob hinkt, fremdes Lob klinget,' which we might translate, 'The praise of oneself is nausea, the praise of a friend lameness, but the praise of a stranger music.'

**3. vexation.** More accurately 'wrath.' The point of the comparison is difficult to understand unless it means that the wrath of a fool is harder to bear than are the loads mentioned in the previous clause. Toy thinks the word is so inappropriate that it should be omitted altogether, and considers that, following the analogy of Eccus. xxii. 14, 15, we are to regard the fool himself as the thing too heavy to be borne.

**4. jealousy.** Cf. S. of S. viii. 6.

**5. love that is hidden.** Or, by a change of vowels, 'love that hides.' The reference is not quite clear, but probably it is to love

6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend :

But the kisses of an enemy are profuse.

7 The full soul <sup>a</sup> loatheth an honeycomb :

But to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

8 As a bird that wandereth from her nest,

So is a man that wandereth from his place.

9 Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart :

So doth the sweetness of a man's friend *that cometh of*  
hearty counsel.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *trampleth upon*.

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which, from whatever reason, does not declare itself at the moment of need. Love which has too much fear to rebuke is regarded as worthless. We may call to mind the saying of 1 John iv. 18, 'He that feareth is not made perfect in love.'

**6. profuse.** This is the generally accepted translation of modern commentators, but it is not really a certain one. The A. V. rendering 'deceitful,' though appropriate, requires a change of text. It is a true description of the insincere greeting that pretends to be affection, as was the kiss of Judas (see Matt. xxvi. 49), and reminds us of the lines :

'There's the traitor's kiss of gold,  
Like the serpent's clammy fold.'

**7. loatheth.** Literally, 'tramples on,' that is, rejects with scorn.

**7. the hungry soul.** Cf. the common proverb, 'Hunger is the best sauc.' Whether there is any reference here, in the secondary sense, to praise, which the man, who seldom gets it, eagerly drinks in, is uncertain.

**8. place.** This would be better rendered by the English word 'home,' and we may think of many popular proverbs in this connexion, e.g. 'East, west, home's best,' and there is a certain interest and pathos in the thought that our own favourite song, 'Home, sweet home,' found its equivalent long ago in Judaism. We may compare further the beautiful imagery of Ps. cxxxviii.

**9.** For the pleasure derived from ointment and perfume see Song of Sol. iv. 10, &c., and references there. The second clause of the verse is unintelligible as it stands, and there must be some alteration of the text to give an intelligible meaning. The simplest change seems to be one which enables us to read 'so doth sweetness of counsel strengthen the heart.' This also has the advantage of preserving the figure of fragrance.

Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not ; 10  
And go not to thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity :

Better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off.  
My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, 11  
That I may answer him that reproacheth me.

<sup>a</sup> A prudent man seeth the evil, *and* hideth himself : 12  
*But* the simple pass on, *and* suffer for it.

<sup>b</sup> Take his garment that is surety for a stranger ; 13  
And hold him in pledge *that is surety* for a strange woman.

He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early 14  
in the morning,  
It shall be counted a curse to him.

<sup>a</sup> See ch. xxii. 3.

<sup>b</sup> See ch. xx. 16.

**10. Thine own friend, &c.** This line speaks only of one person, not of two, as the form might suggest. It will be noticed that the verse consists of three clauses, which is quite against the whole manner of this book. See notes on vi. 22. It is possible to make a fairly good connexion between the first and the third lines, if we omit the second altogether. The second clause as it stands is a distinct contradiction of xvii. 17 ; and even if we were to omit the negative, as has been suggested, the connexion would not be good, unless we follow Bickell in supposing the brother of the second clause to be identical with the friend of the first. It seems that either the second clause is the insertion of some embittered scribe, or that the second or third clause is half of a verse, the former part of which is lost.

**11.** On the thought of this verse see Ecclus. xxx. 126. The appeal is for the pupil to maintain the character of the teaching he has received, in order that no legitimate reproach may be directed against the teacher.

**12.** This is a repetition of xxii. 3.

**13.** This is a repetition of xiii. 16, where see note.

**14. rising early in the morning.** This is probably an unwarranted addition, as it adds nothing to the significance of the words, and spoils the metrical form. The point of the verse is a warning against insincerity, as in xxvi. 25. Praise that is too loudly uttered carries its condemnation on its face.

- 15 A continual dropping in a very rainy day  
And a contentious woman are alike :  
16 He that would <sup>a</sup> restrain her <sup>b</sup> restraineth the wind,  
And <sup>c</sup> his right hand encountereth oil.  
17 Iron sharpeneth iron ;  
So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.  
18 Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof ;  
And he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *hide*.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *hideth*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *the ointment of his right hand bewrayeth itself*

15. Cf. xix. 13. The discomfort here suggested is that of a leaking roof. The LXX seems to have paraphrased the original, and perhaps to have had a somewhat different text as well, or to have misunderstood some of the Hebrew words. It renders, 'Drops drive a man on a wintry day out of doors, so a railing woman drives him out of his own house.'

16. **He that would restrain, &c.** Once more we have encountered a verse the original of which conveys no sense. Our version follows the Latin, which evidently regarded this verse as in some way connected with the subject of the preceding one. There is, however, nothing to indicate such connexion, and the LXX's translation is a desperate attempt to make sense of what is quite obscure. It seems perfectly impossible to the English reader that such a translation could be derived from the same text, but it is a fact that, with the very slightest manipulation, the Hebrew can thus be rendered. The LXX runs: 'The north wind is a severe wind, but by its name is termed auspicious.' One supposes that the reference is to the well-known Greek habit of calling unpleasant things by pleasant names (cf. Euxine and Eumenides). We must conclude that with our present knowledge the verse is inexplicable.

17. **Iron.** This proverb is very frequently employed in English, and its meaning is clear, namely, that through social intercourse men's wits are sharpened; as Lord Bacon puts it, 'Conference maketh a ready man.' Ewald understood it as referring to the magnetic attraction of iron as a symbol of friendly fellowship and union, but the Hebrew can hardly bear that meaning.

18. **Whoso keepeth.** Cf. Song of Sol. viii. 12 and 2 Tim. ii. 6. The point of the proverb is that just as surely as the careful husbandman will reap the reward of his attention to the fig-tree, so will the diligent servant be rewarded by his master.

- <sup>a</sup> As in water face *answereth* to face, 19  
 So the heart of man to man.  
<sup>b</sup> Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied ; 20  
 And the eyes of man are never satisfied.  
 The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, 21  
 And a man is *tried* by <sup>c</sup> his praise.  
 Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar with a 22  
 pestle among bruised corn,  
 Yet will not his foolishness depart from him.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *As water sheweth face to face, so the heart sheweth man to man.*

<sup>b</sup> See ch. xv. 11.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *that which he praiseth* Or, *that whereof he boasteth*

**19. As in water.** The words 'in water' probably arise from a misreading of the Hebrew, and the more correct reading is probably just 'as face answers to face, so does mind to mind.' The majority of commentators take the point of comparison to be the similarity, but others, mindful of the diversities of the human countenance, give this proverb the same sense as the familiar English one, 'Many men, many minds.'

<sup>2</sup> **Sheol and Abaddon.** On these names see note on xv. 11, and for the idea of this verse see xxx. 16. For a reference to the desire of the eye see Eccles. i. 8, ii. 10, iv. 8. The LXX here adds another verse, which may be rendered, 'An abomination to the Lord is he who fixes his eyes, and the uninstructed are unrestrained in speech.' This is probably an addition by some scribe who introduces another proverb that has to do with eyes.

**21. by his praise.** The original meaning of this phrase is difficult to recover. It is frequently understood of the reputation which a man acquires at the hand of his fellows, that is to say, that public opinion is after all roughly just, and that a man may be judged in accordance with the general estimate formed of him by his fellow citizens. Others understand it of the way in which a man bears praise, whether it makes him more or less vain. But a third and very excellent sense is that given by the R. V. margin, namely, that he is tested by the things which he praises, that is to say, that we get an excellent index of character from the subjects and men which evoke any man's highest eulogies. The LXX, again, has an addition here of a verse which represents a common idea in the book, namely, 'the heart of the transgressor seeks evil, but the upright heart seeks knowledge.'

**22. in a mortar.** There is some difficulty about this word,

- 23 Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks,  
*And* look well to thy herds :  
 24 For riches are not for ever ;  
*And* doth the crown endure unto all generations ?  
 25 The <sup>a</sup> hay is carried, and the tender grass sheweth itself,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *grass*.

as Nestle and others consider it may mean 'a refining pot.' Others have supposed that the words 'with a pestle among bruised corn' should be omitted as an obvious gloss, but a note by Mr. Mackie in the *Expository Times* (vol. viii, p. 521) shows that the practice is quite intelligible, as he describes a dish, known in Syria as 'kibbeh,' in which minced mutton is pounded in a mortar for an hour, and then bruised wheat is added and the pounding process is continued till the meat and grain become a uniform, indistinguishable pulp.' Commenting upon this verse, he further says, 'The fool is the pounded mutton, and after the pestle and mortar, as education and enviroment, have done their best, the tiniest shred will still have all the characteristics of the mass.' This seems a very natural and excellent explanation of the passage. According to one Greek version, what is spoken of is the beating up of a mass of soft fruits, such as olives, figs, &c., but even then the metaphor is the same. The LXX has a quite different rendering, namely, 'Though thou scourge a fool, disgracing him in the council,' which must have arisen from a misreading of the present Hebrew, or from a different original. Cheyne thinks that the Greek is a conjectural paraphrase of the words 'though thou scourge a fool in the midst of insults,' or otherwise, 'in the midst of his associates,' but such conjectures are too uncertain to base a translation upon them.

From verses 23 to 27 we have a short agricultural treatise, a kind of Hebrew *Georgic* after the manner of some of the Greek and Latin poets. They may be a selection of gnomic sayings familiar among agriculturists.

**23. herds.** From the context it is apparent that the thought of the writer is confined to sheep and goats, and not to larger cattle. See Eccclus. vii. 22.

**24. crown.** This word is probably wrong, as it does not make a good parallel to the thought of the first clause of the verse, and is also quite inappropriate to the present context. A slight variation of the Hebrew gives the excellent meaning 'wealth.' The LXX varies the sense somewhat, but retains the general idea. It reads 'power and strength do not remain to a man for ever, nor are they handed on from generation to generation.'

**25.** This verse is better closely connected with the verse that



And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in.  
 The lambs are for thy clothing, 26  
 And the goats are the price of the field :  
 And *there will be* goats' milk enough for thy food, for the 27  
 food of thy household ;  
 And maintenance for thy maidens.

The wicked flee when no man pursueth : 28  
 But the righteous are bold as a lion.  
 For the transgression of a land many are the princes 2  
 thereof :

---

follows. It should, therefore, be begun with some such word as 'when,' ended with a comma, and verse 26 begun with a correlative conjunction such as 'then.'

**tender grass.** This is the aftermath or second crop of hay.

**herbs of the mountains.** This describes the pastures of the uplands, which would naturally be mown later than the grass-lands of the valleys.

**26. for thy clothing.** This refers either to the shearing of the lambs and the making of cloth out of their wool (cf. xxxi. 13 and 19), or to the sale of the animals, the price of which will buy clothing.

**the price of the field.** This clearly refers to the sale of the flocks in order to purchase extra land (cf. xxxi. 16).

**27. goats' milk.** Cf. Deut. xxxii. 13, 14 for this article of diet.

**for the food of thy household.** This clause is omitted by the LXX, and some editors follow it here, considering it to have arisen from reading the previous word in the Hebrew twice over (cf. xxxi. 15).

xxviii. 1. **The wicked flee.** Cf. *Hamlet*, 'Conscience doth make cowards of us all.' Cf. also for both clauses the lines in *Henry VI* :

'Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just ;  
 And he but naked, though locked up in steel,  
 Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.'

**2. For the transgression of a land.** This is to be understood as a statement that, owing to the evil conduct of a people, they have to suffer from the instability and inconvenience of a frequent change of rulers, and Wildeboer appropriately cites Northern Israel as a good example. If we translate 'by' instead of 'for,'

But by <sup>a</sup> men of understanding *and* knowledge the state *thereof* shall be prolonged.

3 A needy man that oppresseth the poor

Is *like* a sweeping rain <sup>b</sup> which leaveth no food.

4 They that forsake the law praise the wicked :

But such as keep the law contend with them.

5 Evil men understand not judgement :

But they that seek the LORD understand all things.

6 <sup>c</sup> Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *a man*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *without food.*

<sup>c</sup> See ch. xix. 1.

it will then mean that this state of affairs is the natural result of the evil of the people. The alteration of one letter changes 'princes' into 'enemies,' or 'misfortunes,' both of which words would give good sense.

**But by men.** This may also, as the margin shows, be singular, that is, 'by a man.'

**the state.** This can also be translated 'right,' which gives a very excellent meaning.

**3. A needy man.** Though this is the correct translation of the Hebrew text, it is hardly possible that the latter can be accurate. Some such expression as 'a wicked man,' or, as some read, 'a ruler,' is requisite to give appropriate sense. The metaphor of the sweeping rain is a very forcible one. Some have tried to explain the words as they stand, supposing it to refer to a needy employer or owner who crushes the poor in order to make his own profit out of them; but it is doubtful whether that idea is appropriate to the circumstances of the time.

**4. They that forsake the law.** The only question is whether the term 'law' here refers to the Mosaic code, or to the system of ethical teaching so often referred to in this book. If the former is meant, then these words point to the Jews who during the Greek period apostatized, and in that sense may be said to praise the wicked, because they approved of their manner of worship. It is probable, however, that the second meaning is to be preferred, which will simply be equivalent to saying that to neglect the teaching of the sages is to take the part of 'fools.'

**5. all things.** The reference is more probably to be confined to judgement in the first clause, and the words would be better translated 'understand it perfectly' (see Ps. cxix. 99-102, and John vii. 17).

**6. perverse in his ways.** The margin preserves the literal

Than he that is <sup>a</sup> perverse in *his* ways, though he be rich.

Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son :

7

But he that is a companion of gluttonous men shameth  
his father.

He that augmenteth his substance by usury and increase, 8

Gathereth it for him that hath pity on the poor.

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, 9

Even his prayer is an abomination.

Whoso causeth the upright to go astray in an evil way, 10

He shall fall himself into his own pit :

But the perfect shall inherit good.

The rich man is wise in <sup>b</sup> his own conceit ;

11

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *perverse of two ways.*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *his own eyes.*

translation of the Hebrew, namely, 'perverse of two ways,' but a change of the vowel gives the plural, as in the text.

**7. gluttonous men.** Probably more generally 'profligates' (cf. xxiii. 20, 21).

**8. by usury.** Better, 'by interest,' the R.V. here retaining the old English term. For Hebrew laws against taking of interest see Exod. xxii. 25 ; Lev. xxv. 35-37. In later Judaism the law was made even more exacting. This verse says that the taker of interest will defeat his own ends, because the money so acquired will pass from him into the hand of the benevolent and generous-hearted man. Of course the conditions of life alter the whole problem, and nothing in the humane directions of the O. T. touches the legitimate charge for loans of money that is customary in business transactions. For Ruskin's strongly idealistic views on the subject see *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 68, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, and *Munera Pulveris*.

**9. Cf. xv. 8.** The same ambiguity inheres in the word 'law' in this verse as in verse 4 above, but again the probability is in favour of the reference being to the instruction of the wise.

**10. into his own pit.** Cf. xxvi. 27.

**But the perfect.** These words appear either to be a note of addition by some scribe or editor, which mar the poetic form of the verse and add nothing to its thought, or they are the misplaced half of some proverb, the corresponding piece of which is lost.

**11. The rich man.** Cf. xviii. 11. The sympathy of the writer with the poor is shown here, as frequently throughout the book. Cf. also Eccles. ix. 15.

- But the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.
- 12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory :  
But when the wicked rise, men <sup>a</sup> hide themselves.
- 13 He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper :  
But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy.
- 14 Happy is the man that feareth always :  
But he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into <sup>b</sup> mischief.
- 15 As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear ;  
So is a wicked ruler over a poor people.
- 16 <sup>c</sup> The prince that lacketh understanding is also a great oppressor :

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *must be searched for*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *calamity*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *O prince that lackest understanding and art a great oppressor, he &c.*

12. The general idea of this verse is found again in verse 28 of this chapter, which may well be taken as an explanatory comment upon this one.

**hide themselves.** This is probably as good a meaning as can be obtained for the original, though some editors alter the text so as to make it read 'tremble.'

13. **whoso confesseth.** Here we have very high teaching indeed upon confession and repentance (cf. Hosea xiv. 2-4, and the words in which both John the Baptist (see Luke iii. 8) and our Lord made the keynote of their respective ministries).

14. **feareth.** Not 'reverences,' but 'is in dread of,' the reference probably being to punishment (cf. 1 Peter i. 17).

**mischief.** Read rather, with the margin, 'a calamity.'

15. **a ranging bear.** The alteration of one letter in the Hebrew would make this read 'a bear robbed of her whelp' (see xvii. 12), which is very appropriate, and probably correct.

**poor people.** There does not seem any special appropriateness in the epithet 'poor' here, except to show the writer's sympathy with the poor or, perhaps, it is descriptive of the actual condition which he had in mind, and that the poverty added to the harshness of the tyranny, as has been so often the case in Russia.

16. **The prince.** Probably this word is out of place, and we should simply read, 'He who is a great oppressor lacketh under-

- But* he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.  
 A man that is laden with the blood of any person 17  
 Shall flee unto the pit; let no man stay him.  
 Whoso walketh uprightly shall be delivered: 18  
 But <sup>a</sup> he that is perverse in *his* ways shall fall at once.  
<sup>b</sup> He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: 19  
 But he that followeth after vain *persons* shall have poverty  
 enough.  
 A faithful man shall abound with blessings: 20

<sup>a</sup> Or, *he that walketh perversely in two ways*      <sup>b</sup> See ch. xii. 11.

standing.' The word 'prince' may have been introduced from the preceding verse.

**17. laden with the blood.** What these words mean it is almost impossible to tell. Some interpreters refer them to the man who oppresses the poor; but there would be no sense in saying that such a man was fleeing to the pit, in the sense of the grave; and if he were, he would be so unpopular that there would be no need to forbid men to prevent him from so doing. Others have understood it of the ceaseless remorse of the murderer, but, apart from the fact that it is almost impossible to give the Hebrew this significance, it is also difficult to give any satisfactory explanation of the counsel not to stay him. Delitzsch supposes it refers to the impossibility of helping him in such a case. There can be no real deliverance until he has made his peace with God. All such interpretations, however, are unsatisfactory, and it is better to regard it as being in some way a corrupted text that originally had some reference to the crime of murder, but is now unintelligible. Toy regards it as probably being an extract from a law book that has got in here by mistake.

**18. perverse in his ways.** See note on verse 6 above.

**at once.** This translation is very doubtful, nor is it very satisfactory. By an alteration of the text it has been made to mean 'into a pit,' but it is probably better to omit the word altogether.

**19.** This verse is a slight variation of xii. 11, where see note. The contrast between bread and poverty is more obvious than that of the earlier verse.

**20. A faithful man,** that is, one who is trustworthy in carrying out all the engagements into which he enters.

**blessings.** It is not possible to confine this either to the results that come to himself through such honourable dealings, or to the good that he is able to do to others thereby.

But he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be unpunished.

21 To have respect of persons is not good :

<sup>a</sup> Neither that a man should transgress for a piece of bread.

22 He that hath an evil eye hasteth after riches,  
And knoweth not that want shall come upon him.

23 He that rebuketh a man shall afterward find more favour  
Than he that flattereth with the tongue.

24 Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is  
no transgression ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *For a piece of bread a man will transgress*

**unpunished.** The probable implication is that the love of gain will lead him into devious courses (see 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10), and that through these he will meet punishment at the hand of God and men.

**21. To have respect of persons.** Cf. for this clause xxiii. 5 and xxiv. 23.

**Neither that a man, &c.** This should probably be translated without any connective, as the clause is apparently independent of the former one. The majority of commentators attempt to link the two together by supposing that the reference in both cases is to bribery in courts of law, and that the phrase 'a piece of bread' is the equivalent for a small bribe. It seems, however, more probable that the second clause refers to the temptations attending poverty (see xi. 26), and that it belongs to some other proverb, the first half of which is lost, and that it has been wrongly attached to the previous clause.

**22. an evil eye.** Cf. xxiii. 6 and note. The phrase is equivalent to 'avaricious.' For the contrast of the thought here see xi. 25.

**23. He that rebuketh.** On the general thought of this verse see xxv. 12 and xxvii. 5, 6.

**afterward.** This word has probably been wrongly introduced into the Hebrew, because in order to make this translation possible the word has had to be altered, the literal meaning of the Hebrew as it stands being 'after me,' which can only mean 'in accordance with my precepts,' which is scarcely probable.

**24. Whoso robbeth his father.** Very probably the thought of this verse lies at the back of the saying of Jesus recorded in Mark vii. 11, 12. It is possible that the words 'and saith it is no transgression' are an explanatory note introduced by some scribe, as they destroy the metrical form of the verse, and are certainly not essential to its clear meaning.

The same is the companion of a destroyer.

He that is of a greedy spirit stirreth up strife : 25

But he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.

He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool : 26

But whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.

He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack : 27

But he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.

When the wicked rise, men hide themselves : 28

But when they perish, the righteous increase.

He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck 29

Shall suddenly be broken, and that without remedy.

When the righteous <sup>a</sup> are increased, the people rejoice : 2

But when a wicked man beareth rule, the people sigh.

Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father : 3

<sup>a</sup> Or, *are in authority*

**25. of a greedy spirit**, that is, 'a grasping disposition,' which temper, of course, readily generates ill-feeling amongst other people.

**shall be made fat.** This is a literal translation of the Hebrew, and, of course, means 'shall prosper.'

**26. trusteth in his own heart**, that is, 'trusts in himself,' 'follows the devices of his own desires.' Cf. the trenchant note of Bunyan in the dialogue between Ignorance and Christian.

**27. he that hideth his eyes**, that is, 'disregards or does not pay attention to the suffering that is before his eyes.' (Cf. Ecclus. iv. 5, 6; Luke vi. 30-36.) On the thought of the curse see note on xxvi. 2.

**28.** Cf. verse 12 of this chapter, and the note there.

xxix. 1. **hardeneth his neck.** The word 'stiff-necked' is often used in the Bible as an equivalent for obstinate; see, for example, Exod. xxxii. 9, &c., the figure being taken from oxen used in ploughing and other agricultural processes. The second clause of this verse is practically the same as that of vi. 15.

2. Cf. xxviii. 12.

**are increased.** The alteration of one letter in the Hebrew gives the meaning 'rule' (see margin), which is probably correct.

3. The thought of this verse echoes many passages in the early part of the book, where one finds the effect of wisdom in giving

But he that keepeth company with harlots wasteth *his* substance.

4 The king by judgement establisheth the land :

But <sup>a</sup> he that exacteth gifts overthroweth it.

5 A man that flattereth his neighbour

Spreadeth a net for his steps.

6 In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare :

But the righteous doth sing and rejoice.

7 The righteous taketh knowledge of the cause of the poor

The wicked <sup>b</sup> hath not understanding to know *it*.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *he that imposeth tribute* Heb. *a man of offerings*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *understandeth not knowledge*

grievance to a man's parents frequently mentioned, and where also sensuality is stated to be the marked contrast of wisdom. The closing clause of the verse strongly suggests Luke xv. 13-30, and one wonders whether this proverb may not have been the seed from which the lovely parable there recorded grew.

4. **he that exacteth gifts.** Literally, 'a man of exaction.' The word here employed means in every other context 'ritual offerings.' Of course, the offerings in the Temple were really legalized religious taxes (see Ezek. xlv. 13-16, &c.), but here the word may cover all kinds of taxation, and one knows how great a curse unjust taxation has been, and still is, in Oriental countries.

5. **flattereth.** The word so rendered is really stronger, and signifies all kinds of wiles employed to lead a man astray. His neighbour, here, as so often, means simply 'any one else.' In Bunyan's allegory, Flatterer is represented as 'A man black of flesh, but covered with a very light robe,' who led Christian and Hopeful astray, and, 'before they were aware, they found themselves within the compass of a net in which they were both so entangled that they knew not what to do; and with that the white robe fell off the black man's back.'

6. **transgression.** An alteration of the Hebrew gives the meaning 'path,' which is excellent, and similarly, in the next line, the words 'doth sing' can be rendered 'may run.' These alterations preserve better the form of the figure, but the meaning is equally clear in either case.

7. **hath not understanding.** This phrase is generally interpreted either as meaning 'does not take the trouble to understand' or 'has not sufficient mental grasp to apprehend the meaning of the problem.' Toy would alter the text so as to read 'does not



Scornful men set a city in a flame :	8
But wise men turn away wrath.	
If a wise man hath a controversy with a foolish man,	9
<sup>a</sup> Whether he be angry or laugh, there will be no rest.	
The bloodthirsty hate him that is perfect :	10
<sup>b</sup> And as for the upright, they seek his life.	
A fool uttereth all his <sup>c</sup> anger :	11
But a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it.	
If a ruler hearkeneth to falsehood,	12
All his servants are wicked.	
The poor man and the oppressor meet together :	13
<sup>a</sup> Or, <i>He rageth and laugheth, and there is no rest</i>	
<sup>b</sup> Or, <i>But the upright care for his soul</i> <sup>c</sup> Heb. <i>spirit</i> .	

understand justice,' or 'does not plead for the needy,' but this is not requisite.

8. Cf. xi. 11. Here, as so often in the book, the particular mischief of scoffing is singled out for warning.

9. **a controversy.** This seems to be used in the special sense of a lawsuit.

**Whether he be angry.** The uncertainty here is as to who is meant, the fool or the wise man. The Hebrew most naturally suggests the fool as the subject of the clause (see margin), but in any case the meaning is similar to that of many proverbs, where the fool is spoken of as hopelessly incorrigible.

10. **they seek his life.** As the words are here read, this statement refers to the bloodthirsty, but it is probable that the text should be so altered as to read 'the upright take care of the life of the perfect.'

11. **A fool uttereth.** On this clause cf. xii. 16.

**keepeth it back.** This would naturally refer to the fool's anger, but more probably the reference is to the anger of the wise man, so it is better to read that a wise man restrained his wrath (cf. xvi. 32; Eph. iv. 31, &c.).

12. **falsehood.** Probably, 'false accusations.' Cf. Eccles. x. 2, and the common proverb, 'Like priest, like people.'

13. **oppressor.** From the context it would appear that this means the rich that grind the poor. The LXX renders 'creditor and debtor.' Cf. for the general idea xxii. 2, and also Matt. v. 45. The thought of the verse is not altogether fatalistic, though it is equivalent to saying that, in the words of the common phrase, 'It takes all sorts to make up a world.'

The LORD lighteneth the eyes of them both.

- 14 The king that faithfully judgeth the poor,  
His throne shall be established for ever.
- 15 The rod and reproof give wisdom :  
But a child left to himself causeth shame to his mother.
- 16 When the wicked <sup>a</sup> are increased, transgression increaseth :  
But the righteous shall look upon their fall.
- 17 Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest ;  
Yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.
- 18 Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint :  
But he that keepeth the law, happy is he.
- 19 A servant will not be corrected by words :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *are in authority*

14. Cf. xx. 28 ; xxv. 5.

15. **The rod and reproof.** Better, 'the rod of reproof gives' (see xiii. 24 ; xxiii. 13). On the second clause see x. 1, and for the whole verse cf. xvii below.

16. **are increased.** More probably, as in verse 2 above, 'are in authority.'

**shall look upon.** This should be translated by a stronger phrase, such as 'fast their eyes upon.' The ethical attitude suggested is not of the very highest type, but was natural to a people exulting at the overthrow of their oppressors and persecutors. Toy compares the way in which the English Puritans regarded the Royalists. This verse is probably out of place, as it comes in between two verses whose thought is very closely connected, and the LXX reads this verse both here and after xxviii. 17. Its true position may probably be in that earlier place.

17. See xix. 18.

18. **vision.** The word is doubtful. The LXX translates 'guide,' and this is quite probable, but the reference here is to the precepts of the wise, as in Eccus. vi. 35, viii. 8, seeing that nowhere else does this book speak of the vision of the prophets, but, as has been pointed out, it is not true to say that the period when prophecy flourished most was that during which the people were most obedient to the Divine commandments.

**cast off restraint.** This more probably means 'fall' or 'perish,' as in A. V.

19. **A servant will not be corrected.** This, of course, refers to the treatment of slaves, and obviously inculcates corporal

For though he understand he will not <sup>a</sup> give heed.  
 Seest thou a man that is hasty in his <sup>b</sup> words ? 20  
 There is more hope of a fool than of him.  
 He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child 21  
 Shall have him become <sup>c</sup> a son at the last.  
 An angry man stirreth up strife, 22  
 And a wrathful man aboundeth in transgression.  
 A man's pride shall bring him low : 23  
 But he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honour.  
 Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul : 24

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *answer*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *business*

<sup>c</sup> The meaning of the word is doubtful. The Vulgate renders it, *refractory*.

punishment in dealing with them. The most instructive parallel is the passage in Ecclus. xxxiii. 24-29, where very severe discipline is suggested.

**20. in his words.** Probably, with margin, 'in his business.' The second clause is identical with xxvi. 12.

**21.** This verse should probably be closely connected with verse 19, from which it has, perhaps in error, been divided by verse 20.

**a son.** The word so translated is very uncertain, seeing that this is the only place of its occurrence. It has been variously rendered 'refractory,' 'unthankful,' and, by Delitzsch, 'a nursery,' the latter meaning referring to the supposed fact that the owner's house will become overrun by the children of his indulged slave. The LXX has obviously had quite a different text, for it renders, 'He who from a child lives in luxury will become a slave and come to grief in the end,' which gives a very true and excellent meaning, but one not to be obtained from the present Hebrew. The general sense is clear, namely, a warning against over-indulgence on the part of any one.

**22. An angry man.** This means a man of wrathful temperament, and does not refer simply to a momentary outburst of anger. On the second clause of the verse see xvii. 19.

**23. low . . . lowly.** This play upon words represents the same thing in the original. On the thought of the verse cf. xviii. 12.

**24. hateth his own soul.** That is, 'is his own enemy.' The best comment upon the verse, especially on the second clause, is Lev. v. 1. The situation suggested seems to be that of a partner in the crime, who, hearing the curse pronounced upon the unknown

<sup>a</sup> He heareth the adjuration and uttereth nothing.

25 The fear of man bringeth a snare :

But whoso putteth his trust in the LORD <sup>b</sup> shall be safe.

26 Many seek the ruler's favour :

But a man's judgement *cometh* from the LORD.

27 An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous :

And he that is upright in the way is an abomination to the wicked.

30 The words of Agur the son of <sup>c</sup> Jakh ; the <sup>d</sup> oracle.

<sup>a</sup> See Lev. v. 1.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *shall be set on high*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *Jakh, of Massa* See Gen. xxv. 14.

<sup>d</sup> Or, *burden*

criminal, fails to disclose his knowledge. This is better than to understand it as the R. V. translates, as being a reference to perjury. We should therefore render, instead of 'adjuration,' 'curse.' The whole verse contains a warning against yielding to evil courses, not only because of the sin these involve, but because they lure a man on to worse acts.

25. *shall be safe*. Literally, 'shall be set on high.' (Cf. xviii. 10; Ps. xx. 1.) The LXX curiously translates this verse in two forms, the first corresponding with our English version and the second being 'impiety brings a snare upon a man, but he who trusteth in the Lord (not Jahweh, as in the former clause, but the same word as that employed in Acts iv. 24, see R.V. margin) shall be saved.'

xxx. On the general relation of this chapter to the rest of the book see Introduction, p. 12. It very probably contains the latest proverbs in the whole series, or, at all events, is later *in its present form* than all that precedes it. Great difficulties attach to the translation and interpretation of the opening verse. It is obviously a title, but whether the title refers to the whole chapter, or only to a section of it, is a matter of great controversy, and, further, it is not clear whether the whole verse is to be taken as a title, or only part of it. The suggestion of the R. V., on the whole, seems most probable, namely, that the first half of the verse constitutes a title to the collection of sayings that follow in this chapter, while the second half of the verse is to be closely linked with the paragraph, which extends to the end of verse 4. When we have decided thus far, the next question that arises is how we are to understand the terms of the title. The name Agur occurs nowhere else. It is probably best to retain it in its original

The man saith <sup>a</sup> unto Ithiel, unto Ithiel and Ucal :

<sup>a</sup> Or, as otherwise read, *I have wearied myself, O God, I have wearied myself, O God, and am consumed: for I am &c.*

Hebrew form Agur ben Jakeh, and admit that we know nothing further of him. Unfortunately, however, these proper names are capable of translation, and many of the ancient versions took them as being simply words of an ordinary sentence; thus the LXX renders, 'Reverence my words, my son, and receive them and repent,' while the Latin version understands as follows: 'The words of the assembler, the son of the vomiter,' which obviously understands the first word in a similar sense to Eccles. (cf. Eccles. i. 10) as collector of an assembly or of teachings, and the second to a man who pours out teaching. On the other hand, the word Jakeh has been rendered 'obedient' or 'pious,' and so the old Hebrew commentators understood it. A further difficulty is introduced by the word rendered 'oracle,' which many understand to be also a proper name, namely, Massa. (See Exod. xvii. 7, &c.) So understood, the word would denote the place from which the writer came, but would give us no further information about him. As the word occurs again in the opening verse of chap. xxxi, editors who there read 'Lemuel, king of Massa,' understand here a relation between the two writers, considering it probable that Agur is the king's brother; but this is all extremely speculative. By altering the text Cheyne and others read 'Agur, the author of wise poems.' The objection to taking 'oracle' as it stands is that elsewhere in the O. T. it is a word confined to the prophetic literature (see Isa. xxx. 6, &c., &c.), and always immediately introduces the message uttered. In neither way, therefore, is it suitable to this verse.

**The man saith:** This second clause of the verse is no easier to interpret than the former. We may perhaps unite the word 'oracle' with this, and render 'the oracle of the man spoken unto,' &c., but here again the words of the Hebrew may either be proper names, as the R. V. prints them, or may constitute an intelligible sentence, which is rendered in the margin as follows: 'I have wearied myself, O God; I have wearied myself, and am consumed' (or have failed). The majority of the old versions adopted this course, though they interpreted differently; e.g. the LXX has, 'These things saith the man to those who trust in God, and I cease,' which does not make much sense. Cheyne follows this suggestion of the LXX, and, by altering the text a little, renders thus: 'The words of the guilty man Hak-kohéleti (see note on Eccles. i. 1) to those that believe in God,' which he takes to be an appropriate title for the first four verses, the answer to which is given in verse 5. We have, of course, to consider the possibility

- 2 Surely I am more brutish than any man,  
 And have not the understanding of a man :  
 3 And I have not learned wisdom,  
<sup>a</sup> Neither have I the knowledge of the Holy One.  
 4 Who hath ascended up into heaven, and descended ?

<sup>a</sup> Or, *That I should have the knowledge &c.*

that has been so often before us in this book, viz. that the text is hopelessly corrupt, and that all these interpretations are guesses in the dark. On the whole, it seems most satisfactory to regard the heading of the whole chapter to be 'the words of Agur-ben-Jakeh of Massa,' and then to begin the first poem by the words, 'I have wearied myself,' &c.

2. **brutish** here means 'stupid,' 'lacking in intellect,' and the form of the expression is that of the superlative, and the whole verse is probably ironical, the temper of mind being that of Job when brought into contact with his friends, who supposed they could interpret accurately the will of God.

Wildeboer appropriately quotes in illustration the opening monologue of Faust in Goethe's great poem, where we find the philosopher in the silence of his chamber soliloquizing as follows :

'I've studied now philosophy  
 And jurisprudence, medicine—  
 And even, alas, theology—  
 From end to end, with labour keen ;  
 And here, poor fool ! with all my lore  
 I stand, no wiser than before ;  
 . . . . .  
 These ten years long, with many woes,  
 I've led my scholars by the nose,  
 And see, that nothing can be known !'

The main question about these verses is as to whether they are supposed to be spoken by the same speaker as verses 5 and 6, or whether in these opening verses he is not quoting the words of some one else, which he answers in the thought of verses 5 and 6. Interpreting verse 1 as we have done, it seems more likely that the whole passage to the end of verse 6 is by the same speaker, and indicates the progress of his thought from a despairing agnosticism to a definite trust in the Divine being. Compare for similar ideas the passages in Isa. xl. 12-17, and Job xxxviii-xli.

3. **knowledge of the Holy One.** See note on ix. 10.

4. This verse is very closely modelled upon the series of questions contained in Job xxxviii. 4-11, and is very probably

Who hath gathered the wind in his fists?  
 Who hath bound the waters in his garment?  
 Who hath established all the ends of the earth?  
 What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou  
 knowest?

<sup>a</sup> Every word of God is <sup>b</sup> tried:

He is a shield unto them that trust in him.

Add thou not unto his words,

Lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

<sup>a</sup> See Ps. xii. 6 and xviii. 30.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *purified*.

based upon that passage. The point of the rhetorical questions is to describe the feebleness of man and his intellect as over against the majesty and magnificence of the outer universe. It is probable that upon the first question are based such N. T. references as those of John iii. 13 and Eph. iv. 9, applied to Christ.

**gathered the wind.** Cf. Ps. cxxxv. 7; Amos iv. 13.

**Who hath bound.** See Job xxvi. 8. The reference is obviously to the clouds, which are regarded as the Divine garments in which the Creator is enabled to wrap the rain as a man gathers in his robe the possessions he wishes to carry.

**the ends of the earth.** Ps. xxii. 27.

**What is his name?** The union of the idea of the Creator with that of His Son we need not suppose to be any foreshadowing of later ideas of the Logos, nor can it possibly be, as the older Jewish commentators suppose, a reference to Israel, for in that case the name would be known. It must rather be taken as a kind of proverbial equivalent for full knowledge in all his relations of the person referred to. Its significance being equivalent to such a question as, 'Are you able to explain in every particular the nature and relationship of the Creator?'

**5. Every word of God.** This verse is a quotation from Ps. xviii. 30. Cf. further for close resemblances Ps. xii. 6. The word 'God' is a form in the Hebrew which only occurs here in Proverbs, though it is the ordinary one in the late Hebrew writings. It is altered from the word in Ps. xviii, which there is *Jahweh*.

**6. Add thou not.** This verse is prose, and seems to be quoted in its first clause from Deut. iv. 2, while the second part of it has a strong resemblance to Job xiii. 10. The exact reference of the verse is not quite clear, but probably it may be the utterance of a somewhat conservative mind that did not wish to go beyond what

- 7 Two things have I asked of thee ;  
 Deny me *them* not before I die :  
 8 Remove far from me vanity and lies :  
 Give me neither poverty nor riches ;

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was in his own day regarded as the written scripture. In 132 B. C. we have the earliest reference to the well-known division of the Hebrew scriptures into Law, Prophets, and Writings, and this paragraph may be as late as that reference. Many of the thinkers of that age introduced new doctrines from external sources which were not known to the earlier writers, and this may be a protest against such practices. (Cf. Rev. xxii. 18.)

**7. Two things.** With this verse begins a series of seven utterances in this chapter which are arranged on a numerical basis. The method was probably one very ancient in Hebrew literature, for we find it in the opening chapters of Amos, where the formula frequently occurs, 'For three transgressions, yea, for four.' It is also to be found in Ps. lx. 2, 11, 'God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this.' Cf. further Job v. 19, xxxiii. 14, xl. 5. It is probable that the form of expression may be one common to many literatures in an early stage of development. As Toy points out, it is found also in the Finnish Epic *Kalevala*, where, for example, in Runo xxxi, lines 161 to 163 run

'Burned the fire, a day, a second,  
 Burning likewise on the third day,  
 When they went to look about them.'

Also cf. Runo xxxvii, lines 65 to 68.

'Once and twice he worked the bellows,  
 For a third time worked the bellows,  
 Then looked down into the furnace.'<sup>1</sup>

It has been noted by several commentators that, in strict accordance with the similar passages in this chapter, we should expect the verse to read, 'Two things have I asked of thee, yea, two things deny me not,' and it must be confessed that the closing words of this verse, 'before I die,' scarcely seem appropriate, for the things requested are obviously continuous gifts of a lifetime, and it is possible, therefore, that some alteration of the original text has taken place.

**8. neither poverty nor riches.** This prayer has become almost proverbial as an expression of a desire for the safe middle lot in

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. for a similar form, viz. 'four maner of folkis,' Dunbar's fine little poem, 'Of men evill to pleis.' See also Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, ll. 361-77.



Feed me with <sup>a</sup> the food that is needful for me :  
 Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who is the LORD ? 9  
 Or lest I be poor, and steal,  
 And <sup>b</sup> use profanely the name of my God.

Slander not a servant unto his master, 10  
 Lest he curse thee, and thou be held guilty.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *the bread of my portion.*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *handle the name.*

life. It is used in a well-known passage by Bunyan : when Christiana and her friends are in the Interpreter's house and see the man with the muck-rake, she cries out, Oh, deliver me from this muck-rake.' 'That prayer, said the Interpreter, has lain by till it is almost rusty : give me not riches is scarce the prayer of one of ten thousand. Straws, and sticks, and dust with most are the great things now looked after.'

**food that is needful.** Literally, 'bread of my portion.' The phrase is very closely akin to that in the petition of the Lord's prayer, 'our daily bread.'

**9. Lest I be full.** Cf. verse 22 below. The expression is one denoting prosperity, and shows a clear apprehension of the danger that besets the rich man, whose difficulty in entering the kingdom of heaven our Lord sympathetically recognized.

**use profanely.** The meaning here is obviously bringing to disrepute by stealing, and so causing God's name to be profaned by those who throw scorn at one of His professed followers who has transgressed the moral law. The writer in these verses takes no one-sided view of life, but recognizes the serious spiritual risks that attach both to the condition of poverty and of riches.

**10.** This is an isolated proverb that has found its way into this collection somehow, with no connexion either in form or thought with what precedes and follows it. Similar isolated verses are to be found later in the chapter, namely, verses 17, 20, 32, 33.

**Slander.** Perhaps the word should not be made quite so special, but rather be translated 'gossip about.'

**Lest he curse thee.** See note on xxvi. 2.

**be held guilty.** This is the only occurrence of the original word in the book. It was a technical word connected with the ritual of the Temple (see Lev. iv. 13, &c.), and its employment here may possibly designate the danger of being involved in some such controversy as will bring the man into conflict both with civic and ecclesiastical authorities. Plumptre quotes in illustration of the verse a saying from the Egyptian book of ritual, where one who pleads before Osiris, the judge of the dead, says in his own defence. 'I have not slandered a slave to his master.'

- 11 There is a generation that curseth their father,  
And doth not bless their mother.
- 12 There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes,  
And *yet* are not washed from their filthiness.
- 13 There is a generation, Oh how lofty are their eyes !  
And their eyelids are lifted up.
- 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.
- 15 The <sup>a</sup> horseleach hath two daughters, <sup>b</sup> *crying*, Give, give.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *vampire*

<sup>b</sup> Or, called

**11. There is a generation.** This group of four verses does not numerically state its division, but the form of the language shows clearly that four classes of men are described, and they are all men about whom we have already found numerous proverbs in the course of the book. The actual form of the original shows that each verse consists in an exclamatory utterance. There is really no copulative verb such as the R. V. introduces. On the sin designated in verse 11 see xx. 20 ; on that in verse 12 see xx. 9 ; on that in verse 13 see vi. 17 ; and on that in verse 14 see i. 11, as well as Ps. lvii. 4.

**14. To devour the poor.** This clause is probably an explanatory addition to the verse from the hand of some scribe, as it spoils the symmetry of the passage, and inartistically limits the general statement.

**15. The horseleach.** The word so rendered is very difficult of explanation. It is true that the meaning here given may be the correct one, so far as the word goes, but it is not then easy to explain its exact reference to the rest of the verse, for the daughters are said to be two in number, and then the comparison goes on to deal with four insatiable things. We must suppose, therefore, either that some words have been missed out, that two has been wrongly inserted instead of four, or that this opening clause with reference to the horse-leech and her daughters is, as Frankenberg supposes, an interpolation. Many think that the word designates a vampire or ghoul, such as are common in Arabian stories ; and some attach it to the legend of Lilith, the demon who figures largely in Hebrew legend. Cheyne has a very radical treatment of the text by which, as in verse 1 above, he attributes the saying

There are three things that are never satisfied,

Yea, four that say not, Enough :

<sup>a</sup> The grave ; and the barren womb ; 16

The earth that is not satisfied with water ;

And the fire that saith not, Enough.

The eye that mocketh at his father, 17

And despiseth to obey his mother,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *Sheol*.

that follows to Koheleth. The voracity and insatiableness of the horse-leech is an appropriate enough figure for what is to follow, if only the connexion were clear. In the present condition of the text, however, that connexion must remain uncertain. It is most probable that the line forms the first clause of an unfinished proverb.

**16. The grave :** i. e. 'Sheol.' See xxvii. 20.

**the barren womb.** In addition to the general appropriateness of the figure, one must remember the special slight that attached to childlessness among Hebrew women (see Gen. xxx. 1). The form of the whole verse is what the rhetoricians call a *chiasma*, that is to say, the first and fourth similitudes correspond to one another, as do the second and third. Similar proverbs are quoted from the Arabic and Sanskrit, the former of which reads : 'Three things are not satisfied by three—the womb without children, the fire without wood, and the earth without rain'; while the latter runs—'Fire is not sated with wood, nor the ocean with the streams, nor death with all the living, nor women with men.' It is probable, therefore, from these comparisons that this proverbial verse was common to several people, being, as it is, the outcome of common experience and observation.

**17.** This is another of the isolated proverbs. See verse 10 above.

**The eye.** Here used obviously as the organ that most eloquently expresses the thoughts of the heart ; cf. the evil eye and similar phrases. It is by a strong metaphor, of course, that the eye can be said to mock and despise.

**to obey.** The word so translated is very uncertain in meaning. The Greek renders 'old age,' and the Hebrew should probably be altered so as to give this meaning. The reading of our text was not proposed even by Jewish commentators until a very late period. 'The old age of his mother' gives a very good meaning (cf. xxiii. 22).

The ravens of <sup>a</sup> the valley shall pick it out,  
And the <sup>b</sup> young eagles shall eat it.

- 18 There be three things which are too wonderful for me,  
Yea, four which I know not :  
19 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.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the brook*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *vultures*

**The ravens of the valley.** This degradation implies what is not expressed in the verse, namely, that such children will come to an evil end, and will die not a natural but a violent death, so that their bodies will remain unburied, and their graves be 'unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.' The word rendered 'valley' is best represented by the Arabic word *wady*, which is now commonly employed in English to represent the watercourses of Palestine through which streams only run in winter. Cf. the Greek curse 'To the ravens!'

**young eagles** is literally 'sons of the vulture,' and does not mean 'the young of the vulture so much as birds belonging to the tribe of vultures.

**18. too wonderful for me.** The question here is what is the point of the wonder. Some have answered 'the tracklessness,' but while this is appropriate enough to the first three members of the comparison, it is not easily ascribed to the fourth. Probably, therefore, we should find the common reference to the inexplicability of each of the things cited, especially as we find each one of them, with the exception of the second, referred to elsewhere in a somewhat similar way.

**19. The way of an eagle:** rather, 'vulture,' as before. See Job xxxix. 26, 27 and Wisdom v. 11.

**The way of a serpent.** There may be a reference to the legendary curse pronounced upon the serpent in Gen. iii. 14, especially as the Jewish interpreters supposed that its feet were cut off as part of its curse, and so its mode of locomotion may have appeared peculiarly marvellous to them, and the height of the marvel have been reached when the serpent was seen gliding across a smooth rock.

**The way of a ship.** See Ps. civ. 26, and Wisdom v. 10.

**the way of a man.** This cannot be given the idyllic reference to love and courtship which it has often been supposed to bear, both from the nature of the comparison and from the fact that the

- So is the way of an adulterous woman ; 20  
 She eateth, and wipeth her mouth,  
 And saith, I have done no wickedness.
- <sup>a</sup> For three things the earth doth tremble, 21  
 And for four, *which* it cannot bear :  
 For a servant when he is king ; 22  
 And a fool when he is filled with meat ;  
 For an odious woman when she is married ; 23  
 And an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *Under*.

word translated 'maid' does not mean either virgin or unmarried (see Isa. vii. 14 ; Song of Songs vi. 8), but only 'young woman.' The reference is clearly to the mysterious origin of human beings (cf. Eccles. xi. 5 and Ps. cxxxix. 13-16).

**20. So is the way.** The majority of commentators are agreed that this is an addition of a scribe, who has inserted a connective particle that knits this verse with the preceding. Originally, no doubt, the verse stood alone as an isolated grimly humorous statement which spoke of the adulteress as being so careless about her gross sin that she imagined its consequences might be removed as easily as a person could remove the traces of a meal by wiping his lips with a serviette. What is specially interesting to us is to see that the scribe by thus connecting the verse with the previous one has understood the point of the comparison to be the tracklessness rather than the marvellousness of the examples cited.

**21. For three things.** Rather, 'under three things.' As Toy says of these three verses, 'The tone seems to be humorous or whimsical,' because the language employed is too exaggerated to suit the actual facts.

**22. a servant.** See xix. 10. Such sudden changes of position and rank as are here spoken of always involve many difficulties—not only for the man himself, who seems to reap the benefit, but for all who are under his sway.

**filled with meat.** As in verse 9 above, this means 'in prosperity.'

**23. an odious woman.** Odious is literally 'hated,' so that probably it means 'unattractive,' that is, embittered by having been long passed by and not finding a husband. The idea is that when at last she does find a husband, she is so much of a shrew that the man discovers he has 'caught a Tartar,' as our common phrase expresses it.

**is heir to.** It is a question whether this means literally

- 24 There be four things which are little upon the earth,  
But they are exceeding wise :
- 25 The ants are a people not strong,  
Yet they provide their meat in the summer ;
- 26 The <sup>a</sup> conies are but a feeble folk,  
Yet make they their houses in the rocks ;
- 27 The locusts have no king,

<sup>a</sup> See Lev. xi. 5.

'heiress,' of which we have no instance in the actual Hebrew legislation, for we find no reference to a woman owning property in her own right, and having power to bequeath it, though that may, of course, have been possible without our now possessing any documentary proof of it, but the reference may be to the custom common in earlier Israel and also referred to in the old Code of Hammurabi, of a wife giving her slave-woman to her husband in order to raise up children, as in the case of Sarah and Hagar, in which story also we have an excellent illustration of a family feud such as that practice often entailed. It is scarcely likely, however, that this reference applies to so late a period in Israel's history as that at which these words were written.

24. The four things here used by way of comparison are all drawn from the realm of animal life, and may remind us of the way in which Aesop's Fables make use of the animal creation as illustrative of ethical practice and common-sense guidance of life. Wonderful modern examples are to be found in Uncle Remus's stories of Brer Rabbit, and in Mr. Kipling's *Jungle Books*.

25. **The ants.** See chap. vi. 6-8 and note there.

26. **The conies.** These creatures are referred to in Lev. xi. 5 and Ps. civ. 18. They are small mammals of a dull fawn colour, which live in holes in the rocky ground. Their food consists of leaves, fruit, &c., and they are eaten by the Arabs with avidity. They are about the size of small rabbits, but belong, of course, to a quite different family. Their proper scientific name is the *hyrax syriacus*, and they have been termed in English 'rock badgers.' Their name in Hebrew was *shaphan*, which is also found as a proper name in Ezek. viii. 11 and elsewhere, and it is supposed by many to be a clan name derived from this animal (see article 'Shaphan' in *Enc. Bibl.*).

27. **Locusts.** The classical passage on locusts in the O. T. is Joel ii. 1-11, and in verses 7 and 8 of that passage the ordered march of the locust army is magnificently described. See Driver's notes on the passage in Joel in the *Cambridge Bible*, and also the notes in this series.

Yet go they forth all of them by bands ;  
 The lizard <sup>a</sup> taketh hold with her hands, 28  
 Yet is she in kings' palaces.

There be three things which are stately in their march, 29  
 Yea, four which are stately in going :  
 The lion, which is mightiest among beasts, 30  
 And turneth not away for any ;  
 The <sup>b</sup> greyhound ; the he-goat also ; 31

<sup>a</sup> Or, *thou canst seize with thy hands*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *war-horse* Heb. *well girt* (or, *well knit*) *in the loins*.

**28. The lizard.** The A.V. and some older translators rendered 'spider,' but there is no doubt that the lizard, which was the rendering of the Greek and Latin versions, as well as of almost all modern scholars, is correct. If we take the rendering of the text, namely, 'taketh hold with her hands,' then the reference is to the lizard's well-known capability of running on the smoothest surfaces, or even running on the ceiling like a fly. Probably, however, the rendering of the margin is to be preferred, namely, *thou canst seize with thy hands.* The point would then be the lizard's comparative weakness, and yet its ability to make her way into king's houses. Thus it is brought on a level with the other three creatures named in this group of verses.

**29.** These three verses are extremely corrupt, and it is probably impossible to restore the text with any certainty. The lion, the he-goat, and the king are fairly certain elements, but for the rest, conjecture plays a large part in filling up the blanks.

**31. The greyhound.** This is following certain Greek versions and other translators. Some modern editors have suggested 'war-horse' or 'zebra,' but the majority of the ancient versions read 'cock.' The original word seems to mean 'girt about the loins,' which may refer to the neat build of a well-bred cock; but an alteration of the Hebrew gives the meaning 'proudly stepping,' which, of course, suits either 'cock' or 'war-horse.' The difficulty of accepting the witness of the old versions is that it seems curious to introduce a cock among these grander beasts, but, on the other hand, we have to remember that it was probably introduced from Persia, as Aristophanes calls it the Persian bird, and the reference here may be attributable to its novelty. See article 'Cock' in *Enc. Bibl.*, where Cheyne suggests a further alteration that would give the meaning 'a quarrelsome cock.'

**he-goat.** On this animal see Daniel viii. 5.

And the king, <sup>a</sup> against whom there is no rising up.

32 If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself,

Or if thou hast thought evil,

Lay thine hand upon thy mouth.

33 For the <sup>b</sup> churning of milk bringeth forth butter,

And the <sup>b</sup> wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood :

So the <sup>b</sup> forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

31 <sup>c</sup> The words of king Lemuel ; the <sup>d</sup> oracle which his mother taught him.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *when his army is with him*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *pressing*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *The words of Lemuel king of Massa, which &c.* See ch. xxx. 1, margin.

<sup>d</sup> Or, *burden*

**against whom.** The word so rendered is practically unintelligible. Some have taken it to be a proper name *Alqum*, but no satisfactory significance can be attached to any of the conjectural persons supposed to be signified by the name. If an attempt is made to translate the word, then the revised text and margin give as good readings as are possible, but in both cases they do violence to the grammar. The LXX read 'a king who harangues a people,' also apparently the result of a conjecture. It seems likely that there was some primitive corruption of the text, which may have contained a reference to some other animal, the name of which it is not possible now to recover.

**32. If thou hast done foolishly.** The first two clauses of this verse are extremely uncertain. Frankenberg, for example, only translates, 'thy hand upon thy mouth' out of the whole verse, and gives up the rest as impossible. A certain general idea may be gained of the significance, but not more than a general idea, namely, 'silence is better than committing oneself to foolish courses of action or speech.' This is a thought that the book has rendered familiar to us in other passages, but there is great question as to whether the words rendered 'done foolishly' and 'thought evil' can bear the significance given to them, and the older versions do not in this case help us much.

**33. churning.** Literally, 'pressing,' and the same Hebrew word is used for each of the verbs rendered in our version 'wringing' and 'forcing.' Some have suggested that the first clause is an addition by a scribe, for the figure it employs seems to have little significance in the context, and has no parallel in what follows. On the other hand, it is quite obvious that the second and third clauses are closely connected because there is a play upon words in them, the word for 'nose' being *ap*, and that for 'anger' *appayim*.



What, my son ? and what, O son of my womb ?  
 And what, O son of my vows ?  
 Give not thy strength unto women,  
 Nor thy ways to <sup>a</sup> that which destroyeth kings.  
 It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to  
 drink wine ;  
 Nor for princes <sup>b</sup> to say, Where is strong drink ?  
 Lest they drink, and forget <sup>c</sup> the law,  
 And pervert the judgement <sup>d</sup> of any that is afflicted.

<sup>a</sup> Or, as otherwise read, *them that destroy*

<sup>b</sup> Another reading is, *to desire strong drink*.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *that which is decreed*. <sup>d</sup> Heb. *of all the sons of affliction*.

xxx. 1. **king Lemuel.** Of such a person nothing is known apart from what is said here, so that some translators have been tempted to understand it as a symbolical name meaning 'devoted to God.' Other conjectures have been made as to possible alterations of the text, of which perhaps the most probable is that of Bickell, who thinks the name has arisen from the scribe's reading twice the Hebrew letters which mean 'of a king,' which might easily give rise to this name.

**oracle.** On this word see notes on xxx. 1. As there, so here, it is probably better to translate it as a proper name, Massa, although the identification of this place with any well-known kingdom is very uncertain.

**2. What, my son ?** The Greek version suggests that instead of these interrogatives we should read, 'Thou wilt give heed, my son, to my sayings, and wilt observe my words,' and without much difficulty the Hebrew could be altered to give some such meaning. The Hebrew of the whole passage is late, and possibly in this way to be brought more into line with other passages of the book.

**3. ways.** A slight alteration of the text gives the meaning 'love,' and it should almost certainly be 'those who destroy,' which is probably a synonymous parallel to 'women' of the previous clause.

**4. It is not for kings.** Frankenberg says that the verse mocks at all attempt to translate or explain it. The repetition of the words in the first clause is suspicious, and probably points to some primitive corruption. Instead of 'to say where is' in the second clause, the words so rendered may probably mean 'to mix' or 'to drink.' It is, again, a case in which we get a fair glimmering of the general meaning, but have no clear idea of the individual words.

**5. of any.** Rather, 'of all that are.'

- 6 Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish,  
And wine unto the bitter in soul :
- 7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty,  
And remember his misery no more.
- 8 Open thy mouth for the dumb,  
In the cause of all such as are <sup>a</sup> left desolate.
- 9 Open thy mouth, judge righteously,  
And minister judgement to the poor and needy.
- 10 A virtuous woman who can find?

<sup>a</sup> Or, *ready to pass away* Heb. *the sons of passing away*.

6, 7. Here the translation is sufficiently clear, and though to many modern readers the ethical standard of the advice may not seem very high, we have to remember that, in contrast to the foolish and wicked use of wine which has just been condemned in the previous verse, this is a high and noble service which that gift may render, and to the Hebrew mind wine was also a gift of God (see Ps. civ. 15). That the Wisdom writers had a sufficiently clear idea of the evil that indulgence in strong drink wrought we have already had sufficient evidence in xxiii. 29-35.

8. **For the dumb.** This cannot, of course, mean the physically dumb; but interpreters generally understand it of those who through poverty or some other reason need some one to plead for them. But, as Toy humorously remarks, 'The Oriental man or woman when wronged is anything but dumb,' so that some other word has to be sought. An easy alteration gives the rendering 'in truth,' which may probably be right. Frankenberg quotes appropriately Job xxix. 15 as affording a similar idea to that in this passage.

10-31. Here we have a section quite different from anything else in Proverbs, though it is a poetical form common to Hebrew literature, both in the Book of Psalms and the Book of Lamentations. It is an acrostic poem, each verse of which begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet—an arrangement that may have originally been designed as an aid to the memory, though possibly it was nothing more than an added artifice to show the skill of the writer, as is the case in the strict rule of the sonnet. The subject of the poem is the ideal woman, and it has much interest because it shows the conception of womanhood which at the period of writing seemed to be the highest and best. The ideal may not seem very lofty to many modern minds, as it is little else than the picture of a perfect housewife and shrewd woman of business. But other

For her price is far above <sup>a</sup> rubies.	
The heart of her husband trusteth in her,	11
And he shall have no lack of <sup>b</sup> gain.	
She doeth him good and not evil	12
All the days of her life.	
She seeketh wool and flax,	13
And worketh <sup>c</sup> willingly with her hands.	
She is like the merchant-ships ;	14
She bringeth her food from afar.	
She riseth also while it is yet night,	15

<sup>a</sup> See Job xxviii. 18.    <sup>b</sup> Heb. *spoil*.    <sup>c</sup> Or, *at the business of*

and more spiritual qualities are probably implied in the praise contained in verses 28 and 29. At all events, it is an interesting picture of the high position given to women, and of the comparative freedom which at that period they seem to have enjoyed, contrasting favourably with estimates found in Ecclesiastes and in many passages of the Greek writers.

**10. virtuous.** This should rather be rendered 'a woman of capacity,' and probably it is not only woman, but wife, so that the special praise is directed to the mother of the household. The form of the question is not ironical, as if no such person was to be found, but it rather implies the difficulty and care that is involved in the search, while all that follows points to the joy and satisfaction of attainment. Cf. the whole picture of Penelope in the *Odyssey* as an interesting parallel.

**rubies.** See note on iii. 15.

**11. trusteth :** i. e. has confidence in her wisdom and practical shrewdness.

**gain.** Elsewhere this word means 'booty taken in war,' but here obviously the reference is to general wealth.

**12. good and . . . evil.** These words must also be referred to the effect of her conduct upon his household and property.

**13. willingly.** The literal meaning of the Hebrew is 'in the pleasure of her hand,' which seems to mean 'as she chooses,' and not 'willingly,' as our text takes it. Her wisdom is apparent, that is, in the use she makes of the material that she obtains.

**14. like the merchant-ships.** This points to the wide reach of her business enterprises. She does not rely upon home produce, but employs the merchant to bring her material from far-off lands. The reference is an interesting example of the wide commercial relations of the period.

- And giveth meat to her household,  
 And their <sup>a</sup> task to her maidens.  
 16 She considereth a field, and buyeth it :  
 With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.  
 17 She girdeth her loins with strength,  
 And maketh strong her arms.  
 18 She perceiveth that her merchandise is profitable :  
 Her lamp goeth not out by night.  
 19 She layeth her hands to the distaff,  
 And her <sup>b</sup> hands hold the spindle.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *portion*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *palms*.

**15. task.** Literally, 'portion,' which from the parallelism of the previous verse possibly means food. It is very likely that this third clause is a scribal addition, and should be omitted.

**16. the fruit of her hands :** i. e. 'her earnings.' The whole verse betrays the clever planning of a woman of business, who makes a profit gained at one enterprise form the basis of another, and is ever widening her opportunities of gain as well as strengthening her capital.

**17. She girdeth, &c.** This seems most likely to be understood figuratively, and not literally, and has a reference to the strong-minded way in which she never rests from her enterprises.

**18. perceiveth.** Literally, 'tasteth.' We might render 'learns by experience.'

**Her lamp goeth not out.** Benzinger tells us that among the Bedouin to this day they use the expression 'he sleeps in the darkness' as an equivalent for poverty, for in every house the custom is to allow the lamp to burn all the night through. For the meaning of the figure cf. Jer. xxv. 10; Job xviii. 6.

**19. distaff.** It is almost certain that these names of spinning implements are correct. There is some doubt about the Hebrew in the first case. These primitive and universally employed instruments find poetic description in one of the most beautiful of the poems of Catullus; the passage is referred to by Perowne here, and the following translation is that of Sir Theodore Martin :

'The left the distaff held, from which the right,  
 Plucking the wool with upturned fingers light,  
 Twisted the threads, which o'er the thumb they wound,  
 Then swiftly whirled the well-poised spindle round.'

She spreadeth out her <sup>a</sup> hand to the poor ;	20
Yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.	
She is not afraid of the snow for her household ;	21
For all her household are clothed with scarlet.	
She maketh for herself <sup>b</sup> carpets of tapestry ;	22
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.	
Her husband is known in the gates,	23

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *palm*.<sup>b</sup> Or, *cushions*

**20. She spreadeth out her hand.** In this verse another activity of the hands is referred to. In the former case what the hands wrought for themselves was the subject of consideration, now it is what the hands do for others, and we learn that generosity and helpfulness is part of this old-world ideal of womanhood.

**21. scarlet.** The word is uncertain. As the Hebrew stands, scarlet is the correct rendering ; but many slightly alter the word so as to get a meaning 'warm' out of it. Some of the old versions apparently read this, since they spoke of 'double garments.' Toy suggests altering the order of the lines so as to read verses 21 and 22 together in the following form :

'She is not afraid of the snow for her household ;  
 She maketh for herself coverlets (?) :  
 Her clothing is fine linen and purple,  
 And all her household are clothed with scarlet.'

This is a very ingenious suggestion, but, of course, it is purely conjectural, and it may be simpler to suppose that 'scarlet' is correct, and that they were in the habit of making warm garments of that colour, or that the idea is that, since her household are wealthy enough to wear scarlet, therefore they need have no fear of the cold of winter.

**22. carpets of tapestry.** See the note on vii. 16.

**fine linen and purple.** Cf. the rendering of Luke xvi. 19. The same words that are there used in the Greek Testament are here employed in the LXX. Probably the linen came from Egypt. We find it employed in state robes in that country (see Gen. xli. 42). The purple was obtained from the famous Mediterranean shell-fish, and the preparation of the dye was a great industry in Phoenicia.

**23. known in the gates.** As Toy remarks, the order of the verses does not seem very satisfactory, but we must remember that this is probably due to the limitations of the alphabetical arrangement of the poem ; and yet there may be something in the

When he sitteth among the elders of the land.

24 She maketh linen garments and selleth them ;

And delivereth girdles unto the <sup>a</sup> merchant.

25 Strength and dignity are her clothing ;

And she laugheth at the time to come.

26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom ;

And the <sup>b</sup> law of kindness is on her tongue.

27 She looketh well to the ways of her household,

And eateth not the bread of idleness.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *Canaanite*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *teaching*

suggestion conveyed by the mention of the raiment, for we see how it also occurs in the lines from the *Odyssey*, appropriately quoted here by Plumptre, from the speech of Nausicaa to her father : ' Yea, and it is seemly that thou thyself, when thou art with the princes in council, shouldst have fresh raiment to wear ' (*Odyssey*, 660).

**24. linen garments.** The word here used is different from that employed in verse 22, and is the same that we find in Mark xiv. 51. The material thus indicated was used for many purposes, as, for example, by surgeons and by the wrappers of mummies, and probably designates a very fine kind of fabric.

**girdles.** There are several words used with this meaning in the O. T. (see article 'Girdle' in *Enc. Bibl.*), but the word here employed designates the decorative girdle worn outside the dress ; while that of the poorer classes is almost like our leathern belt, that of the richer class is made of rich material, and frequently highly ornamented.

**merchant.** As the margin shows, this is literally Canaanite, that is, Phœnician. That people seems to have been the great mercantile community of the period.

**25. clothing.** By a common Hebrew figure her character is spoken of here as raiment (cf. such passages as 2 Chron. vi. 41 ; Job xxix. 14 ; Ps. cxxxii. 9).

**she laugheth.** This implies that her foresight has enabled her to face the future without any apprehension. For the thought of the verse see the beautiful lines of Stephen Phillips in his poem 'Endymion' :

'Kind hands, a still and sweet anxiety,  
Brave, prudent talk about the coming day.'

**26. law of kindness.** Rather, 'kindly counsel.'

**27. ways** is, of course, here 'conduct.'

Her children rise up, and call her blessed ; 28  
 Her husband *also*, and he praiseth her, *saying* :  
 Many daughters have done virtuously, 29  
 But thou excellest them all.  
 Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain . 30  
*But* a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.  
 Give her of the fruit of her hands ; 31  
 And let her works praise her in the gates.

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**28. her children rise up.** Here we see the effect of her conduct and character upon her own immediate circle. Frankenberg so interprets the Hebrew as to render, ' Her sons prosper, therefore people congratulate her ; her husband, therefore people praise her.' The sense is good, but it is doubtful whether the Hebrew will bear the meaning.

**29. daughters.** For this use of the word cf. S. of S. ii. 2, &c. It is almost certainly used simply as equivalent to women.

**30. Favour . . . and beauty.** These would be, perhaps, better rendered ' beauty and comeliness,' and the adjectives attached to them probably in both instances signify their transitory character rather than any moral quality that may be supposed to render beauty unworthy.

**that feareth the LORD.** This is the rendering of the Hebrew, but the LXX suggests that the original reading may have been ' a woman's intelligence,' and that this is the work of a scribe who desired an orthodox conclusion to the passage (see Toy's note).

**31.** This closing verse seems to be an appeal for a due public recognition of the character and service of the woman who has been praised throughout the whole length of the poem.

ECCLESIASTES ;

OR, THE PREACHER

INTRODUCTION

AND

REVISED VERSION WITH ANNOTATIONS



# ECCLESIASTES;

## OR, THE PREACHER

### INTRODUCTION

MANY societies are in existence for the study of special works or particular authors. We have our Browning societies, Dante societies, Omar Khayyam has a society for the study of his great poem, and even 'our, mad, bad, glad, sad brother,' Villon, has a society dedicated to the interpretation of his wild and curious rhymes. But it does not appear that any group of men has ever given itself to the study of Ecclesiastes; and yet the work contains quite as many problems and has raised as great and widespread discussions as have some of these other writers. As one of the students of the book has said, it is quite beyond any human capacity to read and estimate all that has been written upon this one little book. Its difficulties were felt by the writer's fellow countrymen in the days soon after its publication, and these problems, and many new ones springing out of them, have exercised the minds of Bible students throughout the centuries, and many remain even now unsolved. It may seem, therefore, scarcely worth while to add another to the long list of studies of the book; but the real excuse for so doing is that the questions it raises are continually present with each successive generation in new forms, and that in Ecclesiastes every age finds a reflection of some part at least of its own temper, and is compelled to seek an interpretation of it in terms of its own thought.

One fascination of the book is found in the fact that its students cannot agree even as to its main purpose and character. Some tell us that the writer is an out-and-out

sceptic, while others have claimed it as an orthodox treatise in proof of the Divine providence and government. Heine, for example, termed it 'The Canticles of Scepticism,' while Delitzsch, on the other hand, called it 'The Canticles of the Fear of God.' Renan praised it as being the only charming book that a Jew had ever written, a book, he added, that touched our grief at every point, while he saw in the writer one who never posed but was always natural and simple. Even its practical tendencies have been understood in widely different senses, for while Frederick the Great reckoned it a true mirror of princes, and regarded it as one of the most valuable books in Scripture, one commentator says it may be regarded as 'a breviary of the most modern materialism, and of extreme licentiousness.' Views quite as extreme and divergent have been taken as to the form and construction of the book. Some look upon it as a carefully reasoned treatise, while others consider it to be a collection of detached reflections. By some it has been looked upon as a dialogue after the manner of Plato, in which, as in Tennyson's poem 'The Two Voices,' an argument is sustained between the God-fearing man and the materialist. Others find many hands at work in the book, and have traced divergent lines of thought to different editors. We can see, therefore, at the outset, that many problems face the student of this book, and that, whatever decisions are finally reached, we cannot expect to attain any conclusion that will be unanimously accepted.

The name of the book and its significance are at the outset matters of dispute. The title in our version is that found in the LXX. The Hebrew title is *Kohleth*, a participial form of a verb which means 'to call.' It is a rare form, however, and there are no very exact parallels with which to compare it. Besides, it is grammatically feminine, and cannot, therefore, agree in strictness with the figure of the king who is presented as the speaker. This difficulty has been got over by some by assuming that the word agrees

with the personified figure of Wisdom, who is supposed to be the speaker throughout, but it is difficult to see how, on this theory, Wisdom could be identified with the king, and, besides, there is no hint that Wisdom is supposed to speak, neither are a great many of the sayings in the book appropriate on her lips. In all probability, therefore, the best way to understand it is, after a common Hebrew usage, to regard the feminine form as equivalent to a neuter adjective, which would then be rendered by some such phrase as 'the sort of person who addresses an assembly,' though some would give to it an intensive meaning, and render 'the great orator.' Cheyne considers that the name is probably the result of some original corruption of the text, and suggests that it springs from a confusion of the Hebrew equivalent of the word, which follows its first occurrence, namely, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' the letters of which in Hebrew might easily be misunderstood for the letters of the word rendered 'Ecclesiastes.' The rendering of our English version 'preacher' is not a very happy one, but it is difficult to find any other single word which better expresses the meaning, though 'teacher' or 'lecturer' would perhaps come nearer to it. One might suggest 'philosopher' or 'sage' as a not inexact equivalent of the significance of the original word. On the whole the best course to take in reading the book is to use the proper name Koheleth wherever it occurs, and bear in mind its significance.

We see, therefore, that the writer is an idealized person, and that his identification with a king in Jerusalem is only a literary fiction. The twelfth verse of the first chapter tells us that he 'was king over Israel in Jerusalem,' which, if spoken of a historical personage, must mean that at the time of writing he was a monarch in retirement. But such a description does not fit any of the sovereigns known to us in the history of Israel, least of all the son of David who is obviously indicated, namely, Solomon. Some writers have fancied that the book presents that

Grand Monarque in a repentant mood, in which he describes all his past experiences and the various directions in which he has sought for satisfaction and failed to find it. But in addition to history being against this interpretation, there are two other valid reasons against identifying the author of the book with Solomon. The first is the language. In Delitzsch's frequently quoted phrase, 'If the book of Koheleth were of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language.' The proof of this fact is, of course, only possible to students of Hebrew, and the lists of peculiar words and constructions must be sought in commentaries on the Hebrew text, though references to some outstanding instances will be found in the notes in this commentary. The second proof is in the ideas we find in these pages. The problems that perplex the writer are the problems of later Judaism, which first emerged in the Book of Job and in many of the later Psalms. The conception of God found in these pages is not that of Jahweh, who dwells in the midst of His people and is their familiar friend. Indeed, that characteristic name of earlier Judaism is never used in its pages at all; but the thought is of One who is remote from men and regards them more as a judge or ruler than in any other light. The conception finds characteristic utterance in v. 2: 'God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few.' 'The burden of the unintelligible world' presses very heavily upon this man's soul, and he feels himself handicapped by problems theoretical and practical which are too great for him. These are not the moods of Israel's sunny and more childlike faith, but the reflections of a later day that struggled hard with the dark problems of the universe.

Again, the historical background of the book, so far as the hints contained in it reveal that to us, is not characteristic of the days of the earlier monarchy, but of a much later age. More than once we have the phrase 'all that were before me in Jerusalem,' which, of course, could not

be spoken by the historical Solomon. Again, this man seems to favour the poor and the cause of the oppressed (cf. iv. 1-3, v. 8, 9, ix. 16), which, in the form here presented at least, could not be characteristic of Solomon. In the passage iv. 13-16, which describes the poor and wise youth following the old and foolish king, and in ix. 13-15 about the poor wise man who saved the little city in the days of the grievous straits, we seem to have a reference to some actual historical situation, though it may not be possible absolutely to define it (see notes on the passages referred to). The whole circumstances thus indicated point to a period at least not earlier than that of the Persian rule, and more probably indicates the Greek period of the Ptolemys about B. C. 200. Some interpreters would place the book much later still, in the days, namely, of Herod the Great. The external history of the book and its final reception into the Hebrew canon seem to make the last date impossible, for there is some evidence of its being known earlier than the time of Herod, and its final admission into the canon was in A. D. 90, and it is scarcely likely that a book less than a century old would have been so honoured. Additional support to the theory of its having originated in the Greek period is derived from the language and thought of many passages. It may not be possible to maintain the position taken by Tyler and Plumptre, who hold that the writer shows intimate acquaintance with the systems of Greek philosophy, but it certainly seems as if he were familiar with Greek speculation, and that his language and ideas are coloured by what has reached him either through literature or personal intercourse.

A question of great interest and importance attaches to the integrity of the book. Every reader feels that the closing section is different in tone from all that precedes it. Particularly is this true of xii. 13, 14. The moral is forced, and it certainly does not appear to be a clear inference from all that has preceded it to say that

the conclusion of the argument is 'fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.' Much more appropriate would be the eighth verse, 'Vanity of vanities,' saith Koheleth, 'all is vanity.' The verses from ix onwards speak in the third person about the writer of the book, and are to some extent descriptive of his supposed aims and methods. They appear, indeed, to be an attempt to identify him with the writer of Proverbs, and may mark the critical judgement of the period when the book was struggling for a place in the canonical collection, or are the addition of some orthodox editor who felt that there were many valuable lessons in these pages which it was a pity to lose, but which could never become part of the Holy Scripture, unless a turn were given to them different from their obvious significance. The majority of students consequently consider this closing paragraph to be by a different hand from that which composed the bulk of the book. Siegfried, indeed, goes further, and attributes each two verses of the six to a separate hand. He, however, has a very elaborate theory of editorship, and considers that five separate editors have been engaged in the production of the book. The original writer, to whom is attributed the bulk of the work, is the man whose theory of the universe is that all is vanity. The work of this pure pessimist has been gone over by a man with epicurean tendencies who believes in life as being full of gaiety, and that it is a 'pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun.' The third hand is that of a sage who praises wisdom and its pursuit as more valuable than all else. To him is attributed such sayings as those found in vii. 11, 12, and 19. The fourth hand belongs to an orthodox Jew who seeks to correct the unorthodox conclusions of the first and second authors, and adds the pious reflection that we find in iii. 11-15 and elsewhere. To the fifth hand are attributed the proverbial sayings such as those found in iv. 9-12. Out of all this comparative chaos Siegfried thinks that a final editor has attempted to bring satisfactory order, but

without great success. (A good account of this theory can be found in Siegfried's article 'Wisdom' in *HBD*.)

Bickell attempts to account for the seeming confusion of ideas by a theory of accident to the original manuscript. He supposes that the pages on which the book was originally written were wrongly folded—that this was not noticed, and that the book passed into circulation in this confused manner. It is not necessary here to give his ingenious rearrangement, because it is far too clever to be probable, and a fatal objection to the whole theory is to be found in the probability that books were then written in the form of a roll, not in the manner of a modern book, and that, therefore, the supposed accident could never have taken place. Haupt thinks the confusion of the traditional text may be 'partly accidental, partly intentional.' The original manuscript may have been left by the author without a final revision; he may have left a number of parallels and variants without indicating his final preference. This confusion was increased by the editorial changes introduced by the friends of the author, who published the work after his death. It was further increased by the polemical interpolations of the orthodox Pharisaic editors who finally admitted the book into the canon. Haupt's rearrangement of the book is very arbitrary, and will hardly appear convincing to any one else, though some of the alterations are ingenious, and it may even be granted that they improve the clearness of the thought.

It appears to the present writer that many of these attempts to rearrange the book arise from the false idea that one must discover in it a perfectly clear and continuous line of argument. It is more probable that the book consists of the scattered records of many moods, either in the form of a diary of inward experience, a record of the writer's thoughts on different occasions, and in altering circumstances, or—and this seems the most likely theory—that its pages contain a pupil's reminiscences

of his master's teaching. In this latter case we are easily able to account for the different moods displayed in its pages, and also for the fact that the argument is sometimes abrupt and disjointed, and that sudden alternations occur in the subjects under discussion. If the book belongs to the former class, then excellent illustrations of its style of literature are to be found in the *Thoughts* of Pascal and Joubert, in the *Journal* of Amiel, or, to take a quite modern instance, in the *Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, by George Gissing. If the book belongs to the latter class, then we must look for illustrations to the *Discourses* of Epictetus, the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon, to the poem which in many ways stands closest to Ecclesiastes in all literature, namely, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, or, to take another quite modern instance, the lecture notes in *Silanus the Christian*, by Dr. Abbot. If we may further suppose that the lectures of the teacher covered a long period of years, and that his disciples' notes extended over the same period, or were written in order to give reminiscences of many years, the conditions are easily understood, and we shall not wonder so much at the changes of mood and the seeming contradictions. Such a theory does not, of course, exclude the possibility of there being annotations and corrections in the book from other hands, and some of the more obviously orthodox statements as well as the epilogue are almost certainly to be attributed to such a source. The view here taken of the book's origin would be considerably strengthened if we might with certainty adopt the explanation given by some interpreters that the title 'king' in i. 12 designates not a ruling monarch, but has the significance sometimes found in Jewish writings of a famous teacher. We must further remember that the character of the Hebrew wisdom or philosophy was not of that strict logical order with which we are familiar in ancient Greek and modern Western thought, in that the tendency of the Oriental thinker was to embody his reflections in the form of suc-



cint sayings that would not only be memorable to his scholars, but by their somewhat enigmatic form would stimulate further reflection (see further the General Introduction, p. 9).

#### LITERATURE FOR ECCLESIASTES.

The most charming English commentary is that of Plumptre in the *Cambridge Bible*. It must be read with caution because of the theory that underlies it, but in the wealth of its literary illustration and the charm of its style no book surpasses it. It also contains three valuable appendices on the relation of the book to Shakespeare, to Tennyson, and to Omar. Another commentary of the more popular sort, full of suggestive material, is that by Genung, entitled *Words of Koheleth*. For commentaries of a more scholarly order the student may be referred to Ginsburg, Wright, and Delitzsch, and also the suggestive work of Tyler, which formed the foundation upon which Plumptre built up his theory. The article in the *Enc. Bibl.* by Prof. Davidson and that in *HBD.* by Prof. Peake should also be consulted. It will be plain to the reader of this commentary that, so far as the teaching of the book goes, much depends upon the view of it that is taken, but there is still much valuable suggestion to be found in Cox's exposition in *The Expositor's Bible*. There is a small commentary with useful notes by Principal J. T. Marshall, published by the American Baptist Publication Society; and quite unique is Forbush's *Ecclesiastes in the metre of Omar Khayyam*, with a slight literary introduction. Of modern German commentaries those of Siegfried and Wildeboer are the most valuable, though Siegfried's peculiar position, as stated above, should be kept in mind. See also Moffatt's *Literary Illustrations to Ecclesiastes*, and the Commentary by Barton in the International Critical series, published too late for use in this work.

# ECCLESIASTES ;

## OR, THE PREACHER

THE words of <sup>a</sup> the Preacher, the son of David, king 1  
in Jerusalem.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher ; vanity of 2

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the great orator* Heb. *Kohleth*.

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i. 1. **Preacher.** For the meaning of the word thus translated see Introduction, p. 212.

**king.** This is in apposition to preacher, not to David, so that it was understood, by the editor of the book at all events, that the writer was himself king of Jerusalem, or it is at any rate presented under that guise. If we can take it in the sense in which the word is used in the Talmud as equal to head of a school, then we can, perhaps, understand, how from verse 12 of this chapter the usage might by a mistake give rise to the present title.

i. 2-11. Since all things are vanity, what advantage comes to a man through all his days' work? There is one unceasing procession of human life which passes to the grave as regularly as the sun passes across the sky, the wind alters its course, or the rivers flow to the sea. A dreary and unsatisfied round is the tale of all existence, and there is neither novelty to be discovered in the future nor in the present grateful recollection of the past.

2. **Vanity of vanities.** This is the Hebrew expression for superlative vanity. The word 'vanity' occurs with impressive frequency throughout the book, sometimes in the phrase 'all is vanity,' as here, and at other times in the expression which we find first in verse 14.

One of the most recent literary illustrations of this refrain is the ballad of W. E. Henley, from which a verse is here quoted :

'Life is a smoke that curls—  
Curls in a flickering skein,  
That winds and whisks and whirls,  
A figment thin and vain,  
Into the vast Inane.  
One end for hut and hall!  
One end for cell and stall!

3 vanities, all is vanity. What profit hath man of all his  
 4 labour wherein he laboureth under the sun? One generation goeth, and another generation cometh; and  
 5 the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he  
 6 ariseth. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth

Burned in one common flame  
 Are wisdoms and insanities.  
 For this alone we came :  
 "O vanity of vanities!"

**3. under the sun.** These are words which also recur frequently, and are probably borrowed from the Greek. They are the equivalent of our word 'sublunary,' which takes its metaphor from the moon.

**4. One generation goeth.** The first thought that occurs to the writer is the changefulness of all human life. It was no new idea, but one common to many human systems, and frequently expressed in the very metaphors here employed. A quaint echo of it is found in an epitaph on a grave in a Scottish churchyard :

'The earth builds on the earth  
 Castles and towers;  
 The earth saith to the earth,  
 "All shall be ours."  
 'The earth goeth on the earth,  
 Glistering like gold,  
 The earth goeth to the earth  
 Sooner than it wold.'

In contrast to the changing life of men, the author thinks of the earth as stable and an abiding background for the ever-varying pageantry of human life, which changes with such kaleidoscopic rapidity.

**The sun also ariseth.** The imagery here is that which was common to the people of the old world. The sun was regarded as running a race (cf. Ps. xix. 5), and probably the word translated 'hasteth' contains the figure of a horse panting in the chariot or a racehorse upon the racecourse.

**6. The wind goeth.** The reference to the north and south winds is found also in the Song of Songs ix. 16, and these two directions are probably named because they are the prevalent winds in Palestine. In the New Testament we have also a reference to the south wind in Luke xii. 55. The very form of the

about unto the north ; it turneth about continually in its course, and the wind returneth again to its circuits. All <sup>a</sup> the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full ; unto the place whither the rivers go, thither they go again. <sup>b</sup> All things are full of weariness ; man cannot utter it : the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which hath been is that which shall be ; and that which hath been done is that which shall

<sup>a</sup> Or, *torrents*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *All words are feeble*

verse in the original, with its monotonous reiteration, suggests the weariness of all human endeavour.

**7. All the rivers, &c.** The word for 'rivers' is that which denotes a swiftly-flowing stream, as the ceaseless energy of Nature is chiefly in the writer's mind. Here is another excellent illustration of the endless circle of Nature's processes. It is a matter of debate whether the writer thinks of the process of evaporation, as modern science understands it, or whether he is writing under the conception of the idea of his age that the sea-water filtered through the earth, and, so cleansed, returned again to the sea in the springs and streams. The idea was a not uncommon one in classical poetry, and in Plumptre's commentary will be found excellent illustrations from Greek and Latin poets. A striking parallel is that in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, line 1248 :

'The sea, though all the rivers flow to it,  
Increaseth not in volume.'

**8. All things are full of weariness.** Since the Hebrew word rendered 'things' may also mean 'words,' the meaning of the phrase is uncertain. Many render 'all words are feeble,' and either meaning gives excellent sense. The reading of the text calls our attention to the ceaseless wearying round of the processes of Nature which has just been illustrated, while the other emphasizes the fact that no language or poet or orator is competent to express the wonder and the sadness of it. The following words 'man cannot utter it' seem rather to suggest that the second meaning is preferable. The final clauses of the verse imply that neither sight nor hearing is equal to the task laid upon it. The words of the Latin poet who spoke of one 'being wearied with a glut of vision' are a parallel case. Perhaps the thought that lies deeper still is that not even the complete story of the ex-

10 he done : and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there a thing whereof men say, See, this is new ? it hath

ternal universe, were it known, could possibly satisfy the human heart.

9. The writer now advances from the world of nature to the world of man, and for the first time we come across a form of expression that recurs frequently throughout the book—Life holds and can hold no novelty. See Dunbar's short and touching poem 'Of the Changes of Life,' especially the closing stanza :

'So nixt to symmer, winter bene ;  
Nixt efter comfort, cairis kene ;  
Nixt efter mydnycht, the myrthfull morrow ;  
Next after joy, ay cumis sorrow :  
So is this warld, and ay hes bene.'

Cf. also the famous lines in *Macbeth*, v. 5. ll. 24-29.

10. **See, this is new.** The thought is further emphasized by the supposition that men will refuse to believe so sad a statement, and that the youth of every generation will claim novelty for their discovery ; but the writer rejoins that some time in the past the most striking of supposed novelties has been anticipated. And this general statement is proved more or less by present-day discoveries. We who are proud of our modern civilization are continually discovering that many of our most vaunted novelties were known to the ancient world. Some years ago, for example, at a medical exhibition in Rome were shown surgical instruments from ancient Etruria which compared well with the latest productions of English and American makers, and some of the triumphs of Etruscan dentistry were not far behind present-day work. Words almost identical with those found here are found in Marcus Aurelius, e. g. 'They that come after us will see nothing new, and they who went before us saw nothing more than we have seen' ; and, again, 'All things that come to pass now have come to pass before, and will come to pass hereafter.'—*Med.* xi. 1, vii. 26. It is true that not only a sorrowful but a joyful and courageous conclusion can be drawn from this doctrine. Dr. Moffat quotes a passage from Havelock Ellis in which this is well stated : 'The thing that has been is the thing that will be again ; if we realize that, we may avoid many of the disillusion, miseries, and anxieties that for ever accompany the throes of new birth. Set your shoulder joyously to the world's wheel ; you may spare yourself some unhappiness, if, beforehand, you slip the Book of Ecclesiastes beneath your arm.'

been already, in the ages which were before us. There <sup>11</sup> is no remembrance of the former *generations*; neither shall there be any remembrance of the latter *generations* that are to come, among those that shall come after.

I <sup>12</sup> the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven: it is

\* See ver. 1.

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**11. There is no remembrance, &c.** He throws forward into the future what he has proved to be the experience of the past, and among the most bitter of his thoughts is that which leads him to forecast a future that holds no recollection of himself and his doings. It is a mood into which he often falls, and it is one that lends much bitterness to this type of philosophy. The stoic emperor also falls into it when he says 'posthumous fame is but oblivion'; and it finds a familiar utterance in the words of Hamlet, soliloquizing on the skull of Yorick:

'Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,  
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away:  
Oh, that that earth, which kept the world in awe,  
Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw!'

i. 12-18. In these verses are given the experience of the idealist king whose self-imposed task has been to search out the secrets of wisdom, and whose conclusion is that the wisest man cannot cure the world's woes, and that the end of all the highest endeavours of human thought is simply to increase the soul's burden of sorrow.

**12.** See Introduction, p. 218. The conclusion of Christina Rossetti's fine poem entitled 'The Testimony,' in which she embodies so much of the spirit of Ecclesiastes, may appropriately be quoted here:

'A king dwelt in Jerusalem;  
He was the wisest man on earth;  
He had all riches from his birth,  
And pleasures till he tired of them;  
Then, having tested all things, he  
Witnessed that all are vanity.'

**13. I applied my heart,** This verse recurs several times throughout the book, and signifies the ardour of the writer's efforts to attain wisdom.

**under heaven.** This is a variant of his usual phrase 'under the sun.'

a sore travail that God hath given to the sons of men to  
 14 be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that  
 are done under the sun ; and, behold, all is vanity and  
 15 <sup>a</sup> a striving after wind. That which is crooked cannot  
 be made straight : and <sup>b</sup> that which is wanting cannot be  
 16 numbered. I communed with mine own heart, saying,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *a feeding on wind* (see Hos. xii. 1) Or, *vexation of spirit*  
 and so elsewhere.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *defect*.

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**a sore travail.** This is the first hint of the thought that is common throughout the book, that God has set men hard and difficult tasks, and that in some ways the Divine control of life is by no means beneficent. In many of the moods of the writer God is recorded as a hard taskmaster.

**14. I have seen all the works.** Perhaps no sentence in the book is so truly pessimistic as this one, though many are more striking. Surely nothing can be sadder than to say that all the works of human enterprise are perfectly fruitless—that life, therefore, both theoretically and practically, is a mockery. The words are so sweeping and universal that nothing can escape the judgement here expressed. The last words of the verse constitute the first occurrence of the phrase that is so famous in the book, ‘a striving after wind,’ which forcibly suggests the purposelessness and ineffectiveness of all man’s enterprises. The words may also be rendered ‘a feeding on winds’ as in Hosea xii. 1, and cf. also Prov. xv. 14. The thought of feeding or pasturing is the root idea of the verb, and, therefore, the latter translation may be preferable.

**15. That which is crooked.** Here the pessimistic mood is applied to the sphere of morals, and the writer declares that there is no making straight the crooked ways, or filling up the hollow places of life. At once the reader is reminded of the strong contrast this affords to the note of the evangelical prophet, ‘the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain (Isa. xl. 4), though, of course, it would not be fair to suppose that any reference to that passage was in the writer’s mind. His thought here, however, displays his fatalistic conception of life and of the Divine government. The second illustration, ‘that which is wanting,’ &c., is not so easily explained. It probably means ‘a blank remains a blank,’ and if an item is lacking in an account there is no making the sum correct. A very slight change in the original would give the meaning ‘that which lacks cannot be filled up,’ which is, perhaps, a little more clear ; but the alteration is not requisite and cannot be certain.

Lo, I have gotten me great wisdom <sup>a</sup> above all that were before me <sup>b</sup> in Jerusalem: yea, my heart <sup>c</sup> hath had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I applied <sup>17</sup> my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also was a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that in- <sup>18</sup> creaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with 2

<sup>a</sup> Or, *yea, more than all*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *over*.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *hath seen abundantly*.

**16. in Jerusalem.** There is no doubt that the better translation is 'over Jerusalem,' but there is no need to look for historical accuracy in the statement, and those who would understand the reference to be to the Jebusite rulers who preceded David in that stronghold are certainly on a wrong track. The words are either to be understood purely ideally or, as above explained, of a teacher.

**17. to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly.** According to the ordinary reading of the Hebrew text, the author now sets himself to discover truth through the study of contraries. He will not be contented by merely investigating wisdom. He will also make search into the pathology of the human mind. This is very modern in tone, for many of the modern psychological discoveries have been made by studying the aberrations of the human mind, and in this direction, perhaps, more may be done in the future. According, however, to the text of the LXX, all reference to madness is omitted, and in place of madness and folly 'parables and science' are read. A very slight change in the Hebrew words would give rise to this altered translation, but it is probably incorrect.

**18. in much wisdom is much grief.** This is a cynical, and perhaps mockingly cynical, conclusion of the section, since, as Wildeboer points out, it is equivalent to praising folly, which was probably not the real thought of the writer when he was at his best.

ii. 1-11. The writer now describes another mood, the epicurean one, and tells how he spent money and effort in the provision of every kind of luxury, beauty, and adornment, wealth and riches, and every means of pleasure and recreation. He did not withhold from himself anything that might tempt the senses and appetites; but the end of it all was once more vanity and weariness.



mirth; <sup>a</sup> therefore enjoy <sup>b</sup> pleasure: and, behold, this  
 2 also was vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of  
 3 mirth, What doeth it? I searched in mine heart how to  
 cheer my flesh with wine, mine heart yet <sup>c</sup> guiding *me*  
 with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might

<sup>a</sup> Or, *and thou shalt enjoy*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *good*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *holding its course*

Dunbar's poem *Of the Warldis Vanity* has caught much of the spirit of this chapter. See the last stanza in particular:

'Heir nocht abydis, heir standis no thing stabill,  
 For this fals warld ay flittis to and fro;  
 Now day up-bricht, now nycht als blak as sabill;  
 Now eb, now flude, now freynd, now cruell fo;  
 Now glaid, now said, now weill, now in-to wo;  
 Now cleid in gold, dessolvit now in ass;  
 So dois this warld ay transitorie go;  
 Vanitas Vanitatum, et omnia Vanitas.'

1. **Go to now:** We cannot but be reminded of the parable in Luke xii, and the words there addressed by the rich man to himself. The form of the address here rather suggests the mocking character of the whole appeal, and the bitterness of the experience he is about to relate.

2. **laughter.** Laughter and mirth are here personified, but it is the laughter of a shallow order; cf. vii. 6 and Prov. xiv. 13. It is with these words that Miss Rossetti begins her poem quoted on i. 12.

3. **to cheer my flesh with wine.** The spirit of the whole passage is admirably expressed in the mocking verse of Omar:

'You know, my friends, with what a brave carouse  
 I made a second marriage in my house;  
 Divorced old barren reason from my bed,  
 And took the daughter of the vine to spouse.'

Many verses of the famous Persian poet echo the same sentiment, and it was no uncommon thought that, as the Latin verse phrases it, truth was to be found in the wine-cup, and many felt with Omar—

'I wonder often what the vintners buy  
 One half so precious as the stuff they sell.'

**mine heart yet guiding me.** The writer impresses upon us the fact that he did not permit himself to sink under sensual pleasures, but deliberately yielded himself to their delights for the purpose of experimenting upon their results.

see what it was good for the sons of men that they should  
do under the heaven <sup>a</sup>all the days of their life. I made 4  
me great works ; I builded me houses ; I planted me  
vineyards ; I made me gardens and parks, and I planted 5  
trees in them of all kinds of fruit : I made me pools of 6  
water, to water therefrom the forest where trees were  
reared : I bought menservants and maidens, and had 7  
servants born in my house ; also I had great possessions  
of herds and flocks, above all that were before me in  
Jerusalem : I gathered me also silver and gold, and the 8  
peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces : I gat me  
men sinners and women singers, and the delights of the

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *the number of the days of their life.*

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4-8. In these verses the writer describes his various buildings and laying out of pleasure gardens and acquiring of varied possessions. The commentators generally illustrate from the narratives of the grandeur of Solomon's court described in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, and very probably the same of these lies behind the descriptions here given ; but there seems little use in particularizing them, since there is no probability that Solomon himself has anything to do with this work. The word rendered 'provinces' in verse 8 is confined to the later Hebrew, and probably signifies here that all lands were laid under contribution, as in the descriptions of the luxurious courts of the Roman emperors. The latter part of verse 8 is the only one that affords any difficulty, and the men and women singers therein mentioned are no doubt entertainers who added to the delights of the feasts in the palace, and the further description 'delights of the sons of men' is probably a general description for all kinds of sensual pleasures, though with special reference to the indulgence of sensual desires. The closing words rendered 'concubines very many' are the most difficult. The word rendered 'concubines' is really of unknown meaning, and numerous conjectures have been made as to its translation. The A. V. renders 'musical instruments,' following Luther. The LXX has 'cup-bearers,' following an Aramaic root meaning to 'pour out,' while certain of the Hebrew paraphrases suggest 'baths.' Some have tried to find a more general meaning in the thought of splendour as shown in heaps of treasure, while, again, 'chariot' and 'palanquin' have been suggested, and even demons male and female,

9 sons of men, <sup>a</sup> concubines very many. So I was great,  
 and increased more than all that were before me in  
 10 Jerusalem: also my wisdom <sup>b</sup> remained with me. And  
 whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them:  
 I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart  
 rejoiced because of all my labour; and this was my  
 11 portion from all my labour. Then I looked on all the  
 works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour  
 that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity  
 and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under  
 the sun.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *musical instruments, and that of all sorts* The Sept. and Syriac render, *cupbearers, male and female*. The meaning of the Hebrew is very uncertain.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *stood by me*

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the latter word in Hebrew having a close resemblance to this one. Another similar word is the word for 'breast,' and that significance has been given to it here, it being supposed to stand by figure of speech for woman. The most recent commentators adduce an Assyrian root which means 'love,' and render the words 'pearls of the harem.' In some form or other this latter is the most likely meaning. He had ransacked all lands for beautiful women wherewith to fill his palace. 'Very many' is probably a sufficiently accurate rendering, the idea being that possession is piled upon possession, and so a multitude is signified.

**9. remained.** More literally, 'sit beside me.' Here we have Wisdom personified as if she was a female monitress, and may perhaps purposely be contrasted with the women of pleasure mentioned in the previous verse. This personifying of Wisdom is common throughout the Wisdom literature.

**10. my portion.** This expression recurs in other passages of the book, and means more likely reward—his reward, that is to say, was in the very joy of the search he was engaged upon.

A very pertinent and pathetic parallel is to be found in the pages of Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, where he writes: 'There was no pleasure I did not experience. I threw the pearl of my life into a cup of wine. I went down the primrose path to the sound of flutes. I lived on honeycomb.'

**11. Then I looked.** Here is apparently a sharp contrast to the words he has just used. The joy was transient, and the end vanity. See Dr. Moffatt's striking quotation from Taine.

And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness <sup>12</sup>  
and folly: for what *can* the man *do* that cometh <sup>a</sup>after  
the king? *even* that which hath been already done.  
Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light <sup>13</sup>  
excelleth darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, <sup>14</sup>  
and the fool walketh in darkness: and yet I perceived  
that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in <sup>15</sup>

Or, *after the king, even him whom they made king long ago?*  
Or, *after the king, in those things which have been already done?*

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12-17. These verses recapitulate in large measure with fuller illustration (cf. i. 1-18). The main thought that is new is the proclamation of the great inherent superiority of wisdom to folly, but yet the end is alike to both; and the practical conclusion is that life is cruel and mocking.

12. *what can the man do, &c.* Siegfried places the second half of this verse immediately after verse 11, to which, it must be confessed, it forms a very appropriate conclusion. If the king has failed in finding real satisfaction out of a life of pleasure—the king who has had such unique opportunities of crowding his life with every possibility of gratification—how can any lesser man hope to succeed where he has failed? Further than the position of the words, however, there is a question about their meaning. The LXX reads a different text, and translates, 'What man will follow after counsel in whatsoever things they wrote it'—which certainly seems unintelligible, while the Vulgate renders, 'What is man that he should follow the King his Maker?' understanding the reference of God; but this is also impossible. Many, however, render the words 'What can the man do who comes after the king whom they made long ago?' making the sentence refer definitely to Solomon; or otherwise, 'What can the man do that comes after the king in those things which have been already done?' Either the rendering of the text or the last of the variations given seems to be the most probable.

14. *The wise man's eyes are in his head.* Cf. the saying of Jesus, Matt. vi. 23: 'If, therefore, the light that is in them be darkness, how great is the darkness!' and Miss Rossetti's poem:

'The one inheritance, which best  
And worst alike shall find and share:  
The wicked cease from troubling there,  
And there the weary are at rest;  
There all the wisdom of the wise  
Is vanity of vanities.'

- my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so will it happen even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I  
 16 said in my heart, that this also was vanity. For of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no remembrance for ever; seeing that in the days to come all will have been already forgotten. And how doth the wise man  
 17 die even as the fool! So I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun was grievous unto me: for all is vanity and a striving after wind.  
 18 And I hated all my labour wherein I laboured under the sun: seeing that I must leave it unto the man that  
 19 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 shewed wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.  
 20 Therefore I turned about to cause my heart to despair concerning all the labour wherein I had laboured under  
 21 the sun. For there is a man whose labour is with wisdom,

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**15. more wise.** These words signify, 'Why should I attempt to be too wise?' and have the cynical meaning that even excess of wisdom is folly, and the labour involved not worth while.

**16. wise man die even as the fool.** This is another proof that the writer had no confident hope in immortality, and that the end of all men was to him alike dark and sad.

**17. So I hated life.** These words are a strong expression of the writer's feeling towards life's mysteries and its baffling contradictions, and mark him out as, for the time being at least, a pessimist.

**18-23.** The writer here expresses for the first time a thought that recurs several times later in the book, namely, that all his efforts may be destroyed by the folly of his successor; and this fate turns all the wise man's best efforts to a cup of bitterness.

**18. seeing that I must leave it.** The first saddening thought is that those things in which he takes most interest must very soon be left—an idea that has embittered the lives of many great and rich men (see the instances given by Plumptre on this verse).

**20. I turned about to cause to . . . despair.** This is a Hebrew expression which apparently has the simple meaning, 'I began to despair.'

and with knowledge, and with <sup>a</sup> skilfulness ; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he <sup>b</sup> leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. For what <sup>22</sup> hath a man of all his labour, and of the <sup>c</sup> striving of his heart, wherein he laboureth under the sun? For all his <sup>23</sup> days are *but* sorrows, and his travail is grief ; yea, even in the night his heart taketh no rest. This also is vanity.

There is nothing better for a man *than* that he should <sup>24</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Or, *success*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *give*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, *vexation*

**21. For there is.** This should probably be rendered, as a hypothetical sentence, 'If there is a man,' &c.

**skilfulness.** This word signifies the cuteness that brings with it material success, and the close of the verse reverts to the galling thought that all his riches may become the portion of a man who does not value them because he has not toiled for them.

**24-26.** The meaning of this short section is not quite clear, because the Hebrew is uncertain ; but, on the interpretation taken in the notes, the general thought is that all enjoyment depends ultimately upon God, who gives good gifts to the righteous, but strips the sinner of his possessions in order that the righteous may be enriched by them—forming thus an illustration of the law laid down by Christ, 'And to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance : but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away.'

**24. There is nothing better.** This translation depends upon a correction of the Hebrew which is accepted by almost every editor. The words as they stand in the received text would mean 'there is no good in a man's eating and drinking' ; but this is contrary to the thought of the context. The R.V. translation probably represents the meaning of the corrected text as well as anything. It does not seem possible to interpret the words as Plumptre does (with many beautiful and appropriate illustrations) of the simple life, because there is no sufficient evidence that the writer here confines his thought to the mere necessities of existence, but that he is praising all the enjoyment that can be got out of life.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dunbar's lines :

'Man, pleiss thy makar and be mirry,  
And sett not by this world a chirry.'

And also Henry VIII's song :

'Then who can say  
But mirth and play  
Is best of all?'

eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labour.

- 25 This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can <sup>a</sup> have enjoyment, <sup>b</sup> more than  
26 I? For to the man that pleaseth him *God* giveth wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that pleaseth God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

- 3 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every

<sup>a</sup> Or, *hasten* thereto

<sup>b</sup> According to some ancient authorities, *apart from him*.

statement with which the verse closes is regarded by many as a pious note of a later editor, and it certainly does not seem quite appropriate to the prevalent mood of the writer, and is in particular out of accord with the close of verse 26.

25. In this verse there are two or three expressions that are difficult in Hebrew, and have been altered in the older versions, which latter are generally followed by modern editors. The most important are the words 'more than I.' If this is retained then the verse constitutes a boastful utterance of the writer that no one can ever know more of life's pleasures than he. Thus to understand the verse almost necessitates the further conclusion that the pious reflections of verses 24 and 26 are not from the same hand. Perhaps for this reason the words have been altered to read 'without him,' meaning that no pleasure in life is possible unless God sanctions it. Further, the words rendered 'have enjoyment' may also mean 'hasten.' If the latter meaning is taken, it must refer to the eager pursuit of pleasure. The LXX renders it 'drink,' but this seems to have arisen from a mistake as to the significance of the original word.

26. This verse, indicating the nature of the Divine government according to the thought of the pious Israelite, is out of harmony with the context, unless we are to suppose it to be a mocking statement of that judgement. It is scarcely probable that the writer would go so far, and it is easier to suppose that another hand has been here at work (for the idea conveyed, cf. Job xxvii. 16, 17, and Prov. xiii. 22).

iii. 1-15. This section may be called the Praise of Opportunism. It begins with the well-known list of times and seasons, and then proceeds to say that while God has thus set limits to all life, He has

a purpose under the heaven : a time to be born, and a 2  
time to die ; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that  
which is planted ; a time to kill, and a time to heal ; a 3  
time to break down, and a time to build up ; a time to 4  
weep, and a time to laugh ; a time to mourn, and a time  
to dance ; a time to cast away stones, and a time to 5

<sup>a</sup> Or, *matter*

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placed an unsatisfied longing in the hearts of men which the regularity of the world seems to mock. The perfection of God's work renders human tasks poor by contrast, and yet by their very nature men are constrained to attempt them.

1. **a season and a time.** In strictness these words would be better reversed, seeing that in English 'season' is more particular than 'time,' and refers more accurately to a definite period. Purpose might be better rendered 'business.' There are some editors who understand the reference to be not so much to the appointed seasons for the events named as to the transiency of all the experiences of human life: thus Haupt translates, 'All lasts but a while, and transient is everything under the sky'; but the whole form of the passage and the lesson drawn from it seems against this idea. In the original manuscripts the contrasted words form two separate lists, and are in that way more clear and emphatic. Similar 'tables of contrast' were known to the Greeks. The whole teaching of the section is summed up in the well-known passage of *Julius Caesar*:

'There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune ;  
Omitted, all the remnant of their lives  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.'

Popular proverbs have also enshrined the same teaching, as, for example, 'The mill cannot grind with the water that is past.'

2. **pluck up.** It has been suggested that, as this word is an uncommon one, and is elsewhere used figuratively of the destruction of cities, the figurative and not the natural sense is the one here. But inasmuch as all the other sets of words in the list are obviously to be taken in their natural sense, this is likely to be so understood also.

3. Cf. Jer. i. 10, and, as Plumptre does by way of illustration, Gal. ii. 18 and 2 Kings v. 26.

4. We are naturally reminded here of our Lord's contrast between Himself and John the Baptist (see Matt. ii. 16-19).

5. **to cast away stones.** This would, perhaps, be better rendered



gather stones together ; a time to embrace, and a time to  
 6 refrain from embracing ; a time to seek, and a time to  
 7 lose ; a time to keep, and a time to cast away ; a time to  
 rend, and a time to sew ; a time to keep silence, and a  
 8 time to speak ; a time to love, and a time to hate ; a time  
 9 for war, and a time for peace. What profit hath he that  
 10 worketh in that wherein he laboureth ? I have seen the  
 travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be  
 11 exercised therewith. He hath made every thing beautiful  
 in its time : also he hath set <sup>a</sup> the world in their heart,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *eternity*

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'scatter,' and may refer to the practice described in 2 Kings iii. 19, 25, of destroying the fertile fields of an enemy by putting stones over them. In this case the reverse process might refer to the clearing of ground for the purpose of planting in it.

**a time to refrain.** This may refer to times of distress in war or other public calamity, or to some occasion of solemn fasting (cf. Joel ii. 16 and 1 Cor. vii. 29-31). The latter passage almost suggests that Paul had these verses in mind.

**6.** This verse finds excellent illustration in our Lord's famous paradox, 'Whosoever will lose his life shall find it,' as well as in the parable of the merchantman seeking a goodly pearl, Matt. xiii. 45, 46.

**8. a time for war.** This alteration in form corresponds to the original, where also the infinitive is changed to a noun, probably as marking the conclusion of the series.

**9. What profit.** The result of the long enumeration is to suggest that man is baffled by the very sense of the fitness of things and his own inability to seize the proper moment.

**11. every thing beautiful.** This reminds us of the words in Gen. xxxi, 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.' Siegfried refers appropriately to the Hebrew fragment of Ecclesiasticus given in the *Expositor*, 5th series, vol. iv, p. 8, which is a variation of the text in chap. xxxix of that book. One verse in particular may be quoted, 'None may say this is bad ; what is it ? for everything is good in its season.'

**the world.** The word in the original is that which is generally translated 'for ever,' and signifies 'eternity.' Some have taken it, however, to mean 'the hidden thing,' and would render 'obscurity' here, as if God had put a veil upon men's hearts so that they could not read the riddle of life. By a slight change in the original

yet so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end. I know that <sup>12</sup> there is nothing better for them, than to rejoice, and <sup>a</sup> to do good so long as they live. And also that every man <sup>13</sup> should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labour, is the gift of God. I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it <sup>14</sup> shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God hath done it, that men should fear before him. <sup>b</sup>That which is hath been already; <sup>15</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Or, *to get good*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *That which hath been is now*

some have understood 'wisdom,' but this is improbable. Again, it has been suggested that we are to understand the translation 'age' to signify that the heart of man is a kind of mirror of all the changing fashions of life. This idea seems to belong to a later time, and we do better to rest on the first translation, 'eternity,' and to understand it as referring to the mystery of longings after a life greater and fuller than any the world holds, which is the strength while it is also the sorrow of human life. To the writer this does not constitute a witness for a higher life beyond the present, but only an added burden in an existence that is already overweighted with problems. For the fact of the presence of these longings in the human heart is simply to baffle it, so that 'man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end.'

**12. to do good.** There is not sufficient evidence that the Hebrew phrase ever bore this ethical significance, and it is more probable that it simply means 'to enjoy themselves'; so that the whole verse echoes in thought ii. 24.

**13. the gift of God.** By the addition of these words the epicurean turn of the passage is lifted into a somewhat higher realm by this statement that God is the source of all our pleasures; but in the opinion of many editors both this and the next verse are from the hand of the more orthodox reviser of the book.

**14. God hath done it.** Here the changelessness of the Divine purpose and the perfection of the Divine work are made the ground of men's trust in Him. It is a profoundly religious idea, and one that is familiar to the writers of the later Judaism, but whether it is appropriate to the dominant mood of this book may be questioned. One is reminded of the profound saying of Amiel, 'All is well, my God surrounds me.'

and that which is to be hath already been : and God seeketh again that which is <sup>a</sup> passed away.

- 16 And moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of judgement, that wickedness was there ; and in the place  
17 of righteousness, that wickedness was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked : for there is a time there for every <sup>b</sup> purpose and for every  
18 work. <sup>c</sup> I said in mine heart, *It is* because of the sons of men, that God may prove them, and that they may  
19 see that they themselves are *but as* beasts. For <sup>d</sup> that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts ; even

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *driven away*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *matter*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *I said in mine heart concerning the sons of men, It is that God &c.*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *the sons of men are a chance, and the beasts are a chance, and one &c.*

**15. is passed away.** God brings back again that which to all seeming has vanished, and, so the writer hints, the endless round begins again. There is no real end, whatever appearances may suggest. Several of the old versions, followed by some modern editors, read 'persecuted.' The words would then mean that God protects the persecuted. This is in itself a possible rendering, but it does not seem at all appropriate to the context.

**16-22.** This section more frankly than before, and without any gloss from more orthodox hands, states an epicurean doctrine. The fresh points of the argument are drawn from the writer's noticing the frequent perversion of justice, and this, he thinks, is the outcome of the Divine mockery of human attempts at wise and righteous conduct.

**17. for there is a time.** By a very slight alteration in the Hebrew this can be rendered, 'for He has appointed a time,' and this may very probably be the real sense.

**18. because of the sons of men.** These words should probably be closely connected with the preceding ones, thus, 'I said in mine heart concerning the sons of men.' The obvious meaning of the words is that man and beast are so absolutely under the Divine government that no distinctions can be made between them ; and apparently the purpose is to humble the pride of human wisdom.

**19. that which befalleth.** The rendering of the margin more accurately represents the meaning of the original, namely, 'the sons of men are a chance,' &c. ; but by the slightest change the

one thing befalleth them : as the one dieth, so dieth the other ; yea, they have all one <sup>a</sup> breath ; and man hath no pre-eminence above the beasts : for all is vanity. All go <sup>20</sup> unto one place ; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit <sup>b</sup> of man <sup>c</sup> whether it <sup>21</sup> goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast <sup>c</sup> whether it

<sup>a</sup> Or, *spirit*    <sup>b</sup> Heb. *of the sons of men.*    <sup>c</sup> Or, *that goeth*

ordinary Hebrew text makes it read 'the lot of men is the same as that of the beasts, &c.,' that is to say, it is not quite so hopelessly fatalistic as the undoubtedly correct reading makes it. Plumptre quotes well a saying of Solon given by Herodotus : 'Man is altogether a chance.'

**as the one dieth.** We may compare the thought of Ps. xlix. 12 and 20, where we are told that man is 'like the beasts that perish,' only that in these passages it is the man who lacks understanding that is so spoken of ; that is, the lot of the righteous is contrasted with the lot of the sinner, and it is only the latter who has such a hopeless outlook. Here the writer seems to have no gleam of the hope of immortality, or he may be, as some think, uttering a protest against the argument for immortality which at his time was becoming a prominent doctrine amongst Jewish thinkers, and at a later period was one of the most pronounced tenets of the Pharisees.

**they have all one breath.** This seems to refer to the words in Gen. ii. 7, and may be taken as an indignant protest against the theory there stated that the breath of life bestowed upon man was something different in character from that which the animal world enjoyed.

20. Cf. i. 4 and note, and also Omar :

'Ah ! make the most of what we yet may spend,

Before we too into the Dust descend ;

Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie,

Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and sans End.'

21. **Who knoweth, &c.** In this verse the writer professes an absolute agnosticism as to the fate of the human spirit. He cannot utter any definite decision as to whether it has any advantage over that of the beast or not. His standpoint is not absolutely that of the Sadducees, but it comes very near to it. His despair is not quite so dark as that of the Persian poet who writes :

'A Muezzin from the towers of darkness cries

"Fools, your reward is neither Here nor There !"

22 goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him *back* to see what shall be after him?

4 Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold, the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they had  
2 no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive;  
3 yea, <sup>a</sup> better than them both *did I esteem* him which hath

<sup>a</sup> Or, *better than they both is he which &c.*

22. Cf. verse 13 above. Siegfried thinks that this verse proceeds from the more optimistic epicurean writer who has added occasional notes in the book. This conclusion is not necessary, however, and we can feel that the words express the best practical result that the somewhat dreary philosophy of the writer permits, and that anyhow he takes a higher ground than many of his brother epicureans.

iv. 1. **They had no comforter.** These words, it will be noticed, are repeated twice in the verse, first with reference to the oppressed, and secondly to their oppressors. In the second case the word may probably mean 'avenger,' as other forms of the verb in the original have that meaning, and there may either be a slight mistake in the word, or this form may have borne the meaning, though we have no other evidence of it. The whole circumstances revealed by the verse are those of a society where tyranny prevailed, and are probably more true of the Greek period of Jewish history than of any other.

2. **Wherefore I praised the dead.** Cf. for the thought of this verse and the next Job iii. 11-26. The writer feels that many have been happy in the moment of their death who have not lived to see the miseries that distress him.

3. **Better than them both.** This idea is also found in the above passage in Job, as also in vi. 3 below, and is memorably expressed, in a famous chorus, by Sophocles:

'Never to be at all  
Excels all fame;

not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Then I saw all labour and every <sup>a</sup> skilful work, that <sup>4</sup> <sup>b</sup> for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. The fool foldeth his <sup>5</sup> hands together, and eateth his own flesh. Better is an <sup>6</sup> handful <sup>c</sup> with quietness, than two handfuls <sup>c</sup> with labour and striving after wind.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *successful*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *it cometh of a man's rivalry with his neighbour*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *of*

Quickly, next best, to pass  
From whence we came.'

*Oed. Col. 1,225.*

The thought of the verse probably reverts back to that of iii. 21.

4. This verse is more clearly understood if the marginal rendering is taken. We might then render it, 'Then I saw the end of all toil and of every successful work, that it cometh of a man's rivalry with his neighbour.' It is curious to find how very modern this conception is. It would make a splendid motto for a Socialist address against the evils of competition.

5. **The fool foldeth his hands.** The thought here seems to be that if the eager strife of competition is vanity, equally bad is laziness. Some think that the verse may represent a current proverb. The most difficult words to interpret are the closing ones, 'eateth his own flesh.' Some understand it of securing his own meals, and that thus the idea is that even the lazy man manages somehow to get enough to eat, and so is as well off as the hard worker, and has not to suffer the penalties that attach to the strenuous life. But it seems better to understand the words of self-destruction. The lazy man starves himself, and comes to an untimely end. The best illustrations of the use of the phrase are to be found in Micah iii. 3 and Isa. xlix. 26, rather than in the somewhat cannibalistic references that are frequently given to illustrate it, such as Isa. ix. 20, &c.

6. This verse seems to strike the mean between the two former ones, and to suggest that the wisest lot is that of the man who is content with little and does not expose himself to the rivalries of the eager world. The first word rendered 'handful' really signifies the hollow of the open hand, while the second signifies the grasped and closed fist. It seems, therefore, that the writer means that it is better to rest satisfied with what is gently placed into the outstretched hand than eagerly to grasp with both hands that for which one has to struggle. If, however, we translate 'of' instead

- 7, 8 Then I returned and saw vanity under the sun. There is one that is alone, and he hath not a second; yea, he hath neither son nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labour, neither are his eyes satisfied with riches. For whom then, *saith he*, do I labour, and deprive my soul of good? This also is vanity, yea, it is a sore travail.
- 9 Two are better than one; because they have a good
- 10 reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he
- 11 falleth, and hath not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth: but how can
- 12 one be warm *alone*? And if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

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of 'with,' in both clauses, the meaning is somewhat different, but this rendering is not so probable.

8. This is a most dramatic and almost pathetic description of a lonely miser, who is never satisfied with the amount he amasses, and yet feels (cf. ii. 18, 19) the bitterness of not knowing who is to be his heir, and what use will be made of the property which has cost so much to win.

9-12. These verses constitute a short section on the advantages of partnership, or, as generally taken, on the benefits of friendship. It is not clear that the higher relations of friendship are necessarily implied. The writer seems rather to look to the gains derivable from concerted action, but it may without much difficulty be applied as a parable of friendship. Plumptre's commentary should be consulted on this passage for the fine selection of literary illustrations, and the student should not omit Bacon's essay on 'Friendship.' The illustrations in verses 10, 11, and 12 are probably taken from the exigencies of Oriental travel, namely, the dangers of slipping on bad roads, of having at night as covering only the cloak worn during the day, and of perils at the hand of robbers.

12. A **threefold cord**. The sudden advance from two to three at the close of this verse is probably nothing more than an emphatic conclusion of the section, or it may be parallel to the numerical proverb such as those found in Prov. xxx. It constitutes a kind of *a fortiori* argument. The fanciful interpretations that have been given to the words have, of course, no foundation in the meaning of the passage.

Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish <sup>13</sup> king, who knoweth not how to receive admonition any more. For out of prison he came forth to be king; <sup>a</sup> yea, <sup>14</sup> even in his kingdom he was born poor. I saw all the <sup>15</sup> living which walk under the sun, that they were with the youth, the second, that stood up in his stead. <sup>b</sup> There <sup>16</sup> was no end of all the people, even of all them over whom he was: yet they that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

<sup>c</sup> Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God; 5

<sup>a</sup> According to some ancient versions, *whereas the other though born in his kingdom became poor.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *There is no end, in the mind of all the people, to all that hath been before them; they also &c.*

<sup>c</sup> [Ch. iv. 17 in Heb.]

**13-16.** This section seems to have some exact historical situation in view, but just what that situation is scholars are unable to determine. Many various solutions have been attempted, but all of them are open to objection. Various historical situations in Jewish history from the days of Joseph to those of Herod have been adduced as fitting the circumstances. One of the most recent solutions, and perhaps as probable as any, is that of P. Haupt, who regards the youth as Alexander Balas (see 1 Macc. x. 47) and the old king as Antiochus Epiphanes. He thinks that this also suits the reference to 'the second' in verse 15, seeing that Demetrius was the first successor of Antiochus, who was set aside in favour of Alexander. The wisest course, however, may be to say that we do not know enough about the exact period when the book was written to enable us to come to any confident conclusion. The practical lesson that the writer draws from the incident is the familiar one of the vanity of it all, this time based on the consideration that the fickle multitude who to-day crowd to honour their momentary favourite will to-morrow forget him, and in the strange lottery of the rapid alternations of rival monarchs to which the age was liable new rulers will bring new favourites, and the state itself in all probability be turned topsy-turvy (cf. Browning's poem, 'The Patriot').

**16. over whom he was.** This is probably more accurately 'before whom he was,' and refers to his leadership of the people (see 1 Sam. xviii. 16).

v. 1: This verse is placed in the original, and in the old versions



for to draw nigh to hear is better than to give the sacrifice  
 2 of fools : for they know not that they do evil. <sup>a</sup> Be not

<sup>a</sup> [Ch. v. 1 in Heb.]

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as the last verse of the preceding chapter, but obviously its connexion is with what follows rather than with what precedes. The writer turns now to acts of worship and to the fulfilment of vows, and shows that in both of these matters the only wise course is to hold the fear of God before one's eyes. So rapid and thorough is the change of thought that Siegfried and others feel the passage must be attributed to another hand ; and certainly it is very difficult to fit the section in with what precedes and follows it. It is possible that originally the passage consisted of some such general advice on the subject of vows as is now found in verse 4, based upon a kind of common-sense view of man's relation to God that did not imply very high religious ideas, and that this has been worked over by some other hand, and ultimately given its more orthodox form.

**Keep thy foot.** This, of course, is a reference to the Oriental idea of reverential behaviour which consists of taking off the shoes on entering a sacred place, and hence figuratively the phrase is employed of a correct demeanour and spirit in worship (cf. for contrast Isa. i. 12). Professor Margoliouth, in *The Expositor*, Feb. 1, 1908, suggests that this verse should be translated 'Walk carefully as thou goest to the House of God, and one that is ready to hear is better than fools offering sacrifice—for they know not to do evil'; and then further regards it as the origin of Eccles. vii. 14 and xxviii. 2. In the latter verse he thinks the words 'one that is ready to hear' are interpreted as referring to the man of a forgiving spirit.

**the house of God.** In Ps. lxxiii. 17 we have the nearest analogy in the words 'the sanctuary of God.' Whether the reference here is to the Temple or to the Synagogue is uncertain. Wildeboer suggests that, at this time, service similar to that of the Synagogue may have been held in some building attached to the Temple, and that thus the contrast between those who listened to the reading of Scripture and that of the unthinking worshipper who followed the ceremonial practices may be the more emphasized. In any case, the contrast suggested is that of the famous passage in 1 Sam. xv. 22—the great distinction between outward observance and inward obedience to which our Lord set His seal in Matt. xii. 7.

**sacrifice of fools.** This may be not only a sacrifice that has no thought of its significance, but actually the sacrifice of wicked men (cf. Prov. xv. 8), though the latter does not seem so probable.

**they know not.** These words are capable of several inter-

rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter <sup>a</sup> any thing before God ; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth : therefore let thy words be few. For <sup>a</sup> 3  
 dream cometh with a multitude of <sup>b</sup> business ; and a fool's voice with a multitude of words. When thou vowest <sup>a</sup> 4  
 a vow unto God, defer not to pay it ; for he hath no pleasure in fools : pay that which thou vowest. Better <sup>a</sup> 5  
 is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst

<sup>a</sup> Or, *a word*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *travail*

pretations. First, that of the text, which is followed by many interpreters, but is not easily sustained by the Hebrew. Secondly, 'they know not so that in consequence they do evil.' Thirdly, 'they (i.e. "the righteous") know not to do evil.' This seems impossible, as the reference to the righteous would be very obscure, and almost unintelligible without some further indication. A slight alteration of the original would enable us to render, 'for they know not how to do anything else than evil,' which would give a good sense. The choice seems to lie between this and the second rendering given above.

**2. let thy words be few.** The whole precept is against carelessness and mere repetition in prayer, and inculcates a reverential spirit that finds its utterance in proper language. A precept from the Talmud forms a close parallel, 'The words of a man should always be few in the presence of God' (cf. Matt. vi. 7).

**3. For a dream cometh.** The illustration contained in this verse is based upon a true observation, namely, that a harassed mind filled with many anxieties and crowded with thoughts of business gives no opportunity for quiet slumber, and so occasions dreams ; just in the same way the restless spirit of the foolish man is manifested in his merely verbal prayers, which are impotent and fruitless as a passing vision.

**4. he hath no pleasure.** This should, perhaps, be more generally expressed 'There is no pleasure,' i.e. neither God nor men find any satisfaction in a fool. The reason adduced for not paying a vow is different from that found in Deut. xxiii. 21, where we read, 'The Lord thy God will surely require it of thee.' Here the writer does not look to the final result of the recklessness, but to the moral weakness inherent in such conduct. A somewhat close parallel is that of Prov. xx. 25.

**5.** For this verse cf. Deut. xxiii. 22 ; in fact, the whole section seems to have that passage in Deuteronomy in view, for the next verse has a distinct reference to Deut. xviii. 23.

- 6 vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin ; neither say thou before the <sup>a</sup> angel, that it was an error : wherefore should God be angry at thy  
 7 voice, and destroy the work of thine hands ? <sup>b</sup> For *thus it cometh to pass* through the multitude of dreams and vanities and many words : but fear thou God.  
 8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and the violent

<sup>a</sup> Or, messenger of God See Mal. ii. 7.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *For in the multitude of dreams and vanities are also many words or, there are vanities, and in many words*

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**6. thy flesh to sin.** Flesh seems here to be an equivalent to the whole nature, which is thus led into evil ways by the rashness of a careless vow. The phrase may signify 'to be brought under punishment,' in which case the thought is that of the painful results that will ensue.

**before the angel.** If 'angel' is the correct rendering, the reference must be to the recording angel. The LXX reads 'before God,' but the word is not Elohim, as in Ps. viii. 5, but another word, whose ordinary meaning is 'messenger,' though it is frequently employed of the angel of God, especially in the E narratives of the Pentateuch. In Malachi ii. 7 we find it employed of the priest, and that is probably its significance here. The words would then refer to the custom described in Num. xv. 25, where the ritual of the offering for sins of ignorance is described.

**that it was.** 'That' should probably be omitted, as the word so translated was a mere sign of quotation. We should, therefore, render 'it was an error' as the actual words spoken to the priest. The closing words of the verse point to the folly of running recklessly into the risk of meeting the Divine displeasure.

**For thus it cometh to pass, &c.** It will be seen that these opening words have no equivalent in the original, but are introduced by the revisers with the purpose of making sense of a very difficult verse, the idea being that the writer here sums up the thought of the foregoing paragraph ; but, as will be seen from the R. V. margin, other renderings are suggested, neither of which appears to give much better sense. We are almost driven to the conclusion that there must be some original corruption of the text, and probably a solution along the lines of that suggested by Siegfried is the most satisfactory, namely, that the words refer back to verse 3, and that originally they must have run somewhat as follows : 'As dreams come from a multitude of business, so come vanities from

taking away of judgement and justice in <sup>a</sup>a province, marvel not at the matter : for one higher than the high regardeth ; and there be higher than they. <sup>b</sup>Moreover <sup>9</sup>the profit of the earth is for all : the king *himself* is served by the field.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the state*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *But the profit of a land every way is a king that maketh himself servant to the field or, is a king over the cultivated field*

a multitude of words.' The verse closes with a repetition of the warning to fear God.

8-20. The section covered by these verses consists of rather loosely connected reflections upon civil government and the use of wealth. Throughout we find fresh illustrations of the central theme that even wealth and power lead to vanity, and are without lasting satisfaction.

8. This verse reveals the typical condition of many Oriental states, wherein a corrupt government leads to oppression and injustice. The bribery and tyranny of high officials causes the grinding of the faces of the poor, as in many parts of Turkey at the present time. The latter part of the verse is very obscure. What the reference of the words 'for one higher than the high regardeth ; and there be higher than they' is we cannot easily discover. Some think the reference to be to God, who overrules all apparent injustice, in the end for good. But in addition to the fact that on the second occasion the word rendered 'higher' is a plural form, which is not in itself impossible in reference to the Divine Being, there is the consideration that so to understand it does not give a good sense, and it is more probable that it is a somewhat disguised reference to the multitude of high officials whose mutual jealousies and counterplots baulk one another at every point. The writer's conclusion is, therefore, that in such a rotten system of government there need be no surprise at evil results.

9. **Moreover the profit of the earth.** This verse is one of the most difficult in the book to interpret, and probably there is some original corruption of the text which makes it impossible for us now to extract a satisfactory meaning from the words as they stand, neither does any suggested restoration commend itself. The meaning of the translation in the R. V. text is obviously that both people and king are in the end dependent upon the soil—a sort of ancient claim that 'back to the land' is the only solution of the social problem ; and very probably, however we translate the words, the meaning is, as Delitzsch maintains, to suggest that a king who takes interest in the development of agriculture serves

10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver ;  
 nor he that loveth abundance with increase : this also is  
 11 vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that  
 eat them : and what advantage is there to the owner  
 12 thereof, saving the beholding of *them* with his eyes ? The  
 sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little  
 or much : but the fulness of the rich will not suffer him  
 to sleep.

13 There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun,  
 14 *namely*, riches kept by the owner thereof to his hurt : and  
 those riches perish by evil <sup>a</sup> adventure ; and if he hath  
 15 begotten a son, there is nothing in his hand. As he

<sup>a</sup> Or, *travail*

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the highest interests of his country. Wildeboer makes the interesting suggestion that the words might be rendered, 'In all circumstances it is a gain for a land when it has a king to whom obedience is willingly rendered' ; and this is, perhaps, the best that can be made of very difficult Hebrew.

**10. he that loveth abundance with increase.** It would be better to translate, 'He that loveth riches will never be satisfied with his income.'

**When goods increase, &c.** This is a reflection from experience : As the rich man's household increases, he has the more to care for, and is compelled to spend more freely : but even if his possessions increase, and he is able to make a more brilliant show in the world, all the advantage that accrues is the delight to the eyes that such glories bring, but no real gain to the possessor.

**12.** Increase of riches brings with it such anxiety that often the wealthy man is a stranger to the unbroken slumber of the labourer.

'They know who work, not they who play,  
 If rest is sweet.'

**13-17.** These verses contain a clearly written and powerful picture of the man who has heaped up wealth, and by some evil chance of fortune has been deprived of it all, so that the son for whom he has hoarded it is left penniless, and the man himself returns to the grave in poverty, his life embittered by his sorrow and disappointment. Cf. for an illustration of the verses Job i. 21, xxi. 25 ; Eccles. xl. 1 ; 1 Tim. vi. 6.

came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he go again as he came, and shall take nothing for his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is <sup>16</sup> a grievous evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that he laboureth for the wind? <sup>a</sup> All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he <sup>17</sup> is sore vexed and hath sickness and wrath.

Behold, <sup>b</sup> that which I have seen to be good and to be <sup>18</sup> comely is for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labour, wherein he laboureth under the sun, <sup>c</sup> all the days of his life which God hath given him: for this is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath <sup>19</sup> given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much <sup>20</sup> remember the days of his life; because God answereth *him* in the joy of his heart.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it <sup>6</sup> is heavy upon men: a man to whom God giveth riches, <sup>2</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The Sept. has, *All his days are in darkness and mourning, and much vexation and sickness and wrath.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one &c.*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *the number of the days.*

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**18, 19.** These verses, in a rather more expanded form, repeat the thought of ii. 24.

**20. he shall not much remember.** Joy and gladness shall so fill the man's life that he will not be morbid either about its length or shortness (cf. Prov. xv. 13, 15). As to the last words of the verse, the meaning is clear, though the translation varies. Probably the best rendering is, 'God occupies him with the joy of his heart,' that is, makes joy his constant companion (cf. Plumptre for the various renderings that have been suggested).

vi. This short chapter is concerned with the disappointment of life that comes through experience of cherished desires finding no fulfilment. The writer returns to the mood and to the illustrations that we have found in ii. 18-23, iv. 7, 8, v. 13-17.

wealth, and honour, so that he lacketh nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it; this is vanity, and it is an evil disease. If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, but his soul be not filled with good, and moreover he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he: for it cometh in vanity, and departeth in darkness, and the name thereof is covered with darkness; moreover it hath not seen the sun <sup>a</sup> nor known it; <sup>b</sup> this hath rest rather than the other: yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, and yet enjoy no good: do not all go to one place? All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. For what advantage hath the wise more than the fool?

<sup>a</sup> Or, *neither had any knowledge*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *it is better with this than with the other*

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**3. no burial.** The writer is choosing different types from which to illustrate the unsatisfactoriness of life. In verses 1 and 2 he selects the childless man. In this verse he selects a man with a large number of descendants, who yet comes to a dishonoured grave. Some writers see a double reference to Greek history in this verse—first, to Artaxerxes Mnemon (404 B. C.), who is said to have had over 100 children, and who died of grief at the age of nearly 100, because of the evil conduct of his sons; and secondly, to his son Artaxerxes Ochus, who was slain by one of his court favourites, and whose body was devoured by cats. The shame of having no honourable burial was reckoned a terrible disgrace in the ancient world (see the story of Jezebel, 2 Kings ix. 35, and of Jehoiachim, Jer. xxii. 19). On the other hand, the determination to give a beloved brother fitting burial at all hazards is the subject of Sophocles' magnificent play the *Antigone*.

**5. nor known it.** This may also mean 'nor awakened to self-consciousness,' and the following words are better rendered as in the margin: 'It is better with this than with the other.' The whole thought is the outcome of a very pessimistic mood that gives way to exaggerated language about even the saddest of earthly lots.

**8. For what advantage.** This cynical question has been met

<sup>a</sup> *or* what hath the poor man, that knoweth to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

<sup>b</sup> Whatsoever hath been, the name thereof was given <sup>10</sup> long ago, and it is known that it is <sup>c</sup> man: neither can he contend with him that is mightier than he. Seeing <sup>11</sup> there be many <sup>d</sup> things that increase vanity, what is man

<sup>a</sup> Or, *or the poor man that hath understanding, in walking before the living*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *Whatsoever he be, his name was given him long ago, and it is known that he is man*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *Adam* See Gen. ii. 7.

<sup>d</sup> Or, *words*

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before (ii. 15), but the second clause of it is new, and not easy to interpret. It probably means, 'What is the advantage of the poor man who knows how to control his appetite over the rich man who does not possess that knowledge?'

**9. the sight of the eyes.** This obviously means the attainment of desire (cf. Prov. xiii. 12).

**10. Whatsoever hath been.** Better, perhaps, as in the margin, 'whatever he is.' Two interpretations of the verse are given. One sees in it a statement of absolute fatalism, namely, that man's nature is fixed from all eternity: but two objections are raised to that interpretation—first, that the word rendered 'already' is never used anywhere else in this book of the Divine purposes, neither is the word 'mightier' used elsewhere of God. It is more probable, therefore, that the words are a play upon the name Adam, and refer to man's essential mortality and his inability to escape Death, who is mightier than he.

**11. many things.** The word here rendered 'things,' as is frequently the case, may also mean 'words,' and if so understood here the reference will be to the purposeless discussions of the philosophers. Cf. Omar:—

'Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about: but evermore  
Came out by the same door wherein I went.'

Cf. further the immediately following stanzas. This interpretation fits in best with that which saw in the former verse a reference to fatalism; but if we render 'things' it better suits the second interpretation, and refers to the multitude of life's affairs.



12 the better? For who knoweth what is good for man in *his* life, <sup>a</sup> all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

7 A *good* name is better than precious ointment; and the <sup>2</sup> day of death than the day of one's birth. It is better to

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *the number of the days*.

12. **his vain life . . . as a shadow.** Compare for the metaphor viii. 13; Job xiv. 2; Jas. iv. 14, also Omar:

'We are no other than a moving row  
Of Magic Shadow-shapes, that come and go  
Round with the Sun-illuminated Lantern held  
In Midnight by the Master of the Show.'

And also the famous French verses:

'La vie est vaine:  
Un peu d'amour,  
Un peu de haine,  
Et puis—bonjour!

'La vie est brève:  
Un peu d'espoir,  
Un peu de rêve,  
Et puis—bonsoir!'

vii. 1-12. This section consists in the main of a series of proverbial utterances, more or less closely connected, on the subject of the greater wisdom that inheres in a serious view of life, though the illustrations that are taken strike one as rather gloomy in character, and as taking a narrow view of mirth and wisdom.

1. **A good name, &c.** In the original these words constitute a *paranomasia*, which is difficult to produce in English, the play being on the words for 'name' and 'ointment,' which resemble one another very closely. It might roughly be represented in English by the rendering, 'Fair fame is better than fine perfume' (cf. Song of Songs i. 3).

**the day of death.** The thought of these words is that the end of life is secure, while its beginning is full of uncertainty, and many excellent literary illustrations will be found in Plumptre's note on the passage. We are reminded of the cynical remark of the grave-digger in *Beside the Bonnie Briarbusk*: 'Ye can hae

go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: 3 for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made <sup>a</sup>glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourn- 4 ing; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It 5 is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns 6 under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity. <sup>b</sup>Surely extortion maketh a wise man foolish; 7 and a gift destroyeth the understanding. Better is the 8 end of a thing than the beginning thereof: *and* the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be 9 not hasty in thy spirit to be <sup>c</sup>angry: for <sup>d</sup>anger resteth in the bosom of fools. Say not thou, What is the cause 10 that the former days were better than these? for thou

<sup>a</sup> Or, *better*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *For*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *vexed*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *vexation*

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little rael plesure in a merrige, for ye never ken hoo it will end; but there's nae risk about a beerial.'

**2. the house of mourning.** We must remember that, according to Jewish custom, mourning lasted for at least a week, and that the reference here is probably to consolatory visits during that period, which are regarded as emphasizing, for the one who takes part in them, the truth of life's uncertainty.

**3. glad** should rather be 'better,' that is, sorrow is a better discipline for the soul than joy. It cuts deeper into life.

**6.** Here, again, there is a *paranomasia*, which can be represented in English as 'the crackling of nettles under a kettle.'

**7. Surely.** This word should properly be rendered by the conjunction 'for,' but in that case it is not easy to trace the argument, so that some think that the first half of the verse has been lost, and Delitzsch supplies it from Prov. xvi. 8, 'Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.'

**9. for, &c.** By a 'gift' in the latter part of the verse we have possibly to understand a 'bribe,' since bribery was one of the great evils of Oriental states. (See Prov. xv. 27, xvii. 8.)

**10.** See the excellent literary illustrations given in Moffatt's volume.

11 I do not inquire <sup>a</sup> wisely concerning this. Wisdom <sup>b</sup> is  
 as good as an inheritance: yea, more excellent is it for  
 12 them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defence, even  
 as money is a defence: but the excellency of know-  
 ledge is, that wisdom preserveth the life of him that  
 13 hath it. Consider the work of God: for who can make

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *out of wisdom.*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *is good together with an inheritance: and profitable unto them &c.*

**11. Wisdom is as good as.** The rendering of the margin, 'good together with,' is probably more correct, and suits better the thought that has occurred more than once in the book, namely, that riches in themselves may do more harm than good, but when coupled with wisdom they make the latter more powerful. In the latter part of the verse the margin should also be followed, 'and profitable unto them.'

**12. defence.** This is really 'shade,' and we are to think of the favourite Oriental figure of the shadow cast by a rock in the blazing heat, as in the famous passage in Isaiah xxxii. 2. The writer couples both wisdom and money here, recognizing that each is capable of protecting to some extent those who possess them; but the latter part of the verse shows that he considers that it will be the part of the truly sensible man to prefer wisdom to wealth, since there is in the former a power that saves life as well as affords it grateful shade by the way. By the alteration of a single letter Siegfried translates the first part of the verse 'the shelter of wisdom is like the shelter of money.'

**13-18.** It is not easy to see any close connexion between these verses and those that precede them. It seems better, therefore, to connect them closely with the verses that follow, and let the next paragraph run from verse 13 to 18, which would then deal with some special aspects of the problem of the Divine government, as presented in the seeming inequalities of human life, and would inculcate a mood of moderation and contentment with practical Godliness. If we do not take this course, the only other open to us is to decide, with Siegfried, that more than one hand is at work on the passage, and that there is no obvious connexion between these verses and what either precedes or follows them.

**13. Consider.** This word may be regarded as summing up much of the practical philosophy of the book. The writer advises us not to perplex ourselves too much about the mysteries of the universe, but by observing and reflecting upon God's methods,

that straight, which he hath made crooked? In the day <sup>14</sup> of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God hath even made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out any thing *that shall be* after him.

All this have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a <sup>15</sup> righteous man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth *his life* in his evil-doing. Be not righteous over much; neither make <sup>16</sup>

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seek to discover how we may rule our lives in accordance with the Divine will.

**14.** The thought of this verse is not quite easy to discover, but probably its general significance is that, whether in joy or in sorrow, we are not to allow the hope or fear of what we follow to deprive us of the value of the passing experience. We are not to refuse to be glad in prosperity, nor when sorrow comes to be so overwhelmed by it that we cannot discover its meaning. God has filled life with both these experiences, but has not given man the power of prevision to tell beforehand which lot will be his; and this very uncertainty of life constitutes for the wise man its true discipline (cf. chaps. iii. 18, vi. 12, and Job ii. 10). Cf. the beautiful sentence in one of R. L. Stevenson's Prayers:—'When the day returns, return to us, our sun and comforter, and call us up with morning faces and with morning hearts—eager to labour—eager to be happy, if happiness shall be our portion—and if the day be marked for sorrow, strong to endure it.' Some have seen in the latter part of the verse a reference to the doctrine of the Resurrection, and have considered that the writer is here opposing the definite teaching upon it, which was just becoming prominent among a certain section of his countrymen at that period; but it is very doubtful whether the words can bear that significance.

**15.** **All this have I seen.** The writer reverts back to that constantly recurring problem, not only of the O. T. thinkers, but, which has perplexed every age, the prosperity of the wicked and the evil lot of the righteous (cf. ii. 14-16, iii. 19, viii. 11-14, as well as the whole Book of Job).

**16.** **Be not righteous over much.** This and the following verse cause much difficulty to commentators owing to their seemingly mocking tone. Many suppose them to be derived from the Greek idea of the Golden Mean, which inculcated the principle that one should never be too enthusiastic about any

- thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?  
 17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why  
 18 shouldest thou die before thy time? It is good that thou  
 shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from that withdraw  
 not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth  
 of them all.  
 19 Wisdom is a strength to the wise man more than ten

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cause, and that the safest going lay in the middle path. But even then it is not easy to understand the form of the teaching here, as it is difficult to suppose that if righteous and wicked are to be taken literally the writer could really suggest that it was well to check one's self in the way of goodness, or that one could safely go a certain length in the way of sin. It seems necessary, therefore, to find some other meaning than the literal one for the words here employed, and the best explanation is probably that which regards the counsel as aimed against the extreme legalism of the sect that was later known as that of the Pharisees. If the writer, as is frequently supposed, had more sympathy with those who were subsequently known as Sadducees, there may be more point in the suggestion. He sees a danger in extreme asceticism, but a still greater one in extreme licence. If we may further think that there was any political reference in the writer's mind, we may compare what is said about the Chasidim (that is, the extreme pietists) in 2 Macc. xiv. 6, that they 'keep up war, and are seditious, not suffering the kingdom to find tranquillity.' Haupt regards the words as equivalent to orthodox and unorthodox, but this introduces too modern ideas. The result of either course is shown to be self-destruction—in the former case probably by excess of zeal, and in the latter by bringing one's self under Divine punishment.

**18. It is good, &c.** The difficulty that attaches to the former verses is, of course, found here also, because until we know to what they refer it is not possible to give a satisfactory meaning to this verse. In general terms it seems to be a statement that the wider our human experience, the better it is for us, so long as all our life is subject to the Divine will. A man should acquaint himself with all the forms of life, but govern his own conduct by the Divine counsel.

**19-29.** In this section we have some general reflections upon wisdom that are not very closely connected, and included in them is an extremely bitter and cynical judgement on women, while the passage closes with a statement as to man's restlessness and subtlety.

**19. ten rulers.** The number ten is obviously merely figura-

rulers which are in a city. <sup>a</sup> Surely there is not <sup>a</sup> 20  
 righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth  
 not. Also <sup>b</sup> take not heed unto all words that are spoken ; <sup>21</sup>  
 lest thou hear thy servant curse thee : for oftentimes also <sup>22</sup>  
 thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast  
 cursed others.

All this have I <sup>c</sup> proved in wisdom : I said, I will be <sup>23</sup>  
 wise ; but it was far from me. That which <sup>d</sup> is is far off, <sup>24</sup>

Or, For

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *give not thine heart.*  
<sup>d</sup> Or, *hath been*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *tried by*

tive, and suggests perfection ; that is to say, that wisdom plays the same part in a man's life as does the best city council in civic affairs. By a slight alteration of the Hebrew the words have been also rendered (as a further reference to the teaching of verse 12), 'Wisdom is a greater protection for the wise man than the riches of the rulers who were in the city.'

**20. Surely.** The Hebrew particle thus rendered is generally translated 'for,' but if we so translate it here, then we are bound to find a close connexion between this and the preceding verse. This is difficult to do, and some are even driven to the story of Abraham's intercession for Sodom in order to account for it, but it is not easy to see how that narrative helps us. It is better, therefore, to translate, as may be done, 'because,' and thus connect closely the verses which follow. This makes better sense.

**21. lest thou hear.** The force of the words is the counsel contained in the common saying 'Listeners hear no good of themselves,' and is directed against the folly of paying attention to all manner of gossip and rumour.

**22. thine own heart knoweth:** Hereby the writer enforces his counsel with a *tu quoque*, as he reminds the reader that his own heart is probably not guiltless of having harboured ungenerous thoughts of his neighbour, and his tongue of having given expression to them.

**23. have I proved.** Here, again, the writer returns to an account of his practical experience of life and the endeavours he made to solve its riddles, as he has already described in chaps. i and ii ; and he has to make the confession that, though wisdom had been his ideal, he has been unable to reach it.

**24. That which is.** True reality has proved elusive, and he has no plummet whereby to sound its depths.

25 and exceeding deep; who can find it out? I turned about, and my heart *was set* to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the reason *of things*, and to know <sup>a</sup> that wickedness is folly, and that foolishness is  
 26 madness: and I find a thing more bitter than death, *even* the woman <sup>b</sup> whose heart is snares and nets, *and* her hands *as* hands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from  
 27 her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. Behold, this have I found, saith the Preacher, <sup>c</sup> *laying* one thing to

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the wickedness of folly, and foolishness which is madness*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *who is a snare, and her heart is as nets*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *weighing one thing after another, to find out the reason*

25. As in i. 17, he here describes how he has penetrated even to the depths of wickedness and folly, but found there also mocking uncertainty, and no final solution; but, he declares,

26. he has made one cruel discovery, namely, that the deepest depth of sin and folly is to be found in the woman who has set herself to act the temptress, and that no more terrible lot can be imagined than to fall into her hands. This teaching has many parallels in Proverbs, as the study of that book will show. It is much discussed whether the author is here speaking of some personal experience or not, but it is impossible to decide the point. Rather against the idea of this being a personal experience is the presence of the words, 'Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her.'

27, 28. The exact connexion and purport of these verses is not easy to discover. To begin with, the word rendered 'account' only occurs in this book, where it is used in three passages, in each of which, unfortunately, the English rendering is different. In vii. 25 it is rendered 'reason,' and in ix. 10, 'device.' Wildeboer considers it equivalent to 'wisdom' here, and if we could so render, it would make the passage much clearer. A further interest is that a slight variant of the same word is translated in verse 29 'inventions,' and there can be no doubt that in the original a play upon the words is intended. Perhaps we may suppose that the real meaning is something like this—that the preacher declares he has carefully compared one thing with another in order to arrive at the real discovery of truth, which he has failed to find, but has discovered this—that men have misled themselves by false discoveries of their own with which they have rested satisfied. A further difficulty of the passage is in the extremely bitter judgement expressed on womankind. The statement

another, to find out the account: which my soul still 28 seeketh, but I have not found: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. Behold, this only have I found, that 29 God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the 8 interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the <sup>a</sup> hardness of his face is changed.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *strength*.

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in verse 26 was intelligible enough, for there a woman of evil life was clearly indicated; but here to say that, while it is hard enough even among a thousand men to find one lover of wisdom, it is impossible to find any at all among women, is the excess of sceptical bitterness. Many passages can be quoted both from Greek and Hebrew writers which show the poor opinion held of women by many among them, particularly in Euripides and in the Greek epigrams.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the evil influence exerted in the Persian and Greek courts by the designing women of the palace; and we are to take the words as an exaggerated expression of the writer's experience of life as he has seen women, by their jealousy and plotting, ruin so many wise counsels. Some have supposed that there is here a special reference to Agathoclea, the mistress of one of the Ptolemies, who was a byword for iniquity.

**29. God made man upright.** The writer goes back in thought to Gen. i. 31, and attributes all subsequent evil to man's own will and work. The 'inventions' may not necessarily be evil, but there is a danger that man's power of discovery and skill in producing them should tempt his pride, and thus lead him astray. See the passages in Greek and Latin literature cited in illustration by Plumptre.

viii. 1-9. This section treats of the praise of wisdom and its practical effects, but also of its serious limitations.

**1. hardness.** This word, literally 'strength,' probably denotes 'coarseness' or 'rusticity.' The thought is that wisdom and its

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. the very bitter lines in the *Medea*, 573-5:

'Would that mortals otherwise  
Could get them babes, that womankind were not,  
And so no curse had lighted upon men.'



<sup>2</sup> *I counsel thee*, Keep the king's command, and that in  
<sup>3</sup> regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his

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pursuit refine the face as well as illumine the heart<sup>1</sup>. The LXX here is followed by some interpreters in its translation, 'his shameless face shall be hated,' but that does not seem at all to express the thought of the passage; cf. Eccus. xiii. 25, 'The heart of a man changeth his countenance whether it be for good or for evil.'

Genung has the following fine illustration from Stevenson's *Island Voyage*, where that writer says: 'To be even one of the out-skirters of art leaves a fine stamp on a man's countenance. I remember once dining with a party in the inn at *Chateau Landon*. Most of them were unmistakable bagmen; others well-to-do peasantry; but there was one young fellow in a blouse whose face stood out from among the rest surprisingly. It looked more finished; more of the spirit looked out through it; it had a living, expressive air, and you could see that his eyes took things in. My companion and I wondered greatly who and what he could be. It was fair time in *Chateau Landon*, and when we went along to the booths we had our question answered; for there was our friend busily fiddling for the peasants to caper to. He was a wandering violinist.'

**2. I counsel thee.** These words, as will be seen, have no equivalent in the original, and might well be omitted.

**that in regard of.** It is generally supposed that these words direct men to obey the king, inasmuch as such obedience is in accordance with the Divine will, who has appointed kings in human society; and many commentators illustrate here by a story told in Josephus of Ptolemy Soter, who settled a number of Jewish captives at Alexandria, and bound them by a solid oath of fealty to his house, knowing that the Jews had such reverence for oaths. Siegfried suggests that the first words of the following verse should be read in this one, so that the meaning of the passage would be, 'Keep the king's command, but when an oath of God is concerned be not in too great a hurry'—that is, it behoves a man to consider carefully whether at any time the lines of the Divine and human obedience cross one another.

**3. Be not hasty.** It is very difficult to give any satisfactory meaning to these words as they are ordinarily read. They may mean, 'Don't be too ready to depart from your duty as the king's servant even in difficult circumstances'; they have also been rendered, 'Do not tremble in the king's presence.' If, however, we

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Cf. Henry James in *Roderick Hudson*: 'Prayer makes fine lines'—referring to the spiritual beauty of a saintly face.

presence; persist not in an evil thing: for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Because the king's word *hath* 4 power; and who may say unto him, What doest thou? Whoso keepeth the commandment shall know no evil; 5 thing; and a wise man's heart discerneth time and judgement: for to every <sup>a</sup> purpose there is a time and 6 judgement; because the <sup>b</sup> misery of man is great upon him: for he knoweth not that which shall be; <sup>c</sup> for who 7 can tell him how it shall be? There is no man that hath 8 power over the <sup>d</sup> spirit to retain the <sup>d</sup> spirit; neither hath

<sup>a</sup> Or, *matter*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *evil*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *for even when it cometh to pass, who shall declare it unto him?*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *wind*

follow Siegfried and attach the first words to the former verse we shall then read, 'Depart from him, persist not in evil,' and we shall understand the counsel as being a direction to leave the king when his commands are clearly evil. This latter interpretation seems on the whole the best.

**5. Whoso keepeth the commandment.** It is doubtful whether the commandment here referred to is that of God or of the earthly monarch, but the latter seems more likely; in which case the counsel is one of prudence, advising men to live in obedience to the king's statutes, and declaring that the wise man will be able to understand the signs of the time, and to walk warily and safely.

**time and judgement.** It gives a better sense if we translate this with the LXX as 'the season of judgement,' and so also in the next verse.

**6. misery.** This is rather 'evil,' and the whole reference of the passage seems to be to the oppression and violence of the tyrant, and the weariness of the wise man at his inability to foretell the end of it all.

**8.** This verse has offered much difficulty to interpreters, but on the whole it seems fairly clear if we once understand its construction. It consists of two parallel ideas, each made up of two members, and may be paraphrased as follows: 'Just as no man can hold the wind in his fist, neither can he delay or anticipate the day of his death; and in the second place, as there is no escaping active service for the soldier engaged in a campaign, so neither will evil give a man any liberty if he has once yielded himself to its power.'

he power over the day of death ; and there is no discharge  
 "in *that* war: neither shall wickedness deliver him that  
 9 is given to it. All this have I seen, and applied my  
 heart unto every work that is done under the sun : <sup>b</sup> *there*  
*is* a time wherein one man hath power over another <sup>c</sup> to  
 his hurt.

10 And withal I saw the wicked buried, <sup>d</sup> and they came  
*to the grave* ; and they that had done right went away  
 from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city : this  
 11 also is vanity. Because sentence against an evil work is  
 not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of  
 12 men is <sup>e</sup> fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner  
 do evil an hundred times, and prolong his *days*, yet

<sup>a</sup> Or, *in battle*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *what time one man had &c.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *to his own hurt*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *who had come and gone away from the holy place, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done* Or, *and men came and went &c.*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *emboldened*

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**discharge in war.** This is generally taken to refer to the Persian customs which permitted no escape to soldiers on service, and is contrasted with the more humane Jewish law contained in Deut. xx. 5-8. Forced service in its most rigid form is always one of the heaviest burdens of a tyrannical government.

**9. there is a time.** This should probably be 'at a time when,' that is, the writer states that all the observations of the previous passage have been made in, and apply to, a time of tyranny.

viii. 10-15. In this section the writer reverts to a familiar subject, the problem of the seeming injustice of the respective lots of the wicked and the righteous, and he concludes with a practical counsel to enjoy life as we find it.

**10.** Upon the meaning of this verse there has been very much discussion, but many of the difficulties of interpretation rather concern the Hebrew, and need not be here discussed. There is a very full note upon it in Plumptre's commentary. On the whole the R. V. represents the meaning very well. We may paraphrase as follows, 'Withal I saw the wicked receive honourable burial at the hands of their friends, while the righteous were excluded from the holy city, and their memory forgotten within it.'

**12, 13.** These verses are in the form of a double paradox,

surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well <sup>13</sup> with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow; because he feareth not before God. There is a vanity which is done <sup>upon</sup> the earth; that <sup>14</sup> there be righteous men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity. Then I <sup>15</sup> commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: <sup>a</sup> for that shall abide with him in his labour *all* the days of his life which God hath given him under the sun.

When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to <sup>16</sup> see the <sup>b</sup> business that is done upon the earth: (<sup>c</sup> for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his

<sup>a</sup> Or, *and that this should accompany him*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *travail*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *how that neither by day nor by night do men see sleep with their eyes*

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'Though the life of the sinful man be a long one, still it is in reality fleeting as a shadow, whereas the righteous, even with a short earthly life, has in it the promise of eternity.' It is one of the strongest passages, therefore, in the book in favour of the doctrine of a resurrection; and naturally Siegfried assigns it to the hand of one of his more orthodox revisers. For the thought of the passage compare Isa. lxx. 20, Ps. xxxix. 6, and Wisdom iv. 8. Cf. Tennyson: 'Then, if Thou wilt, let my day be brief, So Thou wilt strike Thy glory through the day.'

15. For the thought of this verse cf. ii. 24, iii. 12, 22.

**for that shall abide.** This should rather be 'that this should accompany,' or 'let this accompany.'

viii. 16—ix. 6. In this section the same thought is pursued as in the previous one, but under the somewhat different aspect that, death being the common lot of all, their various enterprises are baffled by it, and their successes or failures apparently equalized. Life appears here in the guise of an endless mocker who baffles all men's attempts to solve his riddles.

16, 17. These verses contain one sentence, with a clause in

17 eyes :) then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun : because however much a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it ; yea moreover, though a wise man  
 9 think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it. For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this ; that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God : whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth  
 2 it not ; all is before them. All things come alike to all : there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked ; to the good <sup>a</sup> and to the clean and to the unclean ; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not : as is the good, so is the sinner ; *and* he that sweareth, as

<sup>a</sup> Some ancient versions read, *and to the evil ; to the clean &c.*

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parenthesis that describes the ceaseless effort of the searcher who gives himself no rest either night or day. The meaning of the verses is sufficiently clear, and they constitute a definite statement that by searching man cannot discover the mysteries of the Divine working. Plumptre reminds us that the words form the text of Bishop Butler's famous sermon on 'The Ignorance of Man.'

ix. 1. **all is before them.** These words as they stand seem to constitute the statement that what lies ahead in life is unknown to each man ; whether his future he made up of love or hate, he cannot tell. The LXX, however, and Siegfried follows it, includes the first word of the next verse in this phrase, and, by the tiny alteration of one letter, reads it 'vanity' ; thus the words run 'All that lies before them is vanity.' It is a possible but not very probable rendering.

2. For the practical scepticism of this verse cf. Job ix. 22, though the latter passage is even more severe than this.

**to the good.** This is the only one of the comparisons that has no second member, and it is probable that we should read with several versions 'and to the evil' after it. In the references that follow to ceremonial cleanness and to sacrifice, we see that the writer has the Levitical law in mind.

**he that sweareth.** As has been pointed out, each of the comparisons in the verse has the good one first, so here it would seem that the person who takes an oath, and loyally observes it, is set over against a man who, in a spirit of caution or cowardice, is

he that feareth an oath. This is an evil in all that is 3  
 done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea  
 also, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and  
 madness is in their heart while they live, and after that  
*they go* to the dead. <sup>a</sup> For to him that is joined with all 4  
 the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a  
 dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but 5  
 the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more  
 a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. As well 6  
 their love, as their hatred and their envy, is now perished;  
 neither have they any more a portion for ever in any  
 thing that is done under the sun.

<sup>a</sup> Another reading is, *For who is exempted? With all &c.* or,  
*who can choose? With all &c.*

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afraid either to take the oath or to carry out its conditions when he has taken it. The majority of commentators, however, understand the words differently, and hold that 'swaereth' here refers to rash oath-taking.

**3. and after that.** The English version fails to give us the tragic significance of the original, which breaks off suddenly, and, after a solemn pause, concludes with the words 'to death.'

**4.** There is no doubt that the R. V. here gives the best meaning to the original. The Hebrew margin suggests another meaning, the equivalent of which is given in the R. V. margin, namely, 'for who is exempted? but there seems no purpose in the question and no advantage in the change.

**a living dog.** We must remember that in the East a dog is despised, and consequently the comparison here is between the greatest of animals when dead and the least worthy when alive. Cf. the saying of Achilles in the *Odyssey*, 'It is better to be a serf among the living than a king among the dead.'

**5. the living know.** Here it appears that the writer considers that it is better to look forward even to death than to have no memory at all, and the blackness of the general O. T. view of death is here distinctly felt.

**reward ... memory.** These words in the original are very much alike, so that, as we have found several times, here also a play upon them is purposed. We might render it thus, 'They have no wage, nor is there a page for them in memory's book.'

7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine  
 with a merry heart; for God hath already accepted thy  
 8 works. Let thy garments be always white; and let not  
 9 thy head lack ointment. <sup>a</sup>Live joyfully with the wife  
 whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity,  
 which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of  
 thy vanity: for that is thy portion in life, and in thy  
 10 labour wherein thou labourest under the sun. What-  
 soever thy hand <sup>b</sup>findeth to do, do *it* with thy might;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Enjoy* (Heb. *See*) *life*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *attaineth to do by thy strength, that do*

ix. 7-12. The same thought still connects these verses with those of the last paragraph, but they begin with a brighter counsel along the lines of viii. 15. The shadow of the grave must not be permitted so to fall upon life as to deprive it of all joy; and yet the writer cannot escape, in verses 11 and 12, from its darkness.

**7. God hath already.** These words signify that a man may live in accordance with the counsel herein given, confident that God has set his approval upon such a life.

**8.** The signs here are those of festivity, white garments and perfumed locks being distinctive of festive occasions.

**9. Live joyfully.** Here the quiet life of the home is praised, and advice given to make the best of it, because life itself is short. The words 'all the days of the life of thy vanity' are omitted in many of the old versions, probably because they seemed to cast a shadow upon the joyful thought of the rest of the verse. Compare the words of Tennyson:

'O happy he, and fit to live,  
 On whom a happy home has power  
 To make him trust his life, and give  
 His fealty to the halcyon hour.'

**10. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do.** This very familiar form of the text is probably not the correct one. It should rather read, 'Whatsoever lies within thy strength to do, do it'; and we are reminded of the Latin proverb which states that a man's strength is the limit of his obligation ('*ultra posse nemo obligatur*'), and it is possible that the words here may have been in the mind of Jesus when He said, 'We must work . . . while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.' (John ix. 4.)

for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in <sup>a</sup> the grave, whither thou goest.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not <sup>11</sup> to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his <sup>12</sup> time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

I have also seen wisdom under the sun on this wise, <sup>13</sup> and it seemed great unto me: there was a little city, and <sup>14</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *Sheol*.

**the grave.** This is, of course, the Hebrew word 'Sheol,' the ordinary name for the under-world; but it is its only occurrence in this book.

**12. in an evil net.** Siegfried thinks that the word 'evil' should be omitted, as it has arisen from a misreading of the Hebrew through the word for 'snare' closely resembling the word for 'evil.' The figure is found in several other places (cf. Prov. vii. 23; Ezek. xii. 13, &c.).

**ix. 13-16.** These verses contain an example of wisdom which is either taken from actual experience or is a parable. Those who regard it as a reflection of a historical situation cite Dor, the siege of which is described in 1 Macc. xv; but the details there given are not sufficient to enable us to identify the events here recorded with that incident. Others suppose it to refer to the siege of Bethsura (1 Macc. vi. 31; 2 Macc. xiii. 19), but again there is no sufficient grounds for the identification. As Haupt remarks, the name of the wise defender of Bethsura has been forgotten, while the name of its traitor is preserved; and he further cites Wellhausen's remark that the Jews would have forgotten Judas Maccabeus if the Books of the Maccabees had not been preserved by the Christian Church. Other parallels, such as that of the siege of Abel in 2 Sam. xx. 15-22, or of the services Themistocles rendered to Athens, seem to be quite beside the point. The whole narrative, however, is sufficiently true to human experience to make it very telling.



few men within it ; and there came a great king against it,  
 15 and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it : now  
 there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wis-  
 dom delivered the city ; yet no man remembered that same  
 16 poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength :  
 nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his  
 words are not heard.  
 17 The words of the wise <sup>a</sup> *spoken* in quiet are heard more  
 18 than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. Wisdom is  
 better than weapons of war : but one sinner destroyeth  
 10 much good. Dead flies cause the ointment of the

<sup>a</sup> Or, heard *in quiet are better than &c.*

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16. Cf. vii. 19 ; also Dunbar's poem, 'None may assure in this world,' ll. 16-20:

'Nane heir bot riche men has renowne,  
 And pure men are pluckit down,  
 And none bot just men tholis injure ;  
 Sa wit is blinded and ressoun :  
 In to this world may none assure.'

ix. 17—x. 8. The whole of this long section consists of rather loosely connected verses, many of them in the form of proverbs, and all dealing generally with the question of wisdom and its practical applications.

17. *spoken in quiet*. This should rather be read with the margin, 'heard in quiet are better than.' The meaning is, of course, that more powerful than noisy declamation is the restrained and careful speech of the wise.

him that ruleth among fools. This is equivalent to the Arch-fool.

18. *sinner*. While the word here employed may mean 'traitor,' it is probable that it has rather the meaning of a man who acts foolishly and thoughtlessly. This is another form of the common experience that thoughtlessness often causes more harm than heartlessness.

x. 1. *Dead flies*. This probably should be rather translated 'deadly flies,' that is, those that are either poisonous in themselves or carry contagion from the fact that they are nourished upon, and live in, unclean conditions. When, therefore, they find their

perfumer <sup>a</sup> to send forth a stinking savour : *so* doth a little folly <sup>b</sup> outweigh wisdom and honour. A wise man's heart is at his right hand ; but a fool's heart at his left. Yea also, when the fool walketh by the way, his <sup>c</sup> understanding faileth him, and he saith <sup>d</sup> to every one *that* he is a fool. If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place ; for <sup>e</sup> yielding allayeth great offences. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as it were an error which proceedeth from the ruler :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *to stink and putrefy*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *him that is valued for wisdom*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *heart*.

<sup>d</sup> Or, *of*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *gentleness leaveth great sins undone*

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way into delicate and costly ointment, they bring the germs with them which sour and spoil it.

**so doth a little folly.** The second half of the verse has been interpreted in various ways. Some think that it means the world in general pays more attention to, and values more highly, a little folly than it does much wisdom ; but this somewhat simple statement is not in itself probable here, and does not well carry out the comparison. We must either read, as is done in the text, or understand it of a person in whose case a little folly spoils the effect of his general reputation for wisdom.

**2. at his right hand.** In many languages and at many times the figure of the right and left hand has been employed for wise and unwise conduct. Illustrations from the Greek poets will be found in Plumptre, who also reminds the reader of the significance of our word 'sinister,' which was, of course, originally 'left-handed,' and compare our common usage 'a left-handed compliment.'

**3. when the fool walketh.** Just as a wise or good man is known by his walk or conduct, so the foolish declares himself by his mere appearance. The latter part of the verse may either mean that owing to his self-conceit he says of every one else that they are fools, or, by his conduct, he declares himself to be a fool to every one that sees him.

**4. leave not thy place.** The counsel here given is that the courtier in presence of the ruler's rage should not readily throw up his position or in petulance withdraw from the royal presence, but should remember that patience is the best solver of many difficulties, and observe the counsel of Prov. xv. 1. The 'offences' referred to must surely be those of the ruler, not of the courtier, as many interpreters think.

**5, 6.** The state of things pictured in these verses has had many

6 folly is set in great <sup>a</sup> dignity, and the rich sit in low place.  
 7 I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as  
 8 servants upon the earth. He that diggeth a pit shall fall  
 into it; and whoso breaketh through a fence, a serpent  
 9 shall bite him. Whoso <sup>b</sup> heweth out stones shall be hurt  
 therewith; *and* he that cleaveth wood is endangered  
 10 thereby. If the iron be blunt, and one do not whet the  
 edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *heights*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *moveth stones*

clear illustrations in history, and we need not seek for any one special example as the one before the eyes of the writer, though the Greek period of Jewish history affords many parallels.

**7. upon horses.** The general custom in the earlier days in the East was for men of importance to ride upon asses, and the mention of horses here is taken as an evidence of the later date of the book (see Jer. xvii. 25, and for the general figure Prov. xix. 10).

**8.** This and the immediately following verses inculcate the spirit of caution as a practical manifestation of wisdom. Siegfried attributes the next four verses to one of the later editors.

**a fence.** This should rather be 'a wall,' since the serpent uses the latter as a hiding-place, and in pulling the wall down there is the danger of the serpent, in his anger at being disturbed, striking at the intruder. As to the interpretation of the passage, there are two possibilities. It may refer either to works of wanton destruction, which are apt to meet with retribution, or to the task of reformers, which is constantly being hindered by nervous or spiteful opponents.

**9. heweth out.** These words are better rendered 'moveth,' and the idea may be that of a man who moveth his neighbour's landmark (Deut. xix. 14), though others would take it to refer to the work of the quarryman (cf. Prov. xxvi. 27).

**10. wisdom is profitable.** There are many difficulties in the Hebrew of this verse, but they are purely linguistic, and the only words about which there is any question as to their translation are these latter ones. The meaning seems to be that just as it is a wiser thing for a man to sharpen his axe than to be compelled to put forth more strength with less effect if he fails to do so, so wisdom takes a man much further, and with less effort, than does brute force; so that we might render the words, 'Wisdom is profitable to set things to rights.'

profitable to direct. <sup>a</sup> If the serpent bite <sup>b</sup> before it be <sup>11</sup> charmed, then is there no advantage in <sup>c</sup> the charmer. The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but the <sup>12</sup> lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The beginning of <sup>13</sup> the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of <sup>d</sup> his talk is mischievous madness. A fool also multi- <sup>14</sup> plieth words: *yet* man knoweth not what shall be; and that which shall be after him, who can tell him? The <sup>15</sup> labour of fools wearieth every one of them, for he knoweth not how to go to the city. Woe to thee, O land, <sup>16</sup> when thy king is a <sup>e</sup> child, and thy princes eat in the

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Surely the serpent will bite where there is no enchantment, and the slanderer is no better*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *without enchantment.*

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *the master of the tongue.*

<sup>d</sup> Heb. *his mouth.*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *servant*

**11. If the serpent bite.** The words as read in the R.V. text form a fairly clear parable, namely, if the serpent-charmer is not quick enough to quiet the snake before it bites him, then he is not up to his business. Just so is the wise man shown by his power to gain a quick advantage over his enemies. The reading of the margin arises from a misunderstanding of the word translated 'charmer,' which means literally 'lord of the tongue,' and so is rendered by some 'slanderer'; but the translation is not probable, and it would introduce a new and inappropriate idea.

**14. A fool also multiplieth words.** The irony of this verse consists in the fact that a fool will talk glibly about all sorts of mysteries, while he ignores man's real ignorance of the destinies of human life.

**15. wearieth every one . . . for he knoweth not.** This would be better rendered 'every one who knoweth not,' but the exact meaning of the words is not easy to discover. Of the many interpretations that have been given the two following are perhaps the best, and the first seems preferable to the second. (1) A traveller who seeks his direction to the city from a fool will be so confused by the latter's roundabout directions that he will not be able to find it. This is so common an experience that every one will sympathize with its force. (2) Only a person who has not wit enough to find his own way to the well-known city will be foolish enough to be disturbed by the counsels of a fool. For the idea of the verse cf. Isa. xxxv. 8.

**16. a child.** This word may also be translated 'servant,' and is

17 morning ! Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is <sup>a</sup> the  
 son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for  
 18 strength, and not for drunkenness ! By slothfulness the  
<sup>b</sup> roof sinketh in ; and through idleness of the hands the  
 19 house leaketh. A feast is made for laughter, and wine  
 maketh glad the life : and money answereth all things.  
 20 Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought ; and curse  
 not the rich in thy bedchamber : for a bird of the air  
 shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell  
 the matter.

<sup>a</sup> Or, a free man

<sup>b</sup> Or, rafters sink

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thought by some here to be better so rendered, as it would then refer to a usurper who had ascended the throne, though of low origin ; but the word ' child ' gives an equally good meaning, since so frequently the child-ruler is under the domination of unscrupulous advisers. The statement seems too general to enable us to fix upon any one ruler as designated by it, though Haupt refers it to Alexander Balas, and Grätz, who translates ' servant,' to Herod the Great.

**eat.** This word signifies the self-indulgent feasting of a luxurious banquet. Plumptre quotes appropriately Catullus, xlvii. 5:

'Upon rich banquets sumptuously spread  
 Still gorge you daily.'

Cf. also Isa. v. 11 ; Acts ii. 15.

**17. the son of nobles.** This rather favours the translation ' servant ' in the previous verse, as the contrast would be between the true hereditary monarch and the base-born usurper. The court is here further represented as filled with men who are careful and well regulated in their habits, which, of course, makes for happiness and good government.

**19.** This verse seems to have even less connexion than usual in this section with those that precede or follow it. Some understand it as referring to the luxurious princes mentioned in verse 16 ; but if so, the reference is not clear, and it must be misplaced. Taken alone, its meaning is clear enough, namely, that in the case of those who are simply desiring the pleasures of life, money will purchase all they require. See Plumptre's commentary for illustrations from Latin and Greek authors.

**20. bird of the air shall carry.** This verse inculcates caution

<sup>a</sup> Cast thy bread <sup>b</sup> upon the waters : for thou shalt find 11  
it after many days. <sup>c</sup> Give a portion to seven, yea, even <sup>d</sup>  
unto eight ; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon  
the earth. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty <sup>e</sup> 3

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Send forth*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *upon the face of the waters.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *Divide a portion into seven, yea, even into eight*

on the part of those who have to deal with men in high stations. The figure is probably only a proverbial one, though some have seen in it a reference to carrier-pigeons as employed by spies and informers ; but, though appropriate, this is not requisite. Again Plumptre supplies many excellent literary illustrations.

xi. 1. **Cast thy bread upon the waters.** This verse has given rise to many varying interpretations, but in general it seems to be rightly regarded as a proverbial utterance that was common to Semitic languages. In Delitzsch's commentary numerous examples are given, of which one may be here quoted—'Do good, cast thy bread into the water ; thou shalt be repaid some day.' Stories are also told in Arabic and Hebrew writers of men whose conduct was guided by these proverbs, and who in obedience to them were extremely generous to the poor. We read of one man who had been in the habit of daily casting a cake of bread into the river, and who was thus the means of saving a life, a son of one of the Caliphs, and thus won for himself honour and fortune. Others, again, see in the words a reference to the venture of commerce ; and it has been regarded as a proof that the writer lived in a great seaport like Alexandria, where he was familiar with the merchant venturers, who sent their corn and other produce to many lands in hope of a market. Again, the words have been used of the processes of agriculture, and the sowing of seed in irrigated fields, and even less likely interpretations have been suggested.

2. **Give a portion to.** If this translation is taken, the verse will then be another counsel to generosity without thought of an immediate return ; but if we translate with the margin, as seems more probable, divide a portion into seven or eight parts, then it is a counsel of caution, as in the words of Antonio, in *The Merchant of Venice* :

'I thank my fortune for it,  
My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,  
Nor to one place ; nor is my whole estate  
Upon the fortune of this present year.'

Either interpretation fits well with the closing part of the verse, but the former suits best the counsel of verse 1.

3. **the clouds, &c.** This verse states two examples of the fixed-

themselves upon the earth : and if a tree fall <sup>a</sup> toward the south, or <sup>a</sup> toward the north, in the place where the tree  
 4 falleth, there shall it be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow ; and he that regardeth the clouds shall  
 5 not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the <sup>b</sup>wind, *nor* how the bones *do grow* in the womb of her that is with child ; even so thou knowest not the work  
 6 of God who doeth all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand : for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or  
 7 whether they both shall be alike good. Truly the light

<sup>a</sup> Or, *in*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *spirit*

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ness of natural law with the obvious purpose of suggesting that this may either paralyse or encourage exertion. If one regards the matter in the proper light he will see that, though in a sense things are likely to happen in the future as they have happened in the past, still no one is able perfectly to predict what will come, and should in consequence perform the duty that lies nearest at hand and trust the future to bring it to fruition.

**4. He that observeth the wind.** In illustration of the principle just stated is taken the conduct of the wise agriculturist, who will not be so fearful of atmospheric threatenings as to refrain from the proper processes to which each season calls him.

**5. the way of the wind.** A close parallel to this is to be found in John iii. 8, and it is possible that this passage is there in the mind of the speaker. The marvels of embryology, which in our day have been so studied as to afford even greater reason for amazement than at the time of the writer, are also used in illustration in Ps. cxxxix. 13-16 ; Prov. xxx. 19 ; and 2 Macc. vii. 22. If these common natural processes are beyond the ken of the student, how much less can he expect to understand the inner secret of the Divine working.

**6. In the morning.** This surely refers to the simple processes of agriculture, and, in a somewhat poetic form, advises a man to proceed with his necessary activity throughout the whole day ; but some, with less probability, have regarded it as referring in a more general way to the work of life from its earliest days to its latest, while some confine its meaning to the duty of building up a family.

**7, 8.** These verses speak of ' the good of life, the mere living,'

is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. <sup>a</sup> Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice <sup>8</sup> in them all ; <sup>b</sup> but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth ; and let thy <sup>9</sup> heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes : but know thou, that for all these things God will bring

<sup>a</sup> Or, *For*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *and remember*

but remind us in the spirit of Ps. xc. 10, which is so common a mood of the Hebrew writers, that the end is sorrow. Cf. Kirstie Elliott's saying in the *Weir of Hermiston* : ' Mind that this life 's a disappointment, and a mouthful o' mools is the appointed end.' It is, however, set before us here in the spirit of Lippi's verse,

' Death for us all, and his own life for each.'

From verse 7 to xii. 7 Siegfried assigns to the first reviser of the book.

xi. 9—xii. 8. This section, which probably constitutes the closing section of the book, as it was originally written, begins with a counsel to youth to rejoice in its opportunities, and also to be mindful of its God, before 'the days of darkness' mentioned in verse 8 come upon it ; but here the days of darkness are described in the most poetical language of one of the most famous passages in all literature.

**9. Rejoice, O young man.** These words form the basis of a famous old student's song that dates, in its original form, from the thirteenth century, beginning, 'Gaudeamus igitur iuvenes dum sumus.'

**walk in the ways.** These words are used in a sense quite opposite to that in which they are found in Num. xv. 39, and it is possible that the latter passage may have been in the writer's mind, and that he is here to a certain extent parodying it, or at all events, showing that it is not always wrong to follow one's natural instincts if only in pursuit of their dictation one remembers that the God who has bestowed them upon us will also require their proper employment at our hands. If, of course, we consider, as some do, that these last words are a pious reflection of another hand, then there is the less reason for surprise at the counsel given in the early part of the verse.



10 thee into judgement. Therefore remove <sup>a</sup> sorrow from  
thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for youth  
12 and the prime of life are vanity. Remember also thy

<sup>a</sup> Or, vexation Or, provocation

**10. sorrow.** The word seems to cover all gloom and moroseness, and the word rendered 'evil' in the following clause is better understood of physical pain or defect than of moral evil.

**prime of life.** This word may be rendered either the dawn of life or, taking it from a different root, the season when a man's hair is black. If the latter be correct, then the contrast with the picture of old age that follows is more striking.

**xii. 1. Remember also thy Creator.** As the words stand they constitute a counsel to become firmly rooted in religious faith in early life as a safeguard against the hopeless pessimism of an old age that knows none of the strength or consolation of religion. A fine use is made of this verse in the inscription encircling the dome of the beautiful school-chapel at Giggleswick. By a slight alteration of the original word some scholars translate 'well,' and understand it, in the light of Prov. v. 15, 18, and Song of Songs iv. 12 (see notes on these passages), 'Remember thy wife in the days of thy youth.' The figure was common in Oriental poetry for a woman, and here the writer is taken as advising faithful love in early manhood.

Immediately after this counsel, with the thought of the dark days that are to follow, begins the difficult and much-discussed passage contained in the first seven verses of the chapter. There are two main lines of interpretation. The one regards the whole passage as a vivid and poetic description of a sudden and violent storm, which is, of course, regarded as figurative of the darkness and gloom of old age. With part of the passage this idea accords excellently; but when we come to the fifth and following verses the analogy breaks down. The other leading interpretation is that which regards every detail as applicable to some part or function of the human body, and some of the commentaries read here almost like textbooks of anatomy. It is undoubted that the figure of a house for the human body is not uncommon, but whether the details of the figure are to be pressed is uncertain. It seems certain that the figure is dropped at least in the last clause of verse 5, and it is just possible that it may not be pursued after the close of verse 4. It may be, however, that the clause just referred to ('because man goeth, &c.') is a descriptive note designed to make the imagery clear, and that the figure is pursued in verse 5, while verse 7 gives the sober matter-of-fact statement as to death. The whole imagery, which seems to us somewhat extravagant when it is not distasteful, does not strike

Creator in the days of thy youth, or ever the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them ; or ever the sun, and the light, <sup>2</sup> and the moon, and the stars, be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain : in the day when the keepers <sup>3</sup> of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the <sup>n</sup>grinders cease because they are

<sup>a</sup> Or, *grinding women*

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the Oriental in the same light ; and, though there may be difficulties about the interpretation of each detail, the general idea seems fairly clear.

**2. the clouds return after the rain.** As he has just before compared youth with springtime, so in this verse he compares age with winter, and to a gloomy winter in which no sooner is one rain-storm over than the heaven is once again clouded with the threatening of another. It is not only the winter of life, but also, if not illumined by the presence of God, 'the winter of our discontent.'

**3. keepers of the house.** The figure of the house and its attendants is begun in this verse, and though it is not very satisfactorily explained on the supposition either of a storm or of the decaying fortunes of a residence once famed for its splendour, the latter is, perhaps, the more satisfactory supposition. We have two tasks before us, the one being to fit in appropriately the language as it stands in its figurative sense, and the second to discover what the figures are supposed to describe. The trembling of the keepers of the house and the bowing of the strong men may refer to the feebleness and old age of the retainers, while, by the majority of interpreters, the keepers is understood of the hands and arms, and the strong men of the legs and feet.

**grinders.** This word is a feminine one, and refers to the women who generally worked the handmills (cf. Matt. xxiv. 41). Doughty has well described the ordinary custom thus : 'To grind their corn is the housewife's labour ; and the dull murmur of the running millstone is, as it were, a comfortable voice of food in an Arabian village, when in the long sunny hours, there is often none other human sound' (see the passage quoted in Moffatt). It is difficult to see why the grinders should cease because of the smallness of their numbers. We might think that was all the more reason for their increasing their activities, and Haupt indeed thus translated, 'The grinders quit work, though they are few,' which gives a much better sense. In spite of being few, that is to say,

few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the street ; when the sound of the grinding is low, and one shall rise up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought

they are compelled to cease their activities because of their feebleness. The figure is also interpreted as meaning the teeth, which in old age are both few and feeble.

**those that look out of the windows.** The women in Eastern houses eagerly crowd to the lattices, that they may look out without being themselves seen, but in a house that had fallen upon evil days there might not be any desire to do so, or any women left with sufficient leisure or interest (cf. Prov. vii. 6 and Song of Songs ii. 9, with notes). Figuratively the words apply to the eyes, which become dim and powerless as old age creeps on.

**4. the doors shall be shut.** This is also a sign of the loss of fortune ; where once all was hospitality and bustle are now closed and silent portals. But the interpretation is not so easy. Some think of the ears, others of the lips, and others still of other parts or functions of the body, which become disordered in old age.

**sound of the grinding.** This seems to revert to the figure of the previous verse, and consequently its interpretation is apt to do so also, some holding that it refers to the decay of the powers of hearing, while others regard it as a reference to the weakened powers of mastication. It is this doubling of metaphor, as well as the fact that from this point onward all reference to the house seems to be lost, that leads us to the conclusion that henceforth the figure of the household ceases, and we are only concerned with a highly allegorical description of man in his old age.

**one shall rise up.** This is generally supposed to mean that in old age sleep is so light that the least sound wakes the sleeper, even the twittering of birds at the dawn. Others, however, regard it as a reference to the 'childish treble' of an old man's voice, and render 'one shall approach to (i. e. one's voice shall become like) the voice of a bird.' The imagery is good, but it is doubtful whether the Hebrew expression will bear the rendering (cf. Isa. xxxviii. 14).

**daughters of music.** This either refers to singing women or to birds, and in either case the expression seems to signify that the ears of the old are too dull to appreciate the music (see 2 Sam. xix. 35). Some, however, regard the reference as being to the old man's disinclination to be troubled with entertainment, which in his youth had delighted him. Others consider that the reference, like the previous one, is to the changed note in the voice of the old. Striking illustrations of the passage will be found in

low; yea, they shall be afraid <sup>a</sup> of *that which is high*, and <sup>5</sup> terrors *shall be* in the way; and the almond tree shall blossom, and the grasshopper <sup>b</sup> shall be a burden, and

<sup>a</sup> Or, of danger *from on high*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *shall drag itself along*

Juvenal, *Sat.* x. 200-39, and the student should also consult an interesting article by Mr. Green in the *Expositor*, vol. ii, 1895, which shows the relationship between the class of metaphor here employed and those that are used in Icelandic poetry, revealing the interesting fact that this type of figure is not exclusively Oriental.

**5. of that which is high.** Literally, 'of the high,' which is generally taken to refer to a natural disinclination of old men to climb hills, while the following clause goes even further, and notes their unwillingness as a rule to venture upon any journey because of their increasing nervousness.

**the almond tree.** This and the following figures are very difficult to interpret, and have been understood in a large variety of ways. The most common explanation of the almond-tree is that which regards its white blossoms as symbolical of old age; and one of the best illustrations, not only of the phrase, but of the whole passage, is in a story quoted from the Talmud, where a learned rabbi, on being asked why he did not any longer frequent the school, replied, 'The mountain is snow, hoar-frost surrounds me, its dogs do not bark, nor its millers grind, and the scholars ask me if I am looking for what I have not lost'—by which language he referred to his white hair and beard, his failing voice, his few teeth, and his enfeebled vision. The word rendered 'blossom' may also mean 'reject' or 'loathe,' and consequently some take it literally as meaning that the old man no longer cares for dainties such as almonds, or, as a figurative reference, to his no longer being attractive to women, who will have nothing to do with an old man.

**grasshopper.** Or 'locust.' Some suppose that the thought still follows the subject of food, and that the old man does not reckon locusts any longer a tasty article of diet. There is no evidence, however, that they were ever regarded as luxuries, and certainly the reference in Mark i. 6 does not support it. Neither is it likely that the writer thinks of these insects annoying the old man by their sound; and still more absurd is the idea that the mere weight of a grasshopper would be an intolerable burden for the aged to carry, unless it were proved that some proverbial expression akin to 'the last straw that breaks the camel's back' were referred to. The word, however, may mean 'drags itself along,' and if so rendered the curious movement of the locust may be

<sup>a</sup> the caper-berry shall <sup>b</sup> fail : because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets : or ever the silver cord be <sup>c</sup> loosed, or the golden bowl be

<sup>a</sup> Or, *desire*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *burst*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *snapped asunder*

taken as suggesting the stiff movement of the limbs in old age, and the bent back giving a remote resemblance to a locust. Other changes in the Hebrew have been suggested whereby the meaning is given that the ankles or other parts of the body are referred to, as becoming swollen or powerless in old age ; but these seem to have arisen either from a misreading of the original or from a desperate attempt to make sense of what was otherwise difficult to understand.

**caper-berry.** If we take the word as it stands, the reference must be to the use of this fruit for medicinal purposes as a stimulant, either to the palate or as an aphrodisiac ; but it is possible that the word does not mean the 'caper-berry' at all, but a kind of melon, which at one period of its growth has an appearance that remotely resembles white hair. The word rendered 'fail' may also mean 'burst,' and some, who thus translate it, consider the reference to be made to the bursting of the pods of some plant which thus sheds its seeds, and in that way is symbolical of death ; but the idea is not only far-fetched, but improbable in itself. Others think that the words refer to certain organs of the body, whose failing powers are here described.

Haupt translates quite differently, following a reading of Wetzstein's, who, by the alteration of the vowel-points in the Hebrew word rendered 'caper-berry,' translates it 'poor one,' which, as in Ps. xxii. 20, is supposed to be a designation of the soul : 'Inert lies the chrysalis till the soul emerges'—which, of course, refers to the enfeebled body waiting till the spirit is set at liberty.

**the mourners.** This is variously understood as referring to the professional mourners who await a summons to the old man's obsequies, or of the funeral procession. Cf. Forbush's paraphrase of this clause :

'So man unto his House Eternal goes ;

The portals once for entrance ope, then close.

Along the sodden street the mourners trudge—

But what is done behind those Doors, who knows?'

**6. silver cord be loosed.** The last word should probably be 'snapped, and the figure seems certainly that of a hanging lamp—the difficulty in this interpretation being to understand how or why the golden bowl should be broken ; and, therefore, some understand that it is a bowl of more fragile material, filled with oil of golden

broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern; and the dust return to the 7 earth as it was, and the spirit return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity. 8

And further, because the Preacher was wise, he still 9 taught the people knowledge; yea, he <sup>a</sup> pondered, and sought out, *and* set in order many proverbs. The 10 Preacher sought to find out <sup>b</sup> acceptable words, and that which was written uprightly, *even* words of truth.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *gave ear*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *words of delight*.

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colour. It may be, however, that in this case the thing signified has been permitted to pass over into the metaphor, and force it beyond what it will naturally bear. The whole purpose of the verse is obviously to designate, in highly poetical language, the dissolution of death; and we need hardly concern ourselves much as to whether the bowl means the skull, the silver cord the spinal marrow, the pitcher the arteries, and the cistern the heart; or whether any of the other suggested interpretations that ring the changes upon these is correct or not. Neither need we decide, on lines of the more general interpretation of Delitzsch, as to which is body and which is spirit—but take the two beautiful and touching figures as pathetically descriptive of a final breaking-up of the long companionship between the body and its informing intelligence, which means death.

**7. the dust return.** As has been noted, this is a distinct reference to Gen. ii. 7; but it does not mean that the writer had any clear conception of a personal immortality, still less of a spiritual resurrection.

**8. Vanity of vanities.** Here the oft-recurring note meets us for the last time, and is, in all probability, the closing words of the book as it was originally written; and its temper is well summed up in two lines of Francis Quarles:

‘His breath’s a bubble, and his days a span—  
 ’Tis glorious misery to be born a man.’

9-14. These verses constitute a closing descriptive note of the writer and his purpose from some later hand, or, as Siegfried supposes, from three later hands (see Introduction, p. 216).

**9. he still taught.** These words probably refer to the traditional author of the book, Solomon, and are descriptive of what was generally regarded as his main intellectual activity.

**10. acceptable.** Better, ‘pleasing.’

- 11 The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails well fastened are *the words of* the <sup>a</sup> masters of assemblies,  
 12 *which* are given from one shepherd. <sup>b</sup> And furthermore, my son, be admonished : of making many books there is no end ; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.  
 13 <sup>c</sup> *This is* the end of the matter ; all hath been heard : fear God, and keep his commandments ; for <sup>d</sup> this is the

<sup>a</sup> Or, *collectors of sentences*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *And as for more than these, my son, be warned*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *this is* the duty of all men

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**uprightly** may be rendered 'in correct form,' while the closing description, 'words of truth,' refer to the inner nature of the message.

**11. goads.** This refers, of course, to the stimulating effect of good teaching and of all truth, just as Socrates spoke of himself as 'the Athenian gad-fly.' But the latter part of the verse is not at all clear. The Hebrew, as will be seen from the form of the R. V., is helped out in the English translation by the insertion of various words, the correctness of which is not at all certain. They may be rendered somewhat as follows: 'Like well-driven nails are the collections of sayings made by one master collector.' This, at least, makes intelligible English, and probably comes as near the true meaning of the passage as we are likely to get. What seems to be eulogized is a careful and well-ordered collection of memorable sayings, not strung together loosely as in the Book of Proverbs itself, but well-knit, as in the treatise that has just been closed.

**12. furthermore.** Perhaps this means 'beyond these,' that is, outside the writings here specified, or perhaps 'by these writings be admonished.'

**many books.** This in itself points to a considerably late date, and in all probability to acquaintance with the literatures of many nations. If the words had force then, they have undoubtedly much more force to-day, when we are easily tempted to dissipate our energies in either the reading or writing of useless books, and when we might with profit lay to heart not only this counsel, but that of the stoic emperor—that we should free ourselves from the thirst for books.

**study.** This is the only place in which the word occurs, and it may possibly, as Siegfried thinks, mean 'disputation.'

**13. fear God.** In this verse an orthodox conclusion is given to

whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into <sup>14</sup> judgement, <sup>a</sup> with every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *concerning*

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the whole matter, and a universal law of conduct is laid down, because the last words of the verse should be translated 'This is every man's duty.'

**14. with every hidden thing.** Rather, 'upon every, &c.' The judgement, that is to say, is itself a revelation of the secrets of life—an 'opening of the books,' as the Apocalypse phrases it.



# THE SONG OF SONGS

INTRODUCTION

AND

REVISED VERSION WITH ANNOTATIONS

# THE SONG OF SONGS

## INTRODUCTION

THE title of the little book is 'The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.' This is obviously a descriptive title given by scribe or collector, embodying either his own or the traditional opinion about the book. The form of description indicates that the Song was considered not the finest of Solomon's lyrical productions, but that it was regarded as the best of all the songs known to the Hebrew world. The Hebrew writers attribute to Solomon not only great wisdom, but much literary activity. We are told that 'he spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five.' There probably underlies this statement the admiration of a later generation, and also, perhaps, a slight flavour of the courtiers' flattery. Anyhow, we are without a specimen, so far as we know, of the royal poet's productions. It was customary to attribute writings to any one who had a great name in tradition as an author. Thus it came to pass that the books of the Pentateuch were attributed to Moses, and the bulk of the Psalter to David; and as anonymity seems to have been distasteful to the Hebrews, everything the authorship of which was unknown was wedded to some great name. In the case of the Song of Songs this opinion is not merely speculative, but is proved, so far as anything can be, by the character of the language. The proof is largely technical, and the evidence in detail can only be estimated by students of the original; but one or two points may be explained even to the English reader. The form of the relative pronoun in every instance, save in the first verse, is not that which is usual in classical Hebrew, but is confined either to the

very latest works, which were composed after the exile, or to certain poems and narratives (e. g. the Song of Deborah, Judges iv, 2 Kings vi. 11 in the narrative of the life of Elijah) which emanate from North Israel. The fact that the ordinary form of the relative occurs in the first verse shows that it was written by a scribe who was accustomed to the classical language. Words occur that are not Semitic, but obviously borrowed from foreign languages. More detailed accounts of these will be found in the notes on the respective passages, but meanwhile there may be cited the word for *henna* (i. 14, iv. 13), which is probably Aramaic or Greek; the word for 'litter' or 'palanquin,' which is either Sanskrit or Greek; the word for 'saffron,' which is almost in form our word 'crocus,' is either Aramaic, Greek, or Arabic; while, finally, the word rendered in the R. V. 'orchard' is really 'paradise,' which is probably Persian in origin, though it is found in almost the same form in late Assyrian, Arabic, and Greek (see iv. 13 and also Eccles. ii. 5). Of course, it is barely possible, as Dr. Driver suggests, that these words 'might have reached Israel through Solomon's connexions with the East.' This is not, however, so probable as is the conclusion that these words point to a late period in Hebrew history for the origin of the book. The force of this type of argument may be made quite clear to the English reader by the consideration that such loan-words as 'tiffin' (Anglo-Indian for lunch), 'coolie,' 'rickshaw,' and many others, bear testimony to our connexion with the East, and could not have entered the English vocabulary until our countrymen came into contact with the lands from whose languages they are derived—while, of course, technical words such as 'telephone' and 'Marconigram' point exactly to the date of the discovery of the things they signify. To say, however, that the book in its present form dates from the later period of Hebrew literature is not to deny that there may be earlier elements in it, and subsequently we may be in a position to see how

these earlier elements became worked up into their present form, and to discover the significance of such proof.

Another indication of the comparative lateness of the book is derived from its position in the Hebrew canon and the discussions that arose about its finding a place in the Old Testament. The final decision as to the Hebrew canon was only arrived at about A.D. 100, and this book was one of those whose place was most uncertain. Undoubtedly the question of the date of its origin was not that which weighed most with those who finally agreed to accept it, but rather its character, and there can be little doubt that had the opinion not prevailed that it consisted of an allegory descriptive of the relation between God and His chosen people it would never have been admitted into the sacred writings.

This brings us to the consideration of what the real character of the book is, and upon that subject very wide diversity of opinion has always existed. We shall consider first the earliest recorded idea about it, namely, that it was an allegory. To the thought of the Jewish rabbis it suggested the figure of a spiritual marriage between Yahweh and His people. The figure was a common one in the Old Testament, being probably derived, as Professor Robertson Smith suggested, from the sensual heathen conceptions of the older Semitic religions, in which the Baal or 'Lord' was regarded as the husband of the nation who worshipped Him, and which gave rise to many of the immoral practices described and denounced by the Hebrew prophets. Such gross physical conceptions were prevalent, for example, in the days of Hosea, and a large part of his great service was to purify the thought of the people, while he yet maintained the figurative language of the older religion, and applied it to the realm of the spiritual. It is, of course, conceivable that this metaphor might have been employed in a more elaborate way, so as to produce a marriage-song in which the speaker was Jahweh and the bride the faithful Israel. There are passages in the

Book of Isaiah that come very near to this actual method of literary procedure. Thus, in a well-known passage, the prophet writes, 'But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me and the Lord hath forgotten me'; to which complaint the Divine reply is given, 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands (cf. Song of Songs viii. 6, 'Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm') . . . as I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee . . . as with an ornament, and gird thyself, like a bride' (Isa. xlix. 14-21). Again, we read, in Isa. lxii. 1-5, as follows, 'For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake will I not rest, until her righteousness go forth as brightness (cf. Song of Songs vi. 10) and her salvation as a lamp that burneth . . . thou shalt also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God (cf. Song of Songs iii. 11). Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; . . . but thou shalt be called Hephzibah (married), for the Lord delighteth in thee . . . for as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.' Still, there is a vast difference between the beautiful language of such general descriptions and the elaborate detail of the Song of Songs, a difference that makes it almost inconceivable that the latter could have been originally intended as an allegory of the spiritual relation between God and the people of His choice. This method of interpretation, however, once started by the rabbis, became the dominant one in the Christian Church. It not only claimed in its support the authority of Jewish scholars, but there were certain references in the New Testament that strengthened the idea. Our Lord spoke of Himself as the bridegroom (Matt. ix. 15); He uttered parables in which He was designated by the same name (Matt. xxv.

1-13), and in which the kingdom of heaven was described as a wedding-feast (Matt. xxii. 1-13), while Paul sees in the marriage relationship a perfect parable of that which should exist between Christ and the Church (Eph. v. 23-32), and the Book of Revelation, in the song of the redeemed at the marriage of the Lamb, describes the bride as arrayed for her Lord 'in fine linen bright and pure,' and the heavenly Jerusalem is described as a holy city 'coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.' The earliest extant Christian exposition of the book is that of Origen, in the third century; and while he admits that it probably was written as a marriage-song in honour of Solomon's union with an Egyptian princess, he has no question about its real value lying in its allegorical interpretation, and he repeats in his own form what had been the expressed opinion of a Rabbi of the first century, that 'the whole world was not worthy of the day in which this sublime Song was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but this sublime Song is most holy.' So Origen writes, 'Blessed is he who sings holy songs, but more blessed is he who sings the Song of Songs.'

From the days of Origen onwards the mystical interpretation of the book continued to hold sway in the Church with very few exceptions, and in the Middle Ages in particular it passed the extreme limits of probability. The most famous of the mediaeval interpreters was St. Bernard, from whose pen we possess eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters alone. Even Wesley could not believe that the descriptions of the book could possibly apply to any human love or physical marriage, and held that it must be understood allegorically. It was not until the end of the eighteenth century that some of the German interpreters hit upon the true meaning, and conspicuous among these was the poet Herder, who saw that the book was in line with much similar erotic poetry of the East. This type of interpretation, which persists in many quarters

till the present day, is familiar to us in the language of Christian hymns. It occurs in the well-known verses by the late Mrs. A. R. Cousin, founded on the letters of Samuel Rutherford, who himself was extremely prone to use the amatory imagery of the Song of Songs. Two verses may be quoted in illustration :

‘There the red rose of Sharon  
Unfolds its heartmost bloom,  
And fills the air of Heaven  
With ravishing perfume :  
Oh ! to behold it blossom,  
While by its fragrance fanned,  
Where glory—glory dwelleth  
In Immanuel’s land.

‘Oh ! I am my Beloved’s,  
And my Beloved’s mine !  
He brings a poor, vile sinner  
Into His “house of wine.”  
I stand upon His merit,  
I know no other stand,  
Not e’en where glory dwelleth  
In Immanuel’s land.’

The same idea also underlies Mr. Mudie’s verses beginning :

‘I lift my heart to Thee,  
Saviour Divine !  
For Thou art all to me,  
And I am Thine.  
Is there on earth a closer bond than this,  
That my Beloved’s mine, and I am His.’

One of the most familiar examples is found in Bonar’s hymn ‘I lay my sins on Jesus,’ in a verse which is not included in all hymn books, but belongs to the original form, and runs :

‘I rest my soul on Jesus,  
This weary soul of mine ;  
His right hand me embraces,  
I on His breast recline :  
I love the name of Jesus,  
Emmanuel, Christ, the Lord ;  
Like fragrance on the breezes  
His name abroad is poured.’

In the quaint *Emblems* of Francis Quarles, the reader will find many poems suggested by the Song of Songs, where this allegorical interpretation is carried to an excessive extent. One verse may here be quoted, but, in order to understand the peculiar character of the poems, the book itself must be consulted. In Book iv, No. 11, based on Song of Songs iii. 2, we read :

‘Where have my busy eyes not pryed? oh, where?  
Of whom hath not my threadbare tongue demanded?  
I searched this glorious city; he’s not here:  
I sought the country; she stands empty-handed:  
I searched the court; he is a stranger there:  
I asked the land; he’s ship’d: the sea; he’s landed:  
I climbed the air, my thoughts began to aspire  
But ah! the wings of too-bold desire,  
Soaring too near the sun, were singed with sacred fire.’

In the original form of the favourite hymn by St. Bernard,

‘Jesu, the very thought of Thee,’

there are verses, omitted in the ordinary hymn books, which are much more closely allied with the imagery of the Song of Songs than are those in general use; for example :

‘Thy kiss is bliss beyond compare,  
A bliss for evermore;  
Oh, that Thy visits were less rare,  
And not so quickly o’er!’

One of the most interesting of modern examples of this use of the poem is in Miss Christina Rossetti’s beautiful verses beginning,

‘Passing away, saith the world, passing away.’

The best taste of the Christian interpreters has saved the majority of them from the extravagance of interpreting every verse of the book in this allegorical way, and while, as we have seen, it is admitted that the general idea of love and marriage has the approval of the New Testament writers, and even of our Lord Himself, as a legitimate figure whereby to describe the relation of the Church to Christ, it is quite different from assuming that all the



language of this book can be so applied<sup>1</sup>. It is, moreover, a vicious principle to adopt, if the book was never written with any allegorical idea or purpose; and that this is true will appear later.

Closely allied to the allegorical interpretation is what has been called the 'typical' one. In this case it is recognized that the book was originally written in honour of the marriage of Solomon, but that that circumstance was designed to constitute a type of the relation between God and His people. In effect, of course, this style of interpretation comes to the same results as the former one. It is only the supposed origin that differs, so that all that has been said in objection to the former applies also to this method of exegesis.

The idea that the book was an example of the Hebrew drama arose even among the allegorists, though it developed much more rapidly among those who regarded the book as a poem of purely natural affection. When the idea was first mooted, the conception prevailing was that Solomon was the hero of the piece, and some considered that the voluptuous king had carried away the wife of a simple shepherd to his harem in Jerusalem, and that the story related her virtuous resistance to the king's allurements, and celebrated her return to her shepherd-husband; while others considered that the king had carried away a village maiden betrothed to her shepherd-lover, and that the final scenes celebrated her deliverance from the dangers of the court and the triumph of virtuous love. Out of these ideas have sprung the two main schools of dramatic interpretation among modern scholars. The first school consider Solomon to be the hero all through. In the opening scenes he is tempting the girl, whom he has

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<sup>1</sup> Thence the book was long a favourite from which to choose texts for communion addresses, and we are told that the Bible of the famous evangelical preacher Mc'Cheyne showed more signs of usage at the Song of Songs than in any other place.

conveyed to his palace in Jerusalem, to become a regular member of the harem, and in his infamous intention he is seconded by the other ladies of the harem themselves. The maiden is supposed to escape from the royal palace, and to be wooed again by the king, who now appears in the humble guise of a shepherd. In the rustic simplicity of her northern home the young girl converts him from his polygamous practices to the true idea of marriage, and persuades him to enter into a loving and loyal union with herself, abandoning all the voluptuous courses that had marred his life. In addition to the inherent improbabilities that such a theory brings into the poem itself, there is, of course, no historical evidence of any such conversion on the part of Solomon; and it seems very unlikely that any Hebrew writer would have imagined such a situation for the great king.

The second dramatic interpretation is that which regards not Solomon but the shepherd-lover as the hero of the piece. In this case the drama opens with the presence of the young maid at the court of Solomon as before, but her speeches are made not to the king, but to her northern lover in his absence, though there are some interpreters who imagine that the bold swain somehow managed to find access to the royal palace, and that a sort of Romeo and Juliet dialogue takes place from the lattice of the women's apartment. The maid is then supposed so to work upon the feelings of Solomon, that of his own free will he grants her her liberty, and the poem ends with the joy of the lovers' meeting on the eve of their wedding amid the rustic surroundings of their northern home. This scheme of interpretation will be found in variously modified forms in many commentaries more fully indicated in the list of literature. But the great objection, if it is not indeed a fatal one, to all such theories, is the fact that there are no indications within the poem itself of its being a drama. As has been said, there are not even the 'stage directions' that we find in the Book of Job, where the entrance and exit

of the various characters is at least indicated. Thus, on examining the works of a number of the interpreters who hold this theory, we find that the drama is given in each case a different complexion according to the fancy of the individual, one part being assigned by one writer to one speaker, and by a second authority to another. If a drama is so uncertain as this in its indications of construction and of the parts played by the individual actors, all that can be said is that the dramatist was a most unskilful person, and that he failed utterly to produce the work he purposed. But far from being inartistic, the Song of Songs shows the very highest art, and we cannot, therefore, suppose that its author failed to indicate the very nature of the book he was writing. It would not, of course, be an impossible task to construct a drama out of many of the lyrical love-poems we possess in various literatures. We might take the Lesbia poems of Catullus, for example, and weave them into a sort of dramatic narrative; and, by more or less ingenious arrangement, a similar result might be attained with the love-songs of Heine or of Burns; but no one supposes that such a result would have any other effect than to prove the misapplied ingenuity of the man who produced such an artificial performance. Similarly, we rise from the perusal of the most ingenious reconstructions of the Song of Songs with a stronger consciousness of the perverse cleverness of the authors of the commentaries than with a strong persuasion of the correctness of their theory.

There remains to be considered what may be called the historical or natural interpretation of the book. The pioneer in this direction was Herder, whose poetic temperament enabled him to divine, in spite of the allegorists whose interpretation was then in favour, the true character of the book. His idea was that it consisted of a collection of separate love-songs, but he did not find many supporters until quite recent times, when the researches of a German consul at Damascus not only gave life to Herder's

theories, but, by adducing the evidence of present-day customs in Palestine, showed how the songs contained in the book might in all probability have originated, and that the 'unchanging East' was in this, as in so many other matters, its own best interpreter. The gist of the discovery lay in the description of the marriage customs now prevalent in Northern Syria, and centred round the uses made of the 'threshing-board' in these customs. The 'threshing-board' is an agricultural implement named several times in the Old Testament (cf. Hos. x. 11; Isa. xli. 15; Job xli. 30), and consists of two boards of wood bound together by two cross-timbers. It is oblong in shape, measuring about five feet by four. The boards are bent upward in front so that the whole has somewhat the appearance of a rough sledge. On the under surface are let in lumps of rough basaltic rock. To this rude implement are yoked one or two oxen. The grain is then spread over the threshing-floor, which itself is a level surface of about twenty to thirty feet in diameter, with a row of large stones round it to prevent the straw from being scattered. The thresher stands upon the rough sledge and proceeds to drive his oxen round about the threshing-floor till the process of threshing is completed. This same rough sledge is used by the peasants for two other purposes, as a bier at funerals, and as a seat of honour for the bride and bridegroom at a wedding. It is this latter practice that concerns us here. As in many other countries—forexample, Norway—the wedding festivities are kept up for a week. On the day of the wedding processions led by the band of young men known as the 'companions of the bridegroom' take place, and dances are also a prominent feature of the day, particularly the sword-dance, which is sometimes danced by a man and sometimes by a woman, and is always accompanied by a song in praise of the beauties of the bridal pair. On the morning after the marriage the young husband and wife enter upon what has been called 'the best time in their life,' for during the seven days that follow they play the part of

king and queen, and have their court to wait upon them in the person of the youths and maidens of the neighbouring community. The young men march with the threshing-board upon their shoulders, singing a joyful song, to the threshing-floor. There they erect a platform about six feet in height, place the board above it, and cover the latter with a carpet. Upon this are laid two gaily-embroidered cushions, which form the throne for the 'king and queen.' Before a mock court, with much buffoonery and frequently coarse jesting, proof is led of the consummation of the marriage, and thereafter a grand dance is begun in honour of the wedded pair. Here, again, a song is sung descriptive of the physical beauty of the two, and of their raiment and jewels. This descriptive song is technically known as a *wasf*, parallels to which are to be found in the Song of Songs (iv. 1-7, v. 10-16, vi. 4-7, vii. 1-10). This peculiar song is said to have more or less of a traditional and stereotyped form. Its character, therefore, accounts for the resemblance between the various passages above referred to in the Song of Songs. From this time onward the marriage festivities are in progress, and they consist largely of songs and dances, the former having both solos and choruses, and the latter for the main part performed for the delectation of the bride and bridegroom, but occasionally joined in by these latter. These customs, as one may easily perceive, throw a great light upon the Song of Songs, and many modern commentators hold, as does, indeed, the present writer, that along these lines the true interpretation of the book is to be found. Objection has been taken to the theory from the supposed unity of the book as it now stands; but that unity is, as we have hinted, considerably exaggerated by the supporters of the dramatic theory, who are the main objectors to this one, and there seems little difficulty in Budde's assumption that what unity is observable is due to the hand of the final editor. It does not appear that there is much validity in the objection that we have

not here enough songs to serve for the whole week, for surely we can easily understand that any editor might take a selection of the best from those known to him, or that one series out of many sung during the wedding festivities should be here given. In fact, the very form of the title, 'The Song of Songs,' seems to indicate this, and to show that out of a large selection of songs with which he was familiar this writer has chosen deliberately the best specimens. Again, in the description of the modern Syrian wedding, we are informed that some of the songs deal with war, and because no such songs occur in this book we are bidden reject this theory of their origin; but the process of selection may account also for the absence of these, the purpose of the writer being to confine his selection to those which dealt with the marriage proper. Other lines of objection to the theory will be considered in the commentary, but meantime sufficient has been said to show that this theory of the book's origin is more probable than any of those previously considered<sup>1</sup>. It does not seem desirable to allow our ideas of the proper interpretation of the book to be governed by the uses that can be made of it for practical exposition or theological teaching. The advocates of the dramatic theory make much of the fact that the book as so interpreted is a vindication of pure love and the Divine purpose of marriage as a spiritual union. But even if this were so it would not suffice to justify a mistaken theory about the book, and there is surely as much to be said for the idea that the Bible recognizes the poetry of lyric love, which is common to all the literatures of the world, and springs up naturally in the human soul. If we have here a collection of such poems as they sprang fresh from the heart and lips of some of the unknown singers of ancient Israel, and were

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. W. M. Christie tells me that in the neighbourhood of Safed he found many peasants' songs bearing the strongest resemblance to the Song of Songs, but failed to procure them as he did not then see their full significance.

permitted, even if under the cloak of a false conception of their purpose, and a wrong theory of their origin, to find a place in the sacred canon, we can only rejoice that the class of literature which probably more than any other touches responsive chords in the heart of humanity receives the stamp of the Divine recognition and approval. We may be told that on this theory there are several passages in the book that deal too frankly and openly with sexual passion; but after all there may be a deeper purity about the frank recognition of such subjects, and straightforward, passionate language about them, than in much of the veiled hints of indecent prudery and the attempt to hide what may be better openly stated than uncleanly imagined. Besides, we have to remember that manners and customs change—that things which seem coarse to us do not have that aspect to men of other lands and of other ages. A century or two has made a great difference in that matter in England, and the crossing from one nation to another will even to-day change one's whole ideas about such matters. Morality, it is true, is something far removed from, and far higher than, convention; but the two are so closely united that men are often tempted to reckon what is to them the unconventional as being necessarily the immoral. After all, the book is not a book for children, but for men and women; and with the understanding of men and women, to whom the difficult subject of sex and its relations is always present, and constitutes one of the hardest questions of conduct and of life, this book must be read; and perhaps from it we may not fail to derive some great and valuable lessons—not the least being that marriage and all it involves is in its original Divine intention not only one of the purest of earthly joys, but one of the holiest of the Divine purposes.

## LITERATURE.

For English students of the Song of Songs excellent introductions will be found in *A Biblical Introduction*, by Bennett and Adeney ; and *The Wisdom-Literature of the Old Testament*, by Davison, and also in the English translation of Cornill's Old Testament Introduction. The introductions of Driver and Cornill should also be consulted. Almost all the English commentaries treat the book from the dramatic point of view. The best for ordinary readers is that by Harper in the *Cambridge Bible*. The older commentaries of Ginsburg and Delitzsch should also be consulted, especially by those who understand the original. Adeney's volume in the *Expositor's Bible* is a sympathetic exposition on the dramatic theory, with an interesting chapter on the introduction and also on the mystical interpretations of the book. Margoliouth's edition in the *Temple Bible* should be consulted, for its introduction and notes, though very short, are suggestive. Harper's volume contains a fresh translation in Appendix I, and another and most interesting poetic translation by Fox is to be found in the *Expository Times*, vol. vii. The student should also consult the article 'Song of Songs' in *HDB.* by Rothstein, which contains a somewhat original idea about its composition, and is very full of information, also the article, 'Canticles' by Robertson Smith in *Enc. Brit.*, and by Cheyne in *Enc. Bibl.* Budde's theory, which is followed in this commentary, is most accessible to the English reader in his article in *The New World*, 1894. Readers of German will find Budde's commentary in the *Kurzer Handcomm. zum A. T.*, 1898, and Siegfried's, of most value. Admirable illustrations of the thought and form of expression of the Song are to be found in Dalman's *Palästinischer Diwan*, 1901.



Since the following commentary was written the author has seen Paul Haupt's *Biblische Liebeslieder*, but hardly any reference to it has been possible. The ideas contained in it were, however, already known to the writer from the Professor's papers in *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*. The little volume is of great interest, and is recommended to advanced students. The notes are full of most interesting literary illustrations.

NOTE.—There is a very extraordinary and original study of the Song of Songs by Michelet in his *Bible de L'Humanité*, part ii. chap. 6. He sees clearly that the work is not a religious allegory, nor in his judgement a truly Jewish book at all, but a song of Syria, burning with the passion and sensual feeling of the race, filled, as he says, 'with a kind of fever like an autumn wind, delightful, but deadly.' The study was written in 1864, and is an interesting example of how the literary critic sometimes arrives at a conclusion almost by instinct, which is afterwards verified by investigations of scholarship. It is to this passage of Michelet that Lafcadio Hearn refers in one of his letters, where, speaking of the Song of Songs, he writes, 'I love it more than ever. But Michelet, the passionate free-thinker, the divine prose-poet, the bravest lover of the beautiful, has written a terrible chapter upon it. No lesser mind dare touch the subject now with sacrilegious hand.' It would have been interesting to have seen what that erratic genius had to say about the book. One other interesting literary reference may be added. In Balzac's *Lily of the Valley* he describes a sunset as 'an eternal Song of Songs by which nature bids her creatures love.'

# THE SONG OF SONGS

THE Song of songs, which is Solomon's. 1

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth : 2

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i. 1. This title (see Introduction, p. 287) is probably the work of some later scribe, though it is possible that it was a description given by the editor who collected the songs that are to follow. The idea contained in the words is that the song herein attributed to Solomon is the best of all the songs in existence. If the theory of the book's origin contained in this commentary be the correct one, then this note must have been the work of the later editor, who regarded it as a complete unity. In all probability, however, it really consists of a collection of lyrics by some unknown poet or poets.

i. 2-7. These verses consist of a solo sung by the bride interspersed with verses of chorus on the lips of the maidens who are her companions. These latter chorus verses are found in verse 4, &c. and are fully indicated beneath. The solo consists of an expressed longing for the affectionate embrace of the bridegroom, whose praise is celebrated, and then the bride describes her own charms in a modest manner, accounting for her sunburnt appearance by the outdoor work she has been compelled to perform, while she ends with an appeal to be made conversant with the place of her bridegroom's shepherd duties, that she may henceforth be his constant companion.

In the dramatic interpretation these opening verses are put on the lips of the women of the harem interrupted by a soliloquy on the part of the maiden who appeals to her absent lover, and in verses 5 and 6 addresses the court ladies, while in verse 7 she again turns to her absent lover, and is mocked (verse 8) by the inhabitants of the harem. There could not be a clearer instance of the absurdity and impossibility of the dramatic theory.

2. **Let him kiss me.** At the outset we strike the passionate note of the whole poem. Here the girl, 'sick with love,' as she elsewhere describes herself, mindful of the happy experiences of the preceding day, longs for the intimate fellowship of her husband, and appeals to be freed from the publicity of the festive assembly that she may enjoy that private intercourse.

For thy love is better than wine.

3 Thine ointments have a goodly fragrance ;

Thy name is as ointment poured forth ;

Therefore do the <sup>a</sup> virgins love thee.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *maidens*

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**For thy love.** Cf. iv. 10. Sweeter to her, more stimulating and sustaining than any cordial, is her husband's newly-tasted love, for the draughts of which she eagerly and frankly longs. The word rendered 'love' should really be translated 'caresses,' and designates the outward expression of affection. The LXX translates it 'breasts,' probably through a misunderstanding of the Hebrew word, as that meaning does not appear suitable or probable in this case.

**3. Thine ointments.** There is in this verse a play upon the words, which in the original represent ointment and name<sup>1</sup>. Another example of the same thing is found in Eccles. vii. 1. The Eastern love of perfumes is the reason of the praise here given, and one remembers the many instances in the Bible of the use of such precious ointments. The practice of using such unguents had probably the twofold purpose of allaying heat-irritation and concealing unpleasant odours of the body, so difficult to prevent in Eastern lands. The making of these perfumes was an important trade (cf. iii. 6 and note). The composition of the anointing oil for the priests is found in Exod. xxx. 23-25. The practice of using these fragrant oils was a daily one, and, as with other ancient peoples, the regular consequent of the bath (cf. Ezek. xvi. 9). Their use was a sign of joy (Prov. xxvii. 9, which see; Matt. vi. 7), as their absence was a sign of mourning (2 Sam. xiv. 2; Micah vi. 15). To be able to indulge in their free use is a sign of prosperity (Eccles. ix. 8; Ps. xcii. 10). The employment of perfumes of peculiarly special combination was a sign of wealth and luxury, and might, as in the case of Hezekiah, be part of the treasure of a king's house (2 Kings xx. 13; Amos vi. 6). The practice of welcoming guests by anointing them is alluded to in Ps. xxiii. 5, where the failure to do so was a mark of discourtesy (Luke vii. 46). As a sign of special honour conferred upon a beloved guest we have the touching story of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany (John xii. 1-8), and parallel passages. (On the whole subject the articles 'Anointing,' 'Oil,' 'Perfume,' in *HDB.* should be consulted.)

**ointment poured forth.** Cf. John xii. 3, 'The house was filled with the odour of the ointment.'

**virgins.** The reference is probably to the girl companions

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<sup>1</sup> *shem and shemen.*

Draw me ; we will run after thee :  
 The king hath brought me into his chambers :  
 We will be glad and rejoice in thee,  
 We will make mention of thy love more than of wine :  
<sup>a</sup> Rightly do they love thee.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *In uprightness*

of the young bride, 'bridesmaids,' as we should say, who formed part of the chorus of singers who provided the entertainment during the wedding festival. This is a much more simple explanation than the extremes to which the supporters of the dramatic theory are driven to explain the words.

**4. Draw me.** There is considerable difficulty here in deciding upon the grammatical connexion of the word. The R. V. punctuation makes the words 'draw me' stand alone, in which case they constitute the appeal of the bride to the bridegroom, and the following words are sung in chorus by her companions. If, as seems more natural, in the original, the words 'after thee' are connected closely with 'draw me,' then in all probability 'king' may be taken as vocative, and the chorus words consist of the phrase 'We will run, O king,' when the bride would continue, 'He hath brought me into his chambers.' If the punctuation of the R. V. is to stand, we must regard the words 'The king hath brought me into his chambers' as a kind of mocking answer made by the bride to her companions, reminding them that, however much they attempt to follow, they will find one door closed against them.

**We will be glad.** The next two lines constitute a chorus of the bridegroom's praise re-echoing the words already used by the bride in verse 2. The latter part of the clause is better rendered 'We will celebrate thy caresses more than wine.' Here, again, we have the union of the praise of love and wine so common in the erotic poetry, not only of the East, but of all lands, and strikingly illustrated in the familiar verse of Omar Khayyam :

'A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
 A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou  
 Beside me singing in the wilderness—  
 Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow.'

**Rightly.** R. V. margin gives 'in uprightness,' which probably expresses with greater clearness the idea of this last line. It is the utterance of the bride herself, who thus agrees with the high praise given to the bridegroom by her friends, and

- 5 I am black, but comely,  
O ye daughters of Jerusalem,  
As the tents of Kedar,

at the same time expresses her conviction that their love of him is pure, and their praise uttered from no unworthy motives.

**5. I am black.** The words here used by the bride of her own personal appearance refer to the darkening of her complexion by her exposure to the sun, and we are told that even now the Bedouin women thus contrast themselves with the women of the town. She is, however, conscious of her personal attractions, in all likelihood referring to her liteness of limb and well-knit figure, which find definite praise in a later stage of the poem (vii. 1-7).

**daughters of Jerusalem.** This title recurs frequently throughout the book, and it must be confessed that it is one of the phrases more easy of interpretation on the dramatic theory. The commentators who take this view regard it as descriptive of the king's harem. If the book is of northern origin, the question is at once asked, What are daughters of Jerusalem doing in that part of the country? If, however, we assume not only that the bride and bridegroom were regarded as king and queen for the week, but that sometimes a special name was given to the king, and he was called Solomon, with reference to the traditional splendour of that monarch, there need be little difficulty in assuming that the bride's companions were also named from the royal city. Another explanation is, however, possible, namely, that the girls in their festal attire were humorously regarded as 'daughters of Jerusalem', just as to-day the names of Paris or London might be applied to raiment and fashions of peculiar splendour. Another possibility is that local names may have been used in these marriage-songs according to the district of the country in which they were sung, and that we have here one edited by a southern writer which contains in the main southern names. In any case the words are not to be looked upon as defence against critics, but as humorous banter among friends.

**tents of Kedar.** The name Kedar is found in several places in the O. T., one of the most important references being Jer. xlix. 29, where a description of the Nomadic race is given. The real root of the word probably means 'powerful,' but has by a folk-etymology been connected with a Hebrew root which means 'dark' (cf. article 'Kedar' in *HDB.*). The tents were either made of black goatskin or of black woven material (cf. Doughty, *Arabia Deserta*, pp. 224 f.).

As the curtains of Solomon.

Look not upon me, because I am swarthy,

6

Because the sun hath <sup>a</sup> scorched me.

My mother's sons were incensed against me,

They made me keeper of the vineyards ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *looked upon*

**curtains of Solomon.** This second expression refers to the words 'I am comely,' as the former expression refers to the words 'I am black.' Eastern palaces were famous for their hangings in gorgeous colourings, and even the tents of those in high position were frequently made of rich material beautifully adorned. The comparison here is probably to some such pavilion designed as a pleasure-house or as accompanying the king in some royal progress through the country ; the fame of its splendour may have been traditional.

**6. Look not.** The bride continues modestly to apologize for her sunburnt complexion, but the word she now uses is less severe than that of the former verse, and she begs her friends not to stare at her critically—for the sun has been to blame in the first instance, and in the second place those who gave her outside tasks to perform in tending the vineyards. The margin of the R. V. gives 'looked upon' as an alternative rendering for 'scorched,' but it must be noticed that the word is not the same in the original as that translated 'look upon' in the former line.

**mother's sons.** Surely too much has been made of this expression by many commentators. It is nothing but a poetical phrase for 'brothers,' and is too slight a basis to build up a theory as to the home life of the girl—the probable death of her father, and her consequent ill-usage at the hand of those who should have been her natural protectors.

**keeper of the vineyards.** The ordinary explanation given is that the girl had been put in charge of her brother's vineyard, and that when in the next line she speaks of not keeping her own vineyard, this is to be taken as a figurative reference to her personal appearance. But surely that is not only a strange figure, but a very abrupt transition. It seems much more probable that in both cases the word 'vineyard' is a figure, and is to be interpreted in the light of subsequent references in the poem (for example, iv. 12-15, vii. 6-8, 10-13, viii. 12). The anger of her brothers was probably shown in the attempt to keep her unmarried ; and she here confesses that she had not obeyed their behest, but permitted love to find its inroad into the enclosure of her heart, and another was now lord of the vineyard she had

*But mine own vineyard have I not kept.*

7 Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth,

Where thou feedest *thy flock*, where thou makest *it* to rest  
at noon :

For why should I be as one that <sup>a</sup> is veiled

Beside the flocks of thy companions ?

<sup>a</sup> Most ancient versions have, *wandereth*.

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been directed to keep as her own. This also makes the transition to the next verse much more probable than on any other explanation, as it is another outburst of longing for her husband lover.

**7. Tell me.** This verse brings before us for the first time the pastoral imagery of which the poem is so full. This is a type of poetry that has been prevalent in many lands and at many periods. It very easily becomes artificial, and in the highest examples of it the artificial element is probably always present. Yet under this conventional form some of the finest poetry has been written (cf. the *Eclogues* of Virgil, the *Idylls* of Theocritus, the *Lycidas* of Milton, and the *Thyrsis* of Matthew Arnold). Under pastoral imagery, therefore, the bride now calls upon her bridegroom, begging him to make known to her the noontide resting-place of his flocks that they may spend in love-dalliance the hour of leisure (cf. the figure, Ps. xxiii. 1-3). This explanation avoids the extreme difficulties and improbabilities of the dramatic theory, where the maiden is supposed in an absent way to address her far-off lover, or as by Martineau, that he suddenly puts in an appearance here at the king's palace. Neither is Budde's idea that this particular section of the song refers to a pre-nuptial meeting any more probable.

**one that is veiled.** As the margin of the R. V. indicates, the translation 'wandereth' is much more probable, and is that adopted by many modern commentators, as the original word can very well bear that meaning with but the slightest change in its form. It is difficult to give to the rendering 'veiled' any appropriate sense. Some have considered it to be a complaint on her part that she might be mistaken for a woman of evil character—a class who, we learn from Gen. xxxviii. 15, were accustomed to go with their faces covered. Others take it to mean mourning, as women mourners were also veiled. The best sense, however, is undoubtedly that which pictures the girl as wandering disconsolately among alien flocks and strange shepherds while her heart longs for her own lover.

If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, 8  
Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock,  
And feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents.

I have compared thee, O <sup>a</sup> my love, 9  
<sup>b</sup> To a steed in Pharaoh's chariots.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *my friend* (and so throughout)

<sup>b</sup> Or, *To the steeds* Or, *To my steed*

8. This verse is no mocking gibe of palace women, but a chorus sung by her girl friends, advising her to go fearlessly forth to where the shepherds are, and lead her flock of kids to the pasture-place, where undoubtedly her own lover will soon find her. The fact that in this verse she is spoken of as a shepherdess is another argument against the literal interpretation of verse 6, which would describe her as a vine-dresser.

i. 9—ii. 7. This section consists of a dialogue between the bridegroom and the bride, in which, in alternate verses, the one praises the other, using many similes from nature; and in the last stanza the bride describes in luscious language the joy of her heart in the enjoyment of her husband's love, and ends with a refrain which recurs twice later in the poem, begging her friends not to interrupt her enjoyment.

To the dramatists this section appears to be the appeal of the king to the country maiden, who in turn sings the praise of her own lover, and modestly disclaims the king's flattery, while the closing words are addressed to the court ladies as an appeal not to force her into a hateful union.

9. *love*. The word thus rendered occurs very frequently throughout this poem, and only elsewhere in the O. T. in one place (Judges xi. 37), where it is used by the daughter of Jephtha of her girl friends. There can be little doubt, however, that it is to be taken in this poem as equivalent to lover, and Professor Harper compares the similar use of the word *ami* in French.

To a *steed*. As the form in the original is feminine, we might perhaps render here 'filly.' The comparison may not seem so complimentary to a Western as it did to an Eastern mind; but the beauty of the horse, especially when we remember that in all probability the extreme gracefulness of the Arab breed was in the mind of the writer, renders the comparison no unworthy one, and it is found in both Greek and Latin poets. Theocritus considered it no inadequate figure under which to set forth the beauty of the golden and rose-red Helen, while Horace compares Lyde to a three-year-old filly, sporting upon the wide plains, and shrinking from the touch of her would-be capturer



- 10 Thy cheeks are comely with plaits of hair,  
 Thy neck with strings of jewels.  
 11 We will make thee plaits of gold  
 With studs of silver.

(Theoc. *Idylls* xviii. 30 ; Hor. *Odes* iii. 11. 9). Another reading of the Hebrew gives the word as plural, but this rendering is not probable. The point of the comparison with the chariots of Pharaoh is in all probability because Egyptian horses were specially famous and valued ; and the comparison may get its significance not only from the beauty and grace of the creature itself, but because of the magnificent trappings with which horses in a royal chariot were adorned. To the Oriental the ornaments of the bride were almost as praiseworthy as the beauty of the woman herself, and we find this reference not only in the immediately succeeding verse, but in other passages of the poem (cf. iv. 4, 9).

**10. Thy cheeks are comely.** The LXX renders, 'How comely are thy cheeks,' which may probably represent the correct reading. The description that follows continues the comparison with a horse and the chariots of Pharaoh, for, as we are told by Mr. Lane and others, the horses' heads in Egypt 'are adorned with silk tassels, and coins, or other ornaments, of silver' (*Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, p. 155).

**plaits of hair.** The A. V. renders, 'with rows of jewels,' and it seems doubtful which of the two renderings is correct. The R. V. is favoured by the fact that the second clause of the parallelism speaks of chains of gold, so that it would be reasonable to expect both parts of the adornment to be mentioned. The style of hair-dressing described by Mr. Lane reveals the hair as being divided into numerous plaits always of an uneven number. These are allowed to hang down the back, while to each braid of hair are added three black silk cords with little gold and silver ornaments attached to them. The ornaments on each string are so placed as not to correspond exactly with those on the others. At the extreme end of each cord is generally suspended a gold coin, or sometimes a pear-shaped ornament of flat gold, or one of filigree work, or a tassel of pearls—so that a moderate head-dress may have anything from 600 to 1,000 ornaments in its composition. We can thus see how appropriate is the comparison to the adornment of the horse's mane.

**Thy neck.** Here the description turns to the necklace. These also consist of various forms in modern Egyptian dress, and often contain jewels of great value (cf. Lane, pp. 567-9).

**11. plaits of gold.** This expression probably means strings of gold beads, each one of which is decorated with little points

While the king sat at his table,	12
My spikenard sent forth its fragrance.	
My beloved is unto me <i>as</i> a <sup>a</sup> bundle of myrrh,	13
That lieth betwixt my breasts.	
My beloved is unto me <i>as</i> cluster of <sup>b</sup> henna-flowers	14

<sup>a</sup> Or, *bag*<sup>b</sup> Heb. *copher*.

of silver, or tiny silver pendants are described as hanging from the gold chain. The verse is possibly to be attributed to the bride's companions.

**12. While the king, &c.** On the theory here taken of the poem, these words refer to the wedding-feast, when the bride was perfumed with the richest and rarest odours. The spikenard was one of the most highly prized of these, being the product of an Indian plant (cf. John xii. 3). Those who take the dramatic interpretation generally regard the reference as a figurative one, and consider the maiden to be saying here that only in the absence of Solomon can the deepest feelings of her heart find the liberty of expression. This seems altogether forced and unnatural.

**13. My beloved.** The reference to the spikenard suggests to her a new figure. It is not so much the rich fragrance upon her own body and raiment that is precious, but more valued and sweeter still than any perfume is the bridegroom himself; and she compares him, with the idea doubtless of the intimacy of contact and the privacy of possession, to the bag or little filigree case of perfume, which was worn suspended from the neck, and hung close to her bosom between her breasts. The myrrh was valued, not only for its aromatic properties, but also as a disinfectant, and so was worn night and day. It had also the property of reinvigorating and refreshing the fainting, and so is more appropriate as a figure of the sustaining presence of her beloved.

**14. a cluster of henna-flowers.** This plant was a low tree or shrub whose fragrant flowers grow in large, whitish clusters, not unlike a bunch of grapes. From the plant is extracted the dye from which the Eastern women dye their hands and feet, as described in the following passage by Mr. Lane. The women 'stain certain parts of their hands and feet with the leaves of the henna-tree, which impart a yellowish red or deep orange colour. Many thus dye only the nails of the fingers and toes; others extend the dye as high as the first joint of each finger and toe; some also make a stripe along the next row of joints; and there are several other fanciful modes of applying the henna; but the most common practice is to dye the tips of the fingers and toes as high as the first joint, and the whole of the inside of the hand

In the vineyards of En-gedi.

15 Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair ;

<sup>a</sup> Thine eyes are *as* doves.

16 Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant :

Also our couch is green.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Thou hast doves' eyes*

and the sole of the foot.' When the dye has been applied the hand is tightly bound with linen during the night. The colour remains for about a fortnight or three weeks, and, when skilfully applied, renders both nails and hands more delicate in appearance. Mr. Lane also tells us that there prevails a habit of making indelible tattoo marks between the breasts. If this custom prevailed in Palestine, it is just possible that the mention of the myrrh as lying close to these marks upon her bosom may have suggested the further figure of the henna-flower, its fragrance, and its employment for adornment, while the lasting nature of the beauty it imparted makes it a still more fitting figure of love.

**En-gedi.** We are told that the henna-flower is to-day found in Palestine only at En-gedi. In old days this place was famous for its fertility and vineyards.

**15. Behold, thou art fair.** Here the bridegroom answers in affectionate praise the words of the bride. The gentle tenderness, and perhaps innocence, of the eyes of the dove are attributed to her ; but it is to be remembered that the dove has always been one of the adjuncts of love. It was the bird of Venus, and we shall often find it referred to in the course of the poem. The verse has been thought by some commentators to be too long, and for rhythmic reasons they have suggested cutting out the recurrence of the opening words ; but, of course, there is no textual authority for such a course.

**16. Behold, thou art fair.** In this case the gender of the pronouns shows that the bride is replying to her bridegroom<sup>1</sup>, but the word translated pleasant is stronger than this rendering suggests, and might better be translated 'ravishing.'

**our couch is green.** The words are difficult to interpret because they seem to come so abruptly into the context, and hence certain editors have attempted emendations in the Hebrew text ; but none of them are satisfactory. To give a suitable meaning to the words as they stand is not at all an easy task. It is possible to suppose with many that the girl is thinking of former wanderings among the shady recesses of the forest, and of lover's talks on grassy banks ; but all this appears much too modern and

<sup>1</sup> See, however, Introduction, p. 5.

The beams of our <sup>a</sup> house are <sup>b</sup> cedars, 17  
 And our rafters are <sup>c</sup> firs.  
 I am a <sup>d</sup> rose of <sup>e</sup> Sharon, 2  
 A lily of the valleys.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *houses*      <sup>b</sup> Or, *of cedar . . . of fir*      <sup>c</sup> Or, *cypresses*

<sup>d</sup> Heb. *habazzzeleth*, the autumn crocus.

<sup>e</sup> Or, *the plain*

Western to suit the circumstances. If, on the other hand, we understand it to refer to the nuptial chamber in her new home, it is not easy to explain the epithet 'green.' Siegfried, indeed, suggests that the reference is to the decoration of the marriage couch with greenery and aromatic herbs, but the only passage in support that he can adduce is Prov. vii. 17, which is certainly not appropriate.

**17. The beams of our house.** Here the first question is whether these words are on the lips of the bride or bridegroom. They may be the answer of the latter as further descriptive of the bridal chamber, and if they are thought too splendid for a literal description of the humble dwelling of a peasant, we must remember the whole circumstances of the occasion, and on his lips the words may be glorified by love, which, with its magic, turns the cottage into a palace. On the other hand, both this verse and the next may be a continuation of the bride's speech. Some see in the words a further reference to the forest, and regard them literally as descriptive of its glades.

**ii. 1. a rose of Sharon.** These well-known words are made use of by the bride in which to compare herself to the flowers of her own meadows. The first is generally taken to be the meadow saffron, a flower not unlike a crocus, though others, following the rendering of the Jewish paraphrase, regard it as the 'narcissus,' a flower which, we are told, is the special favourite with the natives. The sweetness of the scent may render it here the more appropriate figure. The 'lily' is by the majority of commentators regarded as the 'scarlet anemone,' as the name, still given to it by the Arabs, is derived from the root of the word here used in the original. The word must (cf. v. 13) denote a red flower, for there the comparison is descriptive of the colour of the lips. These comparisons do not necessarily imply that the bride dwells upon her humility and insignificance. It rather appears that the references are to her beauty and winsomeness. One argument in favour of interpreting the preceding verses as referring to outdoor lovers' meetings in the forest is this continuation of the thought of the scenery of the outer world in the figures here employed.

- 2 As a lily among thorns,  
So is my love among the daughters.
- 3 As the apple tree among the trees of the wood,  
So is my beloved among the sons.  
<sup>a</sup> I sat down under his shadow with great delight,  
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.
- 4 He brought me to the <sup>b</sup>banqueting house,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *I delighted and sat down &c.*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *house of wine.*

**2. a lily among thorns.** The bridegroom catches up her own language and, continuing her metaphor, applies it in a manner that is not complimentary to her companions, whom he compares to thorns. The word used for thorns is found again in Prov. xxvi. 9, which see.

**3. as the apple tree.** The bride here adopts the same form of language as the bridegroom has just used, and describes him as excelling his companions as the apple-tree excels the other trees. The poetical beauty of the imagery is found in the fact that she does not use quite the same type of expression as he has done, and her comparison implies nothing that is directly derogatory to those whom it sets in opposition to her beloved. The rendering 'apple-tree' is not quite certain, though a very large number of commentators favour it. Other suggestions are citron, orange, or quince, and the choice lies between the latter and the apple. The chief difficulty about accepting the 'apple-tree' as the proper translation is that the apple does not flourish in Palestine, and the few specimens that are known are of poor quality. On the other hand, the quince flourishes, and has always done so, for there are many references to it in ancient writers. It is objected to the quince that no one can call its fruit 'sweet.' In its natural condition this is true, but it is generally eaten in a prepared form, which is said to be extremely delicious. Further, the fragrance of the quince is much more marked than that of the apple, and would thus fit in well with the reference in verse 5. Again, the quince was associated with marriage rites, and would probably have appropriate love-associations attached to it (see the article 'Apple' in *HBD.* and *Enc. Bibl.*). The expansion of the metaphor in the remainder of the verse is descriptive of the fullness of the joy she had experienced in realizing all the proofs of his love.

**4. banqueting house.** More literally and appropriately, as in the margin, 'house of wine,' though there are some who

And his banner over me was love.

Stay ye me with <sup>a</sup> raisins, comfort me with apples :

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *cakes of raisins*.

regard the Hebrew original as a proper name, Beth-hayyayin (cf. Bethel, Bethlehem, &c.), as designating the village in which the bridegroom's home stood. This is improbable, as it would make the reference much too special. The 'house of wine' is probably the inn where travellers find refreshment, and is here referred by a metaphor to the chamber of love. And in Omar we find the reference to 'this batter'd Caravanserai of life' and to 'the wine or life,' where here we have the 'wine of love.'

**banner.** The meaning of the word is not easy to settle. In other places it is translated 'standard,' but that rendering is disputed by some scholars, who would give it the meaning of 'a company of troops.' The latter significance seems, of course, quite inappropriate. The main difficulty is to find a good sense for the word 'banner' in this connexion. It is easy enough to speak of the banner of love floating over her. It is very questionable whether the metaphor thus suggested has any proper basis in a probable reconstruction of the scene. We are told that it was a practice in Arabia for the wine-seller to fly a flag outside his shop so long as he had wine to sell, and there may be some connexion between that practice and the words here used. They would then signify that the wine of love was for her a permanent possession.

**5. raisins.** The word is better rendered as in the marg. and in Hosea iii. 1, 'cakes of raisins.' It is well known how sustaining a food the raisin is, and it is a favourite and common one in the East. As generally interpreted, there are several references to these raisin-cakes in the O.T. (see 2 Sam. vi. 19; Isa. xvi. 7, in addition to the passage quoted above). But this meaning has been disputed, and it is said that in all cases the reference is to a cake of flour kneaded together with grape-juice, which in the process of baking would ferment and serve as leaven. It is considered also that this would give the cake a peculiar quality as a restorative, which is what is wanted here. That these cakes were, according to Jer. vii. 18 and xlv. 19, offered to a divinity who was the goddess of love, may throw additional light on the significance of the word in this passage. Professor Cheyne, however (*Enc. Bibl.*, col. 1,569), regards the original word here as wrongly given in the ordinary text, and, by a slight change, alters it to the word that occurs in verse 1, and means 'lilies.' On this understanding the reference would be throughout to her desire for some fragrant and pungent perfume to prevent her

For I am sick of love.

<sup>6</sup> <sup>a</sup> His left hand *is* under my head,  
And his right hand doth embrace me.

<sup>7</sup> I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
By the <sup>b</sup> roes, and by the hinds of the field,  
That ye stir not up, nor awaken love,  
Until it please.

<sup>8</sup> The voice of my beloved ! behold, he cometh,

<sup>a</sup> Or, Let his left hand be &c.

<sup>b</sup> Or, gazelles

from fainting, a meaning that is sometimes given to the passage as it stands, seeing that the Easterns are in the habit of smelling fruit for that purpose. The emendation, however, seems unnecessary.

**sick of love.** These words seem to refer to an excess of love, which has brought her almost to the point of fainting. The older commentators regarded it as an expression of the longing for love unsatisfied, as she hungered for her absent lover ; but, even on the interpretation here accepted, may not this meaning be appropriate ? The joys she has just described cause her suddenly to long for their renewal, and in an outburst of desire she seeks for refreshment. It is to be confessed, however, that the words of the next verse militate against such a suggestion.

**6. His left hand.** Probably the reading of the margin, ' Let his left hand, &c., ' is preferable. The word rendered ' embrace ' is found again in viii. 3, and Prov. v. 20 ; Eccles. iii. 5.

**7. I adjure you.** This is obviously an address to her companions, bidding them leave love its liberty ; and the force of the adjuration by the wild creatures of the field is not only appropriate because of their freedom, but because of their beauty and shyness, and because they are both frequently employed in Eastern poetry as typical of womanly beauty. It is a refrain that occurs on two other occasions in the poem : see iii. 5 and viii. 4.

ii. 8—iii. 5. This section consists of a song sung by the bride, and contains a report of an exquisite love-song addressed to her by the bridegroom. She then turns to him (verse 17) in direct address, but follows this with the poetical record of a dream, in which she has sought and found him in the streets of the city, and concludes with the same refrain with which the last song closed.

Leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.  
 My beloved is like a <sup>a</sup> roe or a young hart : 9  
 Behold, he standeth behind our wall,  
 He looketh in at the windows,  
 He <sup>b</sup> sheweth himself through the lattice.  
 My beloved spake, and said unto me, 10  
 Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.  
 For, lo, the winter is past, 11  
<sup>a</sup> Or, *gazelle*                      <sup>b</sup> Or, *glanceth through*

Verse 15 creates a difficulty, as it does not seem quite easy to fit it into her song. If it is not to be taken as the words of the bride it is then a chorus verse. The dramatic interpreters break the section up into several parts, but are not all in agreement as to the persons to whom these are to be assigned.

**8. The voice of my beloved.** This would be better rendered, 'Hark! my beloved!' The verse is a jubilant outcry of greeting, as she sees in imagination her young shepherd eagerly hastening to meet her.

**9. like a roe.** Several commentators consider these words out of place here, and suppose they have been introduced from verse 17 below. Here the LXX not only reads the words, but adds the conclusion of verse 17 as well. It is not possible definitely to decide the question, but internal evidence seems against the presence of the words here. The remaining words of the verse draw a pretty picture of the lover shyly approaching the home of the maiden, and of their intercourse of loving glances through the cottage-windows. In modern literature there is a charming parallel in Frenssen's *Holy Land*; and Professor Harper happily quotes Tennyson's lines :

'And all my heart went out to meet him  
 Coming, ere he came.'

**10. My beloved spake.** She turns now to relate a love-song that her lover has sung to her, and it deals with the subject that is ever present in love-songs, the poetry of the spring, 'When a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.' It begins with an invitation to come out and view the beauty of the spring of Palestine, and to listen to the call of flower and bird and tree that bid the lovers awake to love, as Nature round about them is already doing.

**11. winter.** This should more accurately be the 'time of the rain,' but the parallel in the second clause of the verse so explains



- The rain is over and gone ;  
 12 The flowers appear on the earth ;  
 The time of the <sup>a</sup> singing of birds is come,  
 And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land ;  
 13 The fig tree ripeneth her green figs,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *pruning* of vines

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it. Since a name for the season must stand here winter is our only appropriate equivalent. What is in strictness meant is *geshem*, the heavy winter rain ; but for six weeks longer the *malkôsh* or latter rain has still to fall (see *Exp. Times*, vi. 390).

**12. The flowers appear.** All travellers tell us of the exquisite beauty of the sudden rush of flowers in Palestine at the opening of spring.

**the singing.** This meaning of the word is doubtful. The LXX and many ancient versions translate 'pruning,' and, as the italics show, there is no equivalent for 'of birds' in Hebrew, and the word here employed is never elsewhere used of the voice of birds, but always of human song. The temptation to render 'singing' probably comes from the supposed parallelism in the next clause, but on the whole 'pruning' seems preferable, as, with the exception of the cooing of the dove, all the other references in the passage are to plant life. The reference to pruning at this season is also an accurate one, for a species of pruning takes place at this period of vine-culture.

**the voice of the turtle.** The dove is another herald of spring, just as the cuckoo is so regarded among ourselves (cf. Jer. viii. 7). The dove has been an attribute of love, and in this sense is particularly appropriate in such a connexion. Tennyson has also used it in another way in the passage above referred to, when he says, 'In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove.' Some modern commentators cut out the words 'in our land' as a gloss<sup>1</sup>. There is no external evidence for this, but the words seem somewhat redundant.

**13. ripeneth.** The word so rendered creates considerable difficulty to scholars because of the uncertainty of its meaning. It is only used in one other passage in the O. T., Gen. i. 2, 26, where it means 'embalm.' The kindred root in Arabic and other Semitic languages suggest that this usage arises from the employment of spices in that process, and so some would render it here 'spiceth' instead of 'ripeneth.' Others suggest 'reddeneth,' because the word has also that meaning in Arabic. In any case,

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<sup>1</sup> i. e. explanatory note by a copyist.

And the vines are in blossom,  
 They give forth their fragrance.  
 Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.  
 O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert 14  
     of the steep place,  
 Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice ;  
 For sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.  
 Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards ; 15

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whatever the original meaning be, the English version represents the process described, and here again discussion arises as to what sort of figs were meant. It was too early for the fresh figs to ripen, but it is said that figs almost always persist on the trees in an unripe state during the winter months, and that when spring comes these rapidly ripen (cf. Matt. xxi. 19, and for the fig-tree as a sign of spring, cf. Matt. xxiv. 32).

**in blossom.** The word so rendered occurs only here, and its meaning is very uncertain, but probably the English represents it with sufficient accuracy.

**fragrance.** The delicate fragrance of the blossoming vines is a noticeable feature in all vineyards. The words that close the verse are a repetition of those in verse 10, and probably mark a section of the song.

**14. O my dove.** Here the lover turns to his beloved with endearing language, comparing her to the rock-doves and her retreat within the house to their hiding themselves in the inaccessible places of the rocks.

**countenance.** Probably better rendered 'figure.'

**15. Take us the foxes.** This verse has occasioned much difficulty to interpreters. The first question to decide is to whom to assign the verse. Is it a continuation of the bridegroom's song? If so, then the connexion is not easy to make out. The transition is extremely abrupt from the praise of his beloved to this reference to the foxes. If not his, it may either be attributed to the bride herself, and so some regard it, with the idea that she is here quoting a verse of a popular vineyard song, which is supposed to be taken in an allegorical sense, as in i. 6, with reference to her love ; but this meaning seems also forced and unnatural. The only remaining possibility is to regard the words as a chorus sung by the companions of bride or bridegroom<sup>1</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> Foxes or jackals (the word in the original means either) are very fond of grapes, and do much damage in the vineyards (cf. Aesop's Fables, and Theoc. v. 112).

For our vineyards are in blossom.

16 My beloved is mine, and I am his :

He feedeth *his flock* among the lilies.

17 <sup>a</sup> Until the day <sup>b</sup> be cool, and the shadows flee away,

Turn, my beloved, and be thou like a <sup>c</sup> roe or a young hart

<sup>a</sup> Or *When the day is cool*                      <sup>b</sup> Or, *break*    Heb. *breathe*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *gazelle*

words may thus be, as has been suggested, a refrain from a popular folk-song, but it is questionable whether even then the literal meaning is to be taken. Many modern commentators regard the words as belonging to a jocular song, with a *double entendre*, warning her against the havoc that love may play in the vineyard of her own heart.

**16. My beloved.** Here we return to the direct address of the bride to her bridegroom, but its purport is not clear, and many modern interpreters seem correct in regarding the language, not only as highly figurative, but as euphemistically hiding ideas that modern Western taste would not tolerate.

**He feedeth.** The word thus rendered may also mean 'the shepherd,' but the sense would not be clear, unless it were to paint some idyllic pastoral scene. The R. V. inserts 'his flock,' but without warrant in the Hebrew; so that the words probably mean 'he feedeth among the lilies,' a phrase that is impossible to interpret literally. It is very probable that both this and the phrases of the following verse describe the kiss and embrace of the lovers.

**17. Until the day be cool.** Few words are more familiar than the A. V. rendering of this passage, 'Until the day break and the shadows flee away,' but unfortunately not only the association but the meaning of the words is almost certainly wrong. As the R. V. margin indicates, the word rendered 'be cool' means literally 'breathe or blow,' as in Gen. iii. 8, where the words rendered 'in the cool of the day' mean literally 'in the blowing or wind of the day,' and, of course, refer not to sunrise but to sunset. Here, therefore, the meaning seems to be the same, and the reference to the departure of the shadows is not to the darkness of night vanishing before the dawn, but to the onrush of the dark, when there are no longer any shadows, because all is darkness (cf. Coleridge in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 'At one stride comes the dark'). Instead of 'until' we should probably translate 'when,' so that the verse is a request for her lover to come to her at eventide. The comparison to the 'roe' and the 'young hart,' which again occurs

Upon the <sup>a</sup> mountains of <sup>b</sup> Bether.

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth : 3

I sought him, but I found him not.

*I said*, I will rise now, and go about the city, 2

In the streets and in the broad ways,

I will seek him whom my soul loveth :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *mountains of separation*

<sup>b</sup> Perhaps, the spice *malobathron*.

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here is obviously to their swiftness, and suggest her eagerness for her lover's advent. She can certainly not mean 'flee swiftly away,' as Prof. Harper, by the exigencies of his dramatic theory, is compelled to translate.

**mountains of Bether.** Here is another difficult phrase, and the word given in the R. V. as a proper name does not, thus read, give any illumination. Some have identified it with a place near Jerusalem (cf. *HBD.*, 'Bether'), but the identification seems very improbable. As the margin shows, the word can be rendered 'separation,' and it is thus that many of the old versions translate it. It is the word employed (Gen. xv. 10) of Abraham's cutting the animals in twain on the occasion of the Lord's covenant with him; but even so the renderings vary between 'cleft mountains,' that is, mountains separated by ravines, and mountains which themselves separate, the 'over the hills and far away' idea of the Scotch love-song, which might be very appropriate here. Others regard it as a contracted form of the word *malabathron*, which in Greek and Latin is designated an aromatic plant. In support of this idea, compare iv. 6, where the fragrance of the hills is definitely referred to; and if the words are figuratively applicable to the person of the bride, the fragrance of the perfumes which she had used would suggest the term. Cheyne, by a slight alteration of the Hebrew word, renders 'cypresses,' regarding it as an appropriate description of Lebanon.

iii. 1. The verses which follow, though still attributed to the bride, probably mark another song distinct from the one just concluded, a song which recounts a dream.

**By night.** This may better be rendered 'night after night,' denoting her constant anxiety and longing for her lover. Of course, the dream must be a reminiscence of the days before the wedding.

**2. city.** Not at all necessarily Jerusalem.

**broad ways.** Rather the open spaces where a number of roads meet.

I sought him, but I found him not.

3 The watchmen that go about the city found me :

*To whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth ?*

4 It was but a little that I passed from them,

When I found him whom my soul loveth :

I held him, and would not let him go,

Until I had brought him into my mother's house,

And into the chamber of her that conceived me.

5 <sup>a</sup> I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,

By the roes, and by the hinds of the field,

That ye stir not up, nor awaken love,

Until it please.

6 Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness like  
pillars of smoke,

<sup>a</sup> See ch. ii. 7.

but I found him not. Note the pathos of this recurrent phrase.

4. The exultant joy of this verse contrasts beautifully with the pathos of the former verses, and the exquisite little lyric closes (verse 5) with the words we have already found in the former chapter.

Verses 6-11. The following song is probably to be attributed to a male chorus, and may be a representative of the more martial songs which Wetzstein describes. The main difficulty is as to whether it describes the glory of the historic Solomon or whether the words are to be referred to the peasant bridegroom. Probably the traditional glory of the great king had set a model for the sort of language here employed. The verses are an imaginary account of a royal progress in which the king is accompanied by his troops and is carried in a magnificent palanquin described in detail, and the song closes with a summons to the maidens to go out to meet the procession.

6. **Who is this?** It should be rather, 'What is this?' The word is feminine in the original, a usage which is often employed in place of the neuter ; but here the pronoun clearly refers to the word rendered 'litter' in verse 7, which is feminine.

**pillars of smoke.** This is taken by the majority of com-

Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,  
 With all powders of the merchant?  
 Behold, it is the litter of Solomon ; 7  
 Threescore mighty men are about it,  
 Of the mighty men of Israel.  
 They all handle the sword, *and* are expert in war : 8  
 Every man hath his sword upon his thigh,  
 Because of fear in the night.  
 King Solomon made himself a <sup>a</sup> palanquin 9  
 Of the wood of Lebanon.  
 He made the pillars thereof of silver, 10  
 The bottom thereof of gold, the seat of it of purple,  
                                   <sup>a</sup> Or, *car of state*

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mentators to apply to clouds of smoke from the incense which is being burned in honour of the royal personage ; but may it not rather apply to the dust of the cavalcade ? The wilderness is, of course, not the literal desert, but out of the lonely and remote places the company is seen drawing near to human habitation (cf. Mark i. 35, &c.).

**Perfumed.** This word seems to refer to the burning of perfumes, and the words descriptive of these include all the richest of such preparations as the East could produce.

**7. mighty men.** For this term see 2 Sam. xxiii. 8, &c.

**8. fear in the night.** The main work of these bodyguards was to watch over the king in the darkness, to prevent there being fear in the night.

**9.** Some consider that the description here given of Solomon's litter is to be attributed to another singer, but that is quite unnecessary. The word rendered palanquin is a different one from that used in verse 7, and from its form seems to have been borrowed from Greek.

**wood of Lebanon.** Certainly the richly scented and much prized cedar.

**10. pillars.** These are the roof-supports of the canopy above the palanquin.

**bottom.** The word more probably denotes the 'back of the seat,' and this meaning is supported by the Greek and Latin versions.

**seat.** This, of course, refers to the cushions of the palanquin being upholstered in dark purple cloth or silk.

The midst thereof being <sup>a</sup> paved with love,  
From the daughters of Jerusalem.

11 Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon,

With the crown wherewith his mother hath crowned him  
in the day of his espousals,  
And in the day of the gladness of his heart.

4 Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *inlaid*

**paved with love.** As the margin suggests, 'paved' is more correctly rendered 'inlaid'; but what can 'inlaid with love' mean?

Interpreters have been driven to explain it as meaning that the palanquin was thus decorated as a token of affection on the part of the daughters of Jerusalem ; but such an interpretation is not easily got out of the Hebrew, if, indeed, it is at all possible. The only other conclusion is that there is some corruption in the text. The first indication of this is that the words 'daughters of Zion,' which occur immediately afterwards, are not found in the LXX, which suggests that they may be misplaced, and should only occur once, namely, in the following verse. Again, a very slight alteration of two letters in the original turns the word translated 'love' into the word that means 'ebony,' so that the whole phrase can be rendered 'the seat is upholstered with purple, and inlaid with ebony,' a perfectly intelligible and probable rendering.

**11. Go forth.** This verse supports Haupt's theory that this song is one sung by the bride's companions as they go forth to meet the bridal procession. Delitzsch quotes Jewish authority for the statement that the custom of the bridegroom's wearing a crown was abolished after the wars under Vespasian. There may be a reference to the practice in Isa. lxi. 10, where the word rendered 'garland' in our version is probably the bridal crown. On the theory here taken of the book, there is, of course, no reference to the historical Solomon.

iv. 1—v. 1. This whole section is taken up with the praise of the personal beauty and allurements of the bride, and many parallels to such lyrics are found in Egyptian and Aramaic poetry, and Wetzstein quotes a *wasf*, which has many parallels to these passages in the Song of Songs. The whole section may consist of one song, or, as is more probable, a second song begins at

<sup>a</sup> Thine eyes are *as* doves behind thy <sup>b</sup> veil :  
 Thy hair is as a flock of goats,  
 That <sup>c</sup> lie along the side of mount Gilead.  
 Thy teeth are like a flock *of ewes* that are *newly* shorn,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Thou hast doves' eyes*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *locks*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *appear on mount Gilead*

iv. 8, but it is not likely that iv. 16 and v. 1 constitute separate sections. The first eight verses consist of elaborate praise in detail of her personal beauty, using in many cases comparisons that may seem far-fetched to Western readers, but were familiar and highly prized by Orientals. From verse 8 onwards the singer makes a personal appeal to the bride that she should yield to his entreaties, continues with further figurative language descriptive of her charms, and concludes with a triumphant statement of the attaining of his heart's desire.

**1. behind thy veil.** The word rendered 'veil' has also been understood as locks of hair. It seems difficult to understand how the eyes could be spoken of as being behind the hair. On the other hand, the Eastern veil, as Mr. Lane shows, may be used in a most coquettish manner. Seeing that it conceals all the features except the eyes, these latter can with skill be displayed to the best advantage.

**flock of goats.** The blackness of goats' hair has already been referred to in i. 5, and that is the point of the comparison here, though Benzinger understands it as 'dirty brown,' which seems improbable, since black hair was so much admired in the East (cf. the *wasf* above referred to): 'Her hair like the black night, her black hair like the seven nights, the like are not in the whole year.' A further point in the comparison appears to be given by the mention of the goats as being on Mount Gilead. The word descriptive of them suggests the goats as lying on the slopes of the hill, and perhaps raising their heads when disturbed, and thus heightens the picture of the masses of hair clustering on the sides of the head. The word translated 'lie along' has also been rendered 'swarm forth from,' but this meaning is not supported in Brown's *Lexicon*.

**Gilead.** The name probably covers the whole mountain-range lying east of the Jordan, between the north end of the Dead Sea and the south end of the Lake of Galilee, though sometimes it was extended further both north and south. The mountains rise to between 3,000 and 4,000 feet from the Jordan valley, and the district is rich in streams, forests, and gentle slopes of pasture-land.

**2. flock of ewes.** The simile may seem quaint, but is not



Which are come up from the washing ;

<sup>a</sup> Whereof every one hath twins,

And none is bereaved among them.

<sup>3</sup> Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet,

And thy <sup>b</sup> mouth is comely :

Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate

Behind thy <sup>c</sup> veil.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Which are all of them in pairs*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *speech*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *locks*

without its beauty. The brilliant whiteness of the newly-shorn sheep in the green pasture-land suggests in this pastoral poetry the simile. The great Scottish lyric poet, Burns, has not forgotten to use it :

‘Her teeth are like a flock of sheep,  
With fleeces newly washen clean,  
That slowly mount the rising steep ;  
And she’s twa glancin’, sparklin’ een.’

The difficulty of the metaphor consists in the reference to the twins. If the rendering in the text be taken, then the only possible meaning is that as the bearing of twins is a sign of healthy ewes, so the teeth are here spoken of as in perfect condition ; but more probably the marginal rendering, ‘all of them in pairs,’ which is a meaning the word bears in late Hebrew, is admissible here, and thus the reference will be to the teeth in the upper and under rows perfectly matching one another.

**3. mouth.** The word is a very unusual one, and from its root rather suggests ‘speech’ ; and that this is a possible meaning may be seen from quoting other two lines of the *wasf* :

‘Her mouth is a little crystal ring,  
And her teeth rows of pearls,  
And her tongue scatters pearls ;  
And, ah, me, how beautiful her lips !’

**pomegranate.** The force of the comparison here lies in the colour of the pomegranate, but interpreters are divided in their opinion as to whether the reference is to the outside or to the inside of the fruit. In the former case the glossy and polished external surface would be used as a figure for the skin ; in the latter the mingling of the red and yellow to the healthy glow of the skin.

**veil.** Here, as appears from the margin, the original word

Thy neck is like the tower of David builded <sup>a</sup>for an 4  
 armoury,  
 Whereon there hang a thousand bucklers,  
 All the shields of the mighty men.  
 Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a <sup>b</sup>roe, 5

<sup>a</sup> Or, *with turrets*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *gazelle*

may refer to either the veil or locks of hair. In this case the latter meaning seems preferable.

**4. neck.** The points of beauty in a woman's neck are those of gracefulness combined with strength displayed in the firm and easy poise of the head. This is well suggested by the tower upon the city wall. Unfortunately, however, some of the details of the comparison cause great uncertainty. Cf. vii. 4 and note.

**armoury.** The word in the original here is a tremendous riddle to Hebrew scholars. From its root it appears to mean 'fatal things,' and thus 'weapons.' By a not uncommon transference of meaning it may signify a place where weapons are stored, hence an 'armoury.' The point of the comparison is between the walls glistening with their trophies of arms and the neck of the bride covered with necklaces of gold and silver ornaments. Prof. Cheyne, by an alteration in the Hebrew word, gives it the meaning 'shield,' and supposes the historical reference to be to the 'house of the forest of Lebanon' described in 1 Kings x. 14-17, where Solomon hung the targets and shields of gold. Cheyne also refers to Ezek. xxvii. 11, where we read, in the description of Tyre, that the soldiers 'hanged their shields upon thy walls round about; they have perfected thy beauty.' This latter illustration seems a very appropriate one. Further, the LXX understands the word as a proper name, Thalpioth. This is by some identified with a village near Damascus, and the words are taken to mean so built as to look toward Thalpioth, that is, as identified with vii. 4. Others, again, consider the LXX to be at fault, and that the word here represents the Greek word *telopos*, which they take to be a borrowed word, meaning 'far-looking,' i. e. from which a wide view is to be obtained.

**shields.** This is the meaning most generally given to the word, but it may also mean 'quivers,' or 'armour,' and the latter is preferred by some scholars (cf. *Exp. Times*, vol. x, p. 43). No change seems necessary.

**5. breasts.** The beauty here praised is obviously the perfect symmetry of the breasts, which suggests the tender and graceful forms of the gazelle wandering among the brilliant scarlet blossoms.

Which feed among the lilies.

6 <sup>a</sup> Until the day be cool, and the shadows flee away,

I will get me to the mountain of myrrh,

And to the hill of frankincense.

7 Thou art all fair, my love ;

And there is no spot in thee.

8 Come with me from Lebanon, *my* bride,

<sup>a</sup> See ch. ii. 17.

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The contrast suggested by the further descriptive line is possibly that of the rich tawny colour of the skin either shining through a diaphanous robe (cf. chap. vii) or displayed against one of thicker texture. Some scholars excise the words 'which feed among the lilies,' as being copied from ii. 16.

Interesting examples of kindred similes are to be found in Irish songs given in the collection known as *Songs of Connacht* :

'Her two breasts—round, fine,  
Shapen, handsome, blossomy,  
As it were snow that would be thrown on mountains.'

Again :

'Two breasts, bright like the blossom of the bushes,  
And her neck like the swan on a March day.'

And, lastly :

'Her breast like a dove,  
Or the foam in the cove.'

**6. mountain of myrrh.** By a slight alteration in the original Cheyne here understands proper names, reading 'mountain of Hermon and hill of Lebanon.' The change is possible, but unlikely and unnecessary, as we have already had a reference (ii. 7) to fragrant mountain slopes, and such similes recur. It is not at all likely that the language in this verse is to be taken literally, as the change would be too abrupt to be probable. Why should he, after such a description of the bride's charms, the perfection of which is summed up in verse 7, here say that because of her beauty he is going to leave her. The words are, after the manner of Oriental poetry, to be taken as referring to his determination to enjoy the sweets of love in her company.

**8. Come with me.** These words indicate either a distinct break in the sentence or the beginning of a new song, probably the

With me from Lebanon :

<sup>a</sup> Look from the top of Amana,

From the top of Senir and Hermon,

From the lions' dens,

From the mountains of the leopards.

Thou hast <sup>b</sup> ravished my heart, my sister, *my* bride ; 9

Thou hast <sup>b</sup> ravished my heart with <sup>c</sup> one of thine eyes,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Go*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *given me courage*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *one look from thine eyes*

latter. It possibly indicates the wooing of a mountain maiden. Compare the words of the Gaelic song :

‘And when with blossoms laden,  
Sweet summer comes again,  
I’ll fetch my nut-brown maiden  
Down from her highland glen.’

There may be the further idea that in departing with him, while she might naturally shrink from the change to a lowland country, she would at least be in surroundings of greater safety.

**Look.** More likely ‘depart.’

**Amana.** The Hebrew margin gives the alternative form Abana (cf. 2 Kings v. 12, where the reverse is true). Probably the form Amana is correct in both places. The name may designate both the stream, which is proverbial for its clearness and purity, and the mountain whence it flows. The latter is part of the range of the Antilibanus (cf. *Enc. Bibl.* under the names). It is this passage that suggested Burne Jones’s fine picture, *Sponsa di Libano*, in the Liverpool Gallery.

**9. Thou hast ravished.** This is undoubtedly the correct meaning ; compare an Egyptian love-song given by Lane, p. 379 :

‘Every night long my moaning ceaseth not  
For a solitary gazelle that hath taken away my soul.’

And, again, p. 376 :

‘The perfect in attributes hath involved me in trouble,  
And the black eyes have overthrown me.’

**sister.** A common practice among lovers in the East is to call each other by the names ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ (cf. viii. 1). Many illustrations are found of the practice in Egyptian and Aramaic love lyrics.

**one of thine eyes.** Probably ‘one glance of thine eyes.’

With one chain of thy neck.

10 How fair is thy love, my sister, *my* bride !

How much better is thy love than wine !

And the smell of thine ointments than all manner of spices !

11 Thy lips, O *my* bride, <sup>a</sup> drop *as* the honeycomb :

Honey and milk are under thy tongue ;

And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

12 A garden <sup>b</sup> shut up is my sister, *my* bride ;

A <sup>c</sup> spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

13 Thy shoots are <sup>d</sup> an orchard of pomegranates, with precious fruits ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *drop honey*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *barred*.

<sup>c</sup> Or, according to many ancient authorities, *garden*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *a paradise*

Compare the *wasf*, already quoted : 'The witchery of her eyes makes me groan.'

**chain.** The reference here is almost certainly to the bewitching beauty of her jewellery (cf. i. 10).

11. There are plays upon words in the original in this verse that cannot be represented in English.

**drop as the honeycomb.** Probably better 'drop virgin honey.' These words are generally explained either as referring to 'kisses' or to 'loving words' (cf. Prov. v. 3 and xvi. 24), but an examination of analogous Eastern poetry makes almost certain a comparison that seems strange and hardly pleasant to Western ideas. The *wasf*, so often quoted, reckons among the beauties of the bride the following epithet : 'her saliva pure virgin honey.' The idea that brings this into the categories of beauty is that the moisture in the mouth adds to the glistening splendour of the teeth.

12. The metaphors here employed are frequent in Oriental verse for virgin charms (cf. i. 8).

13. **shoots.** Here the comparisons proceed to the trees within the garden—the charms of their fruits, the fragrance of their flowers—all descriptive of the bride's person. (Cf. an Egyptian poem quoted by Lane, p. 286 : 'She granted me a reception, the graceful of form, after her distance and coyness. The odours of musk and ambergris were diffused by a person whose form surpassed the elegance of a straight and slender branch.')

- Henna with spikenard plants,  
 Spikenard and saffron, 14  
 Calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense ;  
 Myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.  
*Thou art* a fountain of gardens, 15  
 A well of living waters,  
 And flowing streams from Lebanon.
- Awake, O north wind ; and come, thou south ; 16  
 Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow  
 out.  
 Let my beloved come into his garden,  
 And eat his precious fruits.
- I am come into my garden, my sister, *my* bride : 5  
 I have gathered my myrrh with my <sup>a</sup> spice ;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *balsam*

14. Of the spices here named, the only one that requires special elucidation is that translated 'aloes,' which is certainly not the plant ordinarily so designated in English. It is neither the bitter 'aloe,' employed in medicine, nor the 'American aloe,' familiar as a decorative plant in gardens and conservatories. The plant here named seems to be some species of so-called 'eagle-wood,' which is widely distributed over South-East Asia, and was much prized for the fragrance diffused by it when burned.

16. This and the following verse may either belong to the previous song, as above suggested, or constitute a little lyric by themselves. If the latter, it might well be entitled, 'Anticipation and Realization.' The exquisite imagery of this verse requires no comment save to note that the language is figurative, and constitutes an appeal from the bride for the presence of her beloved.

v. 1. This verse is the bridegroom's answer, and again, in figurative language, describes his delight in love fulfilled.

**spice.** As the margin suggests, this is probably 'balsam.' The word occurs again in v. 13 and vi. 2. The balsam grew profusely in the neighbourhood of Jericho, which was famous for it, as is also the neighbourhood of Mecca. It was much prized as an aromatic spice, and by some is regarded as almost, if not quite,

I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey ;  
 I have drunk my wine with my milk.  
 Eat, O friends ;  
 Drink, yea, drink abundantly, <sup>a</sup> O beloved.

<sup>2</sup> <sup>b</sup> I was asleep, but my heart waked :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *of love*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *I sleep, but my heart waketh*

equivalent to myrrh. From an examination of the passages in the Song of Songs, where the word occurs, it is found always in close connexion with myrrh, as here, so that it probably was a special variety of that substance.

**eat . . . drink.** The words rendered respectively 'friends' and 'beloved' in this verse may mean 'caresses' and 'love,' and some would so render them. The metaphor, however, appears rather harsh, though the meaning is undoubtedly right. It is no literal invitation to a wedding-feast or to a banquet of good fellowship, but advice to enjoy the same bliss with which he is himself enraptured—the joy of marriage. The language is often employed in Arab poetry. Compare songs quoted by Lane :

'Up with us, O true love! Let us intoxicate ourselves  
 Under the shade of the jessamine.'

And again :

'When will she say to me, O youth! come, and let us  
 intoxicate ourselves?'

(cf. Prov. vii. 18).

Verses 2-7. This is another dream-song (cf. iii. 1-4), of greater beauty and wealth of detail than the earlier one. It is the bride's own account of a vision in which her beloved came to her by night, and how, after a little coy dalliance, she rose to admit him, but found he had vanished, as is so often the tantalizing manner of a dream. The watchmen find her, and she fares ill at their hand, being regarded by them as a suspicious character. With the agony and shame of it she awakes. The dramatists consider this dream to be a strong support of their theory, and deny that it could exist as one of the series of popular wedding-songs (see Harper *in loco*). As a matter of fact, however, this seems a very probable form for a popular song to take, and can be paralleled among the love-lyrics of many peoples.

**2. I was asleep.** Note the exquisite description here of what actually happened in a dream, and how well it fits even the latest psychological explanation of a phenomena of dreams. The

It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, *saying*,  
 Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my <sup>a</sup> undefiled :  
 For my head is filled with dew,  
 My locks with the drops of the night.  
 I have put off my coat ; how shall I put it on ? 3  
 I have washed my feet ; how shall I defile them ?  
 My beloved put in his hand by the hole *of the door*, 4  
 And my <sup>b</sup> heart was moved <sup>c</sup> for him.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *perfect*.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *bowels*.

<sup>c</sup> According to many MSS., *within me*

extreme beauty of the whole passage makes comment almost unnecessary and impertinent, but one or two words may be better for explanatory notes.

**undefiled:** probably 'paragon.' 'My paragon' better expresses the idea of the original.

**filled with dew.** The dews of Palestine are extremely heavy, and have more the appearance of a Scotch mist than anything else known in this country. They come in the night, and are very much finer than ordinary rain. As Cheyne suggests, 'night mist' would be a better rendering here and in similar passages (see the article 'Dew' in *Enc. Bibl.*).

3. This and the remaining verses of the dream are, of course, the girl's own words.

**coat.** Better, 'tunic.' The single under garment.

**washed.** This, of course, was always requisite for wearers of sandals. The word rendered 'defile' and several other words in the passage all belong to the period of late Hebrew, and thus have a bearing on the date of the book.

4. **hole.** The reference here is to the lattice mentioned in ii. 9, through which those within might speak with outsiders without being seen. Apparently he put his hand through this opening and beckoned, or in some way made a sign that his love recognized.

**for him.** Many manuscripts read 'within me,' as in Ps. xlii. 4, &c. Either rendering gives excellent sense, but the reading of the text is probably correct.

Some interpreters regard the hole in the door as that by which, in certain forms of Eastern lock, it is requisite for the person who wishes to open the door from the outside to insert his arm with the key (see *HBD.* art. 'House,' vol. ii, p. 434, and art. 'Key,' also Lane, p. 38). This, however, is very improbable, for it would then mean that her lover purposed to enter by stealth, and thus the mention of his knocking proves to be a misconception.



- 5 I rose up to open to my beloved ;  
 And my hands dropped with myrrh,  
 And my fingers with liquid myrrh,  
 Upon the handles of the bolt.
- 6 I opened to my beloved ;  
 But my beloved had <sup>a</sup> withdrawn himself, *and* was  
 gone.  
 My soul <sup>b</sup> had failed me when he spake :  
 I sought him, but I could not find him ;  
 I called him, but he gave me no answer.
- 7 The watchmen that go about the city found me,  
 They smote me, they wounded me ;  
 The keepers of the walls took away my <sup>c</sup> mantle from me.
- <sup>a</sup> Or, *turned away*      <sup>b</sup> Heb. *went forth*.      <sup>c</sup> Or, *veil*

5. The reference to the myrrh dropping from her fingers shows that she had put these unguents on her hands before going to rest (cf. i. 12 and note).

6. **when he spake.** It is difficult to see why she should faint at the sound of her lover's voice, and the excess of joy of which the commentators speak seems hardly a sufficient reason. The word may also be translated, however, 'when he turned away,' a meaning which seems much more appropriate to the passage, especially as it is the ordinary meaning in later Hebrew.

7. **The watchmen.** Her encounter with the watchmen, if it is not altogether to be put down to the distorted imagery of a dream, shows that at the period at which this poem was written those who were supposed to protect the property and person of the citizens were frequently guilty of acts of violence ; for, whatever their suspicions about her character were, they had no right to treat her with such rudeness, unless, indeed, she suggests that the watchmen were themselves guilty of assaulting her, and that to escape their hands she struggled hard, and finally fled, leaving her mantle with them, as did the young man on the night of the betrayal of Jesus (cf. Mark xiv. 51, 52). Riehm considers that the word mantle designates a thin lawn wrap, which Oriental women frequently throw over the whole dress ; but it is improbable that she would be wearing such a garment when she had rushed out hurriedly in the night, and the warmer mantle better suits all the circumstances.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my <sup>s</sup>  
beloved,

<sup>a</sup> That ye tell him, that I am sick of love.

What is thy beloved more than *another* beloved, 9  
O thou fairest among women?

What is thy beloved more than *another* beloved,  
That thou dost so adjure us?

My beloved is white and ruddy, 10

<sup>b</sup> The chiefest among ten thousand.

His head is *as* the most fine gold, 11

His locks are <sup>c</sup> bushy, *and* black as a raven.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *What will ye tell him? That &c.*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *Marked out by a banner.* <sup>c</sup> Or, curling

**8. I adjure you.** All commentators feel a difficulty in giving any plausible connexion between this verse and what precedes. It is much better to separate it entirely from the preceding verses, and to suppose that it is either an introduction to the next song, or that it is out of place here altogether, and may perhaps be an introduction to the song commencing at vii. 10. Here, perhaps, in place of it should be found the verse that has twice occurred already, namely ii. 7 and iii. 5. Either, then, in this revised form, or as the text stands, verses 8 to 16 constitute the bride's song in praise of her bridegroom—a *wasf* of the opposite sex to be paralleled with those in chaps. iv and vii.

**10. white and ruddy.** Compare the description of David (1 Sam. xvi. 12) and of the nobles of Zion (Lam. iv. 7).

**chiefest among ten thousand.** The phrase so rendered is uncertain in meaning. The margin renders 'marked out by a banner,' but it may also mean 'raised like a banner,' i.e. 'eminent' or 'distinguished,' as taken from another root. It comes to much the same meaning, namely, conspicuous. Cheyne alters the Hebrew slightly, and renders 'perfect in beauty.' Whatever the exact nature of the phrase be, the meaning is clear.

**11. fine gold.** (Compare Lam. iv. 2.) Is it possible that in this description (cf. 14, 15) there can be any suggestion drawn from the famous 'chryselephantine' statues of the Greeks? These, which seem barbarous to modern taste, were executed by the finest Greek sculptors in gold and ivory.

**bushy.** The word so rendered does not occur elsewhere in

- 12 His eyes are like doves beside the water brooks ;  
 Washed with milk, *and* <sup>a</sup> fitly set.
- 13 His cheeks are as a bed of <sup>b</sup> spices, *as* <sup>c</sup> banks of sweet  
 herbs :  
 His lips are *as* lilies, dropping liquid myrrh.
- 14 His hands are *as* <sup>d</sup> rings of gold set with <sup>e</sup> beryl :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *sitting by full streams*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *towers of perfumes*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *balsam*

<sup>d</sup> Or, *cylinders*

<sup>e</sup> Or, *topaz*

Hebrew, and consequently a certain amount of conjecture is requisite in its interpretation. The LXX renders 'palm-buds,' or perhaps the sheaths of the palm-buds, which are curly, and so a fitting comparison for hair. Whatever the precise figure that underlies the word, it is certain that the wave or curl of the locks is what is praised.

**12. eyes.** The comparison here, though much discussed, seems to be to that of the pupil and iris of the eye being in colour like a dove, surrounded by the white, which is compared either to streams of water or of milk, the later term being possibly suggested by the foam of a rapid, rushing stream.

**fitly set.** The connexion of these words is in the first place uncertain, whether, that is to say, they are referable to eyes or doves. If the former, they may be descriptive of the full, round eyes beloved by Orientals : if the latter, then the doves are spoken of as sitting beside full streams ; but eventually the figure is of much the same significance.

**13.** The two words *bed . . . banks*. Here the figure returns to a garden and compares the beard scented with fragrant perfumes (cf. Ps. cxxxiii. 2) to beds of sweetly-smelling herbs. The beard is to the Oriental a sign of virile strength and honour, and is thus used to swear by, as being synonymous of a man's honour.

**lilies.** Compare ii. 1, note.

**14. rings of gold.** More correctly 'cylinders of gold,' the reference being to the finely-tapered fingers (cf. *wasf* so frequently quoted :

'Her smooth, fine fingers are like the writing-reed not yet cut').

**beryl.** Rather, 'topaz' or 'chrysolite.' The stone varies much in colour, but there seems to be one variety that fairly resembles the colour of healthy, well-polished finger-nails. In the *wasf* there is a comparison of a different nature, but with the same purpose :

His body is *as* <sup>a</sup> ivory work <sup>b</sup> overlaid *with* sapphires.  
 His legs are *as* pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine <sup>15</sup>  
 gold :  
 His aspect is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.  
 His <sup>c</sup> mouth is most sweet : yea, he is altogether lovely. <sup>16</sup>  
 This is my beloved, and this is my friend,  
 O daughters of Jerusalem.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *bright ivory*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *encrusted*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *speech* Heb. *palate*.

'The glance of her nails is like millet-seeds which have lain over night in milk.'

**ivory.** The rich yellow colour of ivory, as it used to be treated by the sculptor or craftsman, makes a splendid comparison to the skin of the Eastern. The reference to sapphire as encrusting or overlaying this is either to the veins showing through the skin or, as Budde hints, to the contrast between the skin-colour and the blue raiment worn over it. It is indeed possible that we are not to find any strict comparison in the human body to both ivory and sapphire, but that its general beauty is referred to, and the description applies to some work of art made in ivory and sapphire. The former explanation is, however, more likely.

**15. marble.** The word may mean 'alabaster,' which in colour more nearly resembles the skin of an Oriental, but it must not be forgotten that when used in statuary marble was treated with oil by the sculptor, which gave it a rich flesh-tint.

**Lebanon.** The point is the dignity and grandeur of Lebanon.

We quote from Dalman, p. 133, a *wasf* in praise of a male lover as an analogy with that given in this chapter :—

'Brown is his flesh when the wind blows back his raiment.

Long is his hair as long cords, and darker than the darkest night.

His brow shines brighter than the pole-star : it is like the ten-days-old moon when it rises.

His nose is like a sharp sword, like the well-forged blades of Damascus.

His cheeks excel in sweetness a rose-garden, and it is fair to pluck their blossoms when they are fresh.

His mouth is sweetness itself to me, for it is filled with the dew of honey which heals all suffering when one drinks it.

His neck is like the neck of a gazelle, as it flees before the hunter.

On his hand is a ray as of piercing fire, and many rings of gold.

- 6 Whither is thy beloved gone,  
 O thou fairest among women?  
 Whither hath thy beloved turned him,  
 That we may seek him with thee?
- 2 My beloved is gone down to his garden, to the beds of  
<sup>a</sup>spices,  
 To feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
- 3 <sup>b</sup>I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine :  
<sup>a</sup> Or, *balsam*      <sup>b</sup> See ch. ii. 16.

His body is like Indian muslin, the precious purchase of the merchant.

His limbs are formed like marble pillars, and when he draws near you hear the music of the rings upon his ankles.

I have seen no man like him, and all men envy him.'

vi. 1-3. These verses, constituting a question of the bride's companions and her reply, are almost entirely made up of phrases similar to those already employed in the poem. The question is thus suggested whether they are not a fragment of some other song here misplaced. Were these verses combined with v. 4-16, iv. 16, and v. 1 they would make a very beautiful lyric, and their respective isolation would be removed. The suggested restoration is as follows: vi. 1, iv. 16, vi. 2, 3, v. 1. The song would then run:

'Whither is thy beloved gone,  
 O thou fairest among women?  
 Whither hath thy beloved turned him,  
 That we may seek him with thee?'

*Bride:*

'Awake, awake, O north wind; and come, thou south;  
 Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.  
 Let my beloved come into his garden,  
 And eat his precious fruits.  
 My beloved is gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices,  
 To feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.  
 I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine:  
 He feedeth among the lilies.'

*Bridegroom:*

'I am come into my garden,' &c., to end of verse, namely, 'drink abundantly, O beloved.'

3 is an exact repetition of ii. 16.

He feedeth *his flock* among the lilies.

Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tîrzah,  
Comely as Jerusalem,  
Terrible as <sup>a</sup> an army with banners.

4

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *bannered* hosts.

4-10. Here is another song descriptive of the beauty of the bride, in many ways like that contained in chap. iv. The tenth verse, however, has got misplaced, and should stand first as the introductory question leading up to the description (cf. v. 9).

4. In answer to the query of the previous verse comes the praise by the bridegroom of his bride.

The names used for moon and sun in the verse are uncommon and poetic ones.

**Terrible.** This latter simile is a repetition of the last clause of verse 4, and properly means 'bannered hosts,' though the LXX translates it as 'phalanxes,' and the figure applies either to the conquering power of her beauty or the repelling power of her purity upon those who would attempt unwelcome advances. Cheyne thinks there is a double corruption of the passage, and that the scribe, misunderstanding a Hebrew word, wrote 'awe-inspiring as towers,' but that originally the words were the same as in ii. 1, and should read, 'lovely as the lily of the valley.' This seems rather too drastic a treatment of the original.

**Tîrzah.** This is traditionally described as an ancient city of Ephraim (Joshua xii. 24), and became the site of the palace of the kings of Israel from the days of Jeroboam to those of Omri; and even after it had been abandoned as the capital in favour of Samaria it still remained an important fortress. Various identifications of modern place-names with the ancient Tîrzah have been attempted, but none of them is satisfactory. The name appears in various Hebrew authorities as Tiran or Taritha. Cheyne has further raised the question as to whether Tîrzah is the proper form of the name at all, and suggests in preference Zarethan or Zarepath; but the latter place, he argues, was situated in the south, not in the north, as is generally supposed. Probably the place cannot, with our present knowledge, be identified, but it may have been a rival of Jerusalem, not only in importance, but in beauty of situation. Finally, some editors cut out the words altogether as interfering with the metre, as well as introducing irrelevant ideas, while Cheyne completely alters them to read, 'Thou art fair, my friend, as the crocus, and comely as the lily of the valleys.'

- 5 Turn away thine eyes from me,  
 For they <sup>a</sup> have overcome me.  
<sup>b</sup> Thy hair is as a flock of goats,  
 That lie along the side of Gilead.
- 6 <sup>c</sup> Thy teeth are like a flock of ewes,  
 Which are come up from the washing,  
 Whereof every one hath twins,  
 And none is bereaved among them.
- 7 <sup>d</sup> Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate  
 Behind thy veil.
- 8 There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines,  
 And <sup>e</sup> virgins without number.
- 9 My dove, my <sup>f</sup> undefiled, is *but* one ;  
 She is the only one of her mother ;  
 She is the <sup>g</sup> choice one of her that bare her.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *make me afraid*.<sup>d</sup> See ch. iv. 3.<sup>g</sup> Or, *pure*<sup>b</sup> See ch. iv. 1.<sup>e</sup> Or, *maidens*<sup>c</sup> See ch. iv. 2.<sup>f</sup> Heb. *perfect*.

**5. thine eyes.** The thought of the passage seems to be that the eyes of the bride make her lover tremble, like the eyes of a sorcerer, mightier than armed hosts, though it is possible to translate the word with the entirely opposite meaning of 'encourage'; but its general usage and the evidence of the versions is in favour of the ordinary translation. The latter part of this verse and the two following verses are almost exactly repeated from iv. 1-3 (cf. the notes there).

**8.** This reference to the harem of a great prince is taken by the historical interpreters of the book to be without question a reference to Solomon, but this is not necessarily so, and the contrast expressed may simply be that between the loveless magnificence of the palace and the joy of true love in the village home. The word translated 'virgins' has not that meaning in strictness, but simply signifies girls of marriageable age (cf. Isa. vii. 14).

**9. choice.** As the margin indicates, this may also be rendered 'pure,' but more probably the translation of the text is the accurate one, as it better fits the context, and in the later stage of the language, from analogous uses of the root, it may well have borne that meaning. A difficulty is felt by some interpreters

The daughters saw her, and called her blessed ;  
*Yea*, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, 10  
 Fair as the moon,  
<sup>a</sup> Clear as the sun,  
<sup>b</sup> Terrible as an army with banners?

I went down into the garden of nuts, 11  
 To see the green plants of the valley,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Pure*

<sup>b</sup> See ver. 4.

---

as to the latter part of the verse. They insist that it must have been written of an actual occurrence, and that therefore the girl must have been present at the court of Solomon ; but, surely, these words may quite easily fit an ideal situation, and the meaning be, that if she were imagined to be in the king's court, even his favourites would be compelled to confess the superiority of her loveliness.

**10. As the morning.** This reference is to the clear light of dawn, while the following comparisons to moon and sun are very frequent in Eastern poetry, as, for example, in a line of a peasant's poem quoted by Dalman, *P. D.*, p. 111, 'Thy countenance is bright as the full moon on its rising.'

**11.** These two verses, though very obscure, are probably, if taken as explained below, a short song of the bride, descriptive of the suddenness with which her marriage was brought about. While she was scarcely dreaming of any such thing, her bridegroom suddenly appeared, vanquished her heart, and she found herself a bride. Though this is the most probable explanation, it is also possible that the words may be a fragment of another song similar to, or even part of, that contained in vii. 10-12. This is made more probable because the LXX adds to verse 11 the same words that are rendered in vii. 12, 'there will I give thee my love.' In both cases the LXX renders 'breasts,' but that is, of course, only indicative of the lovers' close embrace (cf. Ezek. xxiii. 3), i. 2 and note.

**garden of nuts.** All seem agreed that this refers to an orchard of walnut-trees, which are very common all over North Palestine.

**plants.** This would be more accurately rendered 'green shoots,' but whether it refers to the fresh growth of the spring by



To see whether the vine budded,  
*And* the pomegranates were in flower.

12 Or ever I was aware, my <sup>a</sup> soul <sup>b</sup> set me  
*Among* the chariots of my <sup>c</sup> princely people.

13 <sup>d</sup> Return, return, O Shulammite ;  
 Return, return, that we may look upon thee.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *desire*      <sup>b</sup> Or, *made me* like the chariots of *Amminadib*  
<sup>c</sup> Or, *willing*      <sup>d</sup> [Ch. vii. 1 in Heb.]

the stream-side, or whether, as some suppose, to the buds on the vines, is uncertain.

12. This is probably the most obscure verse in the whole book, and has been translated in a variety of different ways, even with the existing text, while many editors seek with more or less success to attempt emendations. Siegfried gives it up altogether as being hopelessly corrupt. The older versions and the A.V. understood the last words of the verse as a proper name, Amminadib, but this place has never been identified with any probability, and, even if it were known, would afford no satisfactory meaning. It is more general, therefore, to break it up into two words which mean 'princely people,' and render 'set me upon the chariot of my princely people,' or, connecting the words otherwise, 'a princely one who has set me upon the chariot of my people.' But we have the further difficulty of the words rendered 'my soul set me.' This should probably be 'my desire' or 'longing'; but in what sense could this be said to bring her to the chariot of her people? By a slight alteration of the original we might render, 'before ever I understood my desire, I was set, &c.,' and this is probably the best that can be done with it. It is certainly more satisfactory than is the explanation of many who render, 'My longing to see these things brought me to where the chariots were.' Cheyne emends the original so radically as to make it read, 'there will I give thee my love,' which is little else than a counsel of despair. The most probable explanation of the whole verse seems to be that suggested by Budde, that the reference is to the chariot of the wedding procession; and we might paraphrase the whole sentence as follows—in order to make the meaning clear:— 'While I was wandering among the walnut-trees and strolling by the stream-side, to watch the new growth of spring, the budding vines, and blossoming pomegranates, hardly conscious of my own deepest longings, my prince came and set me on the wedding-car.'

13. This verse is probably an introductory chorus to the

Why will ye look upon the Shulammite,  
As upon the dance <sup>a</sup> of Mahanaim ?

How beautiful are thy <sup>b</sup> feet in sandals, O prince's daughter ! 7

<sup>a</sup> Or, of two companies

<sup>b</sup> Or, steps

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*wasfs* that follow, the first two lines being sung by the chorus and the second two being the words of the bride.

**Shulammite.** The introduction of this proper name into the text causes great difficulty. Why is the bride here spoken of as from Shulam ? The place is frequently named in the O. T., and is generally identified with a place near Jezreel, now called Solam or Sulem. The Greek and other versions read Shunammite, which is probably correct here, since the letters 'n' and 'l' frequently alternate in Palestine place-names. The Shunammite here referred to is probably the 'fair damsel' brought to David (1 Kings i. 3), whose name may very well have become almost proverbial as that of an ideal beauty. Otherwise, we must suppose the word simply to refer to the girl's native village, which is also a possible explanation. This gives the title to Aubrey Moore's lovely picture in the Liverpool gallery, which represents the bride in the midst of her companions in an attitude of graceful modesty and yet shy expectancy.

**the dance of Mahanaim.** This is another proper name which must in all probability vanish from the text. As the margin shows, it can be rendered, 'two companies.' The place was well known in the O. T., and is frequently named as a stronghold of North Gilead, and for a little while became the capital of Ishbosheth. Its modern site is thought to be Ajlun. If the word is allowed to stand in the text, it must then be descriptive of a special dance associated with that place (cf. Abel-Meholah, 1 Kings xix. 16, which means dancing valley). On the other hand, if the word is translated it may be rendered 'dance of the two companies,' which may either describe a sort of country dance, or, as Budde supposes, the bridal sword-dance. It seems most probable that the dance thus named was some famous spectacular performance, and the bride remonstrates with the onlookers for expecting her poor performance to equal it. Cheyne so alters the text as to make the words read, 'a lily of the valleys.'

vii. 1-9. We have to remember all through that the description is that of a girl dancing, while her dress is of some gauzy material that shows the figure to perfection.

1. **Feet.** Rather, 'steps,' the reference being to the rapid movement of the feet in the elaborate dance (probably the sword-

- <sup>a</sup> The joints of thy thighs are like jewels,  
 The work of the hands of a cunning workman.  
<sup>2</sup> Thy navel is *like* a round goblet,  
*Wherein* no mingled wine is wanting :

<sup>a</sup> Or, *Thy rounded thighs*

dance previously mentioned), though there may be a further thought of the beautiful jewelled shoes upon the dancer's feet, perhaps also to anklets that would shimmer in the light and make music with their tinkling.

**prince's daughter.** This can scarcely be taken literally. It seems a statement that she is worthy to be the daughter of a prince, because of her extreme beauty. Cheyne would alter the words to read, 'daughter of delights' (cf. vi. 12), but unnecessarily.

**joints of thy thighs.** This is probably a misunderstanding of the original, which seemingly refers to the beauty of outline of the upper part of the lower limbs as the body sways to and fro in the graceful movements of the dance. Oriental dancing gives much more scope for such movements as best reveal the suppleness of the body than does that with which we are most familiar.

**jewels.** The word signifies necklet and similar ornaments, and seems never to be used in any other sense. It is not at all easy to understand the metaphor here if the comparison is with the movements of the limbs. Perhaps we may imagine the dance being performed by torchlight, and the gleam upon flesh and garment suggesting the flashes of light upon gold, silver, and gems. This is more probable than many of the explanations suggested. The song quoted below from Dalman gives a hint (cf. iv. 9) of quite another idea, which may probably be correct.

**2. navel.** This word stands elsewhere in the O. T. as synonymous with body (cf. Job xi. 16 A. V. ; Prov. iii. 8, R. V.). Here, however, this more general meaning will not suffice, and yet the English rendering is not appropriate. The word is probably descriptive of the whole of the lower part of the body. Cf. the lines in a *wasf*, given by Dalman.

'Thy navel is like a box cunningly wrought by the artificer and filled with civet, from which there stream the odours of musk and camphor, and thy body is like silk twined in skeins, whiter than the whitest silk or carded wool. Thy thighs—the pillars of thy body—by their beauty, hold me as in a prison house, and love itself trembles as with fear at the beauty of thy perfectly formed ankles.'

Thy belly is *like* an heap of wheat  
Set about with lilies.

<sup>a</sup> Thy two breasts are like two fawns 3  
That are twins of a roe.

Thy neck is like the tower of ivory ; 4  
Thine eyes *as* the pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-  
rabbim ;

Thy nose is like the tower of Lebanon  
Which looketh toward Damascus.

<sup>a</sup> See ch. iv. 5.

It is not difficult to trace the influence of this section of the Song of Songs in a mediaeval poem printed as No. 34 in Mr. J. A. Symonds's collection entitled 'Wine, Women, and Song.'

The reference to 'mingled wine' is probably by way of perfecting the description of the goblet, which is regarded as only reaching the height of its beauty when the wine shines inside it.

**belly.** This might be rendered 'body' with more appropriateness, as the metaphor brings out the rich, golden colour of the flesh to describe which winnowed wheat was a favourite Eastern simile. We are told that on the threshing-floors the heaps of grain are sometimes decorated with flowers, and the suggestion here may arise from the contrast of the dancer's garment with her body. In the poem already quoted we find a description of a kindred character, where the poet says, 'thy body is like twining skeins of silk, whiter than woven silk or carded cotton.'

3. See 4, 5.

4. **neck.** Cf. iv. 4. P. Haupt quotes Hall Caine's description in the *Manxman* of Kate's neck: 'It was round, and full, and soft, and like a tower.'

**Heshbon.** A town of Moab, frequently referred to in the O. T. It has a fine situation about 600 feet above the valley. Among the ruins are those of a large reservoir, which has by some been identified with one of the pools here mentioned ; but the reference is more probably to some of the large number of pools which are still found in the neighbourhood. Cheyne suggests a somewhat radical alteration of the text, which would make the passage read, 'Thine eyes are like Solomon's pools by the wood of Bethcerem (place of a vineyard),' and considers that an illustrative description of the place is found in Eccles. ii. 4-6.

**tower of Lebanon.** This was probably some watch-tower on the mountains, that was well known to the people. Cf. v. 15.

- 5 Thine head upon thee is like Carmel,  
 And the hair of thine head <sup>a</sup> like purple ;  
 The king is held captive in the tresses *thereof*.  
 6 How fair and how pleasant art thou,  
 O love, for delights !

<sup>a</sup> Some ancient versions have, *like the purple of a king, bound &c.*

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5. **Carmel.** The point of the description here is the lonely grandeur of the mountain comparable to a proudly-held head.

**purple.** Brides' tresses are described as with a sheen of purple upon them, which is true of intensely black hair.

**tresses.** The word thus translated occurs very seldom, and in the other instances obviously means 'water-troughs.' It is supposed, therefore, that the connecting idea is that of 'flowing,' the hair flowing over the shoulders being the origin of the application of the term. The metaphor of the lover, as held by the locks of his beloved, is a common Eastern one. Compare the song already quoted, 'Thy hair upon thy shoulders is like binding cords, like wings of the storm in a darksome night.' Cheyne, however, refuses to accept the ordinary derivation, and regards the word as a corruption of pomegranate, and renders, most improbably, 'Pleasant are they as an orchard of pomegranate trees.' As has been frequently said in the course of this exposition, the form of these lines has many parallels in Eastern verse, and a very lovely one is to be found in a Burmese love-song quoted by Mr. Hall in his exquisite volume *The Soul of a People*: 'She is more beautiful than any blossom; her face is as delicate as the dusk; her hair is as night falling over the hills; her skin is as bright as the diamond. She is very full of health, no sickness can come near her. When the wind blows I am afraid, when the breezes move I fear. I fear lest the south wind take her, I tremble lest the breath of evening woo her from me, so light is she, so graceful. Her dress is of gold, even of silk and gold, and her bracelets are of fine gold. She has precious stones in her ears, but her eyes, what jewels can compare unto them?'

6. **O love, for delights.** Two questions here arise, namely, whether love is to be taken as abstract or concrete, whether it is an apostrophe of the passion, or an address to the maiden; probably the latter is correct. In the second place 'for' should probably be 'among' or 'above,' placing her pre-eminently beyond all conceivable joys. Siegfried considers the verse an interpolation, but it is possibly a kind of interlude before turning to the new theme of the following verses.

This thy stature is like to a palm tree, 7  
 And thy breasts to clusters *of grapes*.  
 I said, I will climb up into the palm tree, 8  
 I will take hold of the branches thereof:  
 Let thy breasts be as clusters of the vine,  
 And the smell of thy <sup>a</sup> breath like apples;  
 And thy <sup>b</sup> mouth like the best wine, 9  
 That goeth down <sup>c</sup> smoothly for my beloved,  
<sup>d</sup> Gliding through the lips of those that are asleep.  
 I am my beloved's, 10

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *nose*.<sup>b</sup> Heb. *palate*.<sup>c</sup> Heb. *aright*.<sup>d</sup> Or, *Causing the lips of those that are asleep to move or speak*

7. **palm tree.** The slenderness and straightness of the tree renders it an appropriate metaphor for the fine figure of the bride, while the bunches of dates, that with their golden colour are said to intensify so strikingly the beauty of the tree, are here compared with the rounded form of the breasts. In similar poems we find the breasts compared with pomegranates or apples, and in one case with an inverted cup of purest porcelain.

8. This is a poetic description of the bridegroom's taking possession of the person of his bride. It is questionable whether 'clusters of the vine' is correct or not, and whether we must not understand it of the date-clusters, as in the former verse. The fragrance of apples (or quinces; see ii. 3) is one greatly enjoyed by Orientals, and hence an appropriate figure for the sweet lips of the bride.

9. This verse is very difficult to translate, and consequently to interpret. There is probably some original corruption in the text, for the LXX and other versions render the last clause 'gliding over my lips and teeth,' and probably that comes as near the meaning as we can hope to reach. The probability is that the whole comparison is between the sweetness of the bride's kisses and the delicious flavour of good wine.

vii. 10—viii. 5. The whole of this section consists of a song by the bride indicative of her great affection for the bridegroom, and it is couched in the language of the country and full of the scenery of her village home. The very dainties that she promises him are those which would be prepared by her own hands, or gathered in her own orchard. The song closes with two verses that we have

And his desire is toward me.

11 Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field ;

Let us lodge in the villages.

12 Let us get up early to the vineyards ;

Let us see whether the vine hath budded, *and*<sup>a</sup> its blossom  
be open,

*And* the pomegranates be in flower :

There will I give thee my love.

13 The<sup>b</sup> mandrakes give forth fragrance,

<sup>a</sup> Or, *the tender grape appear*

<sup>b</sup> See Gen. xxx. 14.

already met with in an earlier part of the book, so that they are probably a conventional refrain.

**10. I am my beloved's.** These words have already occurred in iii. 16 and vi. 3, and some editors, therefore, consider them as an inserted clause here. This does not, however, seem necessary, rather are they to be regarded as a conventional opening of a song, which also closes with conventional phraseology.

**11. Come, my beloved.** There is a freedom of utterance about the bride's invitation to her bridegroom that may seem to Western minds hardly consonant with the appropriate feelings of modesty ; but we must remember that Oriental language is freer than ours, and that if, as we suppose all through, the marriage has already been consummated, it is no longer the words of the maiden, but of the bride in the eagerness of her new-found gladness.

**Let us lodge.** This possibly means 'spend the night,' and instead of 'in the villages,' the words should almost certainly be rendered 'among the henna-flowers' (cf. iv. 13); the latter is more in keeping with the whole imagery of the poem and with the lusciousness of the passage.

**Let us get up early.** The imagery of the song suggests that day as well as night is to be given up to the joy of love, and there may be a subtle connexion between the beauties of the spring and the promise of fruit in the orchard and their own newly-wedded life. Some interpreters, indeed, regard all these references to outward nature as purely figurative of the bride's physical charms, but surely the association of the two is more true to poetry than to hold that there is no thought of outward nature at all.

**13. mandrakes.** This is a fruit something like a plum in appearance, round and yellow, possessed of a peculiar fragrance and a pleasant taste. The plant had magical associations attached

And <sup>a</sup> at our doors are all manner of precious fruits, new  
 and old,  
 Which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.  
 Oh that thou wert as my brother,  
 That sucked the breasts of my mother!  
*When* I should find thee without, I would kiss thee;  
 Yea, and none would despise me.  
 I would lead thee, *and* bring thee into my mother's house,  
<sup>b</sup> Who would instruct me;

<sup>a</sup> Or, *over*

<sup>b</sup> Or, *That thou mightest*

to it, and was called distinctly the 'love apple' (cf. Gen. xxx. 14). The married women of Palestine regard the eating of the fruit as certain to save them from the reproach of barrenness.

**at our doors.** Rather, 'over our doors.' This seems to refer to fruit stored on shelves or ledges beneath the cottage roof, a picturesque touch of homeliness. The bride will show her beloved the simple but precious gifts which she has stored up for him.

viii. 1. **as my brother.** The words here are supposed to be difficult to fit in with what precedes and follows them. The bride, it is said, has been using very ardent language, and presently returns to it, but here she is regarded as using the shy and modest language of a young girl who is unconventional enough to wish her lover to be her brother that she may kiss him freely where and when she likes. But after all, is this a sign of such excessive modesty? Do not the words rather suggest the desire to lavish caresses upon her bridegroom both in public and private, and so fit in with the whole tenor of the passage?

2. **I would lead thee.** Here the same idea is continued, and she desires such freedom of intercourse as would be unchallenged and unrestrained in any circumstances.

**Who would instruct me.** It is possible to translate these words either thus, or 'that thou mightest instruct me,' or, as a definite future statement, 'thou wilt instruct me.' If we render it in either of these ways, it obviously means that she desires to be taught the secrets and fascinations of love, either at the hand of her mother or of her bridegroom, both of whom are regarded, appropriately enough, as competent instructors. But the Greek and Syriac versions read here the same words that occur in iii. 4, namely, 'into the chamber of her that conceived me.' This is



- I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine,  
 Of the <sup>a</sup> juice of my pomegranate.
- 3 <sup>b</sup> His left hand *should be* under my head,  
 And his right hand should embrace me.
- 4 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
<sup>c</sup> That ye stir not up, nor awaken love,  
 Until it please.
- 5 Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness,  
 Leaning upon her beloved?

<sup>a</sup> Or, *sweet wine*

<sup>b</sup> See ch. ii. 6, 7.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *Why should ye stir up? or why &c.*

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probably the true text, and what she desires is that her mother's bridal chamber should also be her own.

3, 4. With these verses, which have already occurred in another song, earlier in the book, she concludes her passionate appeal.

5-14. This closing section of the poem is extremely difficult, on any theory of its composition, as the connexion of the various sections is not at all clear. The dramatic interpreters think that they have found a solution, and Professor Harper says that on his theory 'everything is simple, intelligible, and natural,' while, that on the theory taken in this commentary the verses are full of 'insuperable difficulty.' An impartial investigation of his commentary, or any similar one, should convince the reader that it is not so simple as he supposes. Probably there has been some original dislocation of the text, and in addition to this it is very difficult to tell whether certain verses, e. g. 11, 12, and 13, are to be assigned to the bridegroom or to the bride. Taken in the order in which they stand, the section contains the following: First, question by the chorus, then a verse from the bridegroom reminiscent of the bride's home. Following upon this comes the most famous passage of the book, the bride's praise of the power of love. Next are verses apparently to be attributed to the bride's guardians, in which they speak of their watchfulness over her. Then follows a declaration by the bride that she is safe in her bridegroom's care. This is followed by words that, in all probability, are to be attributed to the bridegroom, in which he contrasts favourably his own possession with the boasted wealth of Solomon, and the song concludes with either two verses sung by the bride or, more likely, verse 13 by the bridegroom and verse

Under the apple tree I awakened thee :  
 There thy mother was in travail with thee,  
 There was she in travail <sup>a</sup> that brought thee forth.

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine <sup>6</sup>  
 arm :

For love is strong as death ;  
 Jealousy is <sup>b</sup> cruel as <sup>c</sup> the grave :

<sup>a</sup> Or, and

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *hard*.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. *Shcol*.

<sup>14</sup> the final appeal of the bride, echoing phrases that have been heard already.

This outline shows that the construction of the passage is very complicated, and one is tempted to suggest emendations. The introductory question in verse 5 may have originally stood before the song that commences at vii. 10, and the latter part of the verse might appropriately be inserted at the beginning of chap. viii. Again, verses 8 and 9, which, as they stand at present, have no obvious contact with the verses that precede or that follow them, may originally have been introductory verses to one of the *wasfs* of which the book is full. Perhaps they ought to be inserted before iv. 8 or vii. 1. For the purpose of interpretation we shall now proceed to take the verses as they stand.

5. Cf. iii. 6.

**Under the apple tree.** These words are surely to be attributed to the bridegroom, though the ordinary Hebrew text makes them the words of the bride. The reference here seems to be to the bride's home, and the awakening is in all probability the awakening to love, not a literal waking out of sleep. Whether or not the apple-tree is to be thought of as overshadowing the cottage, her home is surely referred to, and we are not to suppose that she was actually born under the shade of the tree. Some regard the whole reference to the apple-tree as figurative of love, a quite possible interpretation.

6. **seal.** The earliest form of seals known to us is the cylindrical one found in Babylon. A cord was passed through the cylinder, and it was worn round the neck, and thus may be spoken of as being over the heart. For the second expression, 'upon thine arm,' Budde suggests 'a bracelet.' This is possible, though we have no instance of seals being worn in such a manner.

**cruel as the grave.** The literal meaning of the word rendered cruel is 'hard,' and perhaps 'inexorable' would be a good English rendering. The grave is, of course, *Shcol*, which, as the place of the dead, there is no escaping. In these verses we have one of the highest expressions, not only in Hebrew poetry, but in all

The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,

<sup>a</sup> A very flame of <sup>b</sup> the LORD.

7 Many waters cannot quench love,

Neither can the floods drown it :

If a man would give all the substance of his house for love,

<sup>c</sup> He would utterly be contemned.

<sup>a</sup> Or, *A most vehement flame*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. *Jah.*

<sup>c</sup> Or, *It*

literature, of the power and purity of true love. No misfortune can slay it, nor can any promise of riches tempt a man to exchange it. The unselfishness of true love is beautifully expressed in the closing phrase. Some writers argue that this passage is inconsistent with the view of the book here taken, but that does not seem at all necessary, for though the lover's language is at times sensuous, it is never selfish, nor does it degenerate into the bargaining character of many Oriental wedding contracts. The thoughts that are here expressed are nothing more than the high-water mark of true and loyal devotion, nor is there anything inconsistent with their being the utterance of the young bride who has been portrayed throughout these pages. Some writers consider the words to be the consummation of the book, but this is impossible if the present order is even approximately correct. We must confess that it is very difficult to find an appropriate setting for them, but they seem best placed after verse 10 of the present chapter, when verses 11 and 12 will then form the bridegroom's triumphant response to this magnificent utterance of the bride. We might, indeed, reconstruct the complete song as follows : verses 8, 9, 10, 6, 7, 11, 12. It would then read as follows :—

*The Brothers :*

'We have a little sister,  
And she hath no breasts :  
What shall we do for our sister  
In the day when she shall be spoken for ?  
If she be a wall,  
We will build upon her battlements of silver :  
And if she be a door,  
We will enclose her with boards of cedar.'

*The Maiden :*

'I am a wall, and my breasts like the towers thereof :  
Then was I in his eyes as one that found peace.  
Set me as a seal upon thine heart.

. . . . .

- We have a little sister, 8  
 And she hath no breasts :  
 What shall we do for our sister  
 In the day when she shall be spoken for?  
 If she be a wall, 9  
 We will build upon her <sup>a</sup> a turret of silver :  
 And if she be a door,  
 We will inclose her with boards of cedar.
- I <sup>b</sup> am a wall, and my breasts like the towers *thereof*: 10  
 Then was I in his eyes as one that found peace.  
 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon ; 11

<sup>a</sup> Or, *battlements*<sup>b</sup> Or, *was*

He would utterly be condemned.'

*The Bridegroom :*

'Solomon had a vineyard,' &c., to end of verse 12.

**8. We have a little sister.** These are the words of the bride's guardians, who think of the as yet undeveloped girl and of their responsibility for her in the future. The dramatic critics consider that the words must refer to some definite story of her brother's unkind treatment of her (cf. i. 6), but surely the very opposite is what is here spoken of. They are anxious to preserve her from any harm, and so

**9.** they promise that should she be like a city wall that keeps out all invaders, they will crown the wall with battlements of silver, i. e. provide her with a good dowry. On the other hand, should she prove like an open door through which any man may walk, they will take care to put a strong barrier of cedar-wood behind the door that no man may open it.

**I am a wall.** In this verse the maiden vindicates her character. She has reached womanly maturity, and yet preserved her perfect maidenly purity, and both character and beauty of form have commended her to the bridegroom, and in the haven of his love she is at peace. Professor Harper says that, on the theory here maintained, these words are meaningless. But surely they cannot well be clearer.

**Solomon had a vineyard.** This and the following verse are best given to the bridegroom, who, if the conjectural emendation given above is correct, in these words replies to the impassioned praise of love uttered by the bride. The vineyard referred to may

He let out the vineyard unto keepers ;  
 Every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand  
*pieces* of silver.

- 12 My vineyard, which is mine, is before me :  
 Thou, O Solomon, shalt have the thousand,  
 And those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.
- 13 Thou that dwellest in the gardens,  
 The companions hearken <sup>a</sup> for thy voice :

<sup>a</sup> Or, to

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have been a famous one, and its fertility so great that it secured a large sum to the vine-dressers. For the last words of the verse are best rendered 'any one would gain a thousand shekels by its fruits.'

**12. My vineyard.** Here the bridegroom contrasts his possession of the bride with all the vaunted wealth of the kingly vineyard, and says that neither the revenue of its owner nor the wages of its keeper is any temptation to him ; the riches of his love are greater in his eyes than princely revenues. This forms a most appropriate response to the words of the bride, 'If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be condemned,' and strengthens the probability of the reconstruction above given. It is also the language of all true and disinterested love, and finds its echo in the love-songs of all nations, though no more appropriate parallel can be found than the gay lines of the old French song :

'Si le roi m'avait donné  
 Paris, sa grande ville,  
 Et qu'il me fallut quitter  
 L'amour de ma mie,  
 Je dirais au roi Louis :  
 Reprenez votre Paris.  
 J'aime mieux ma mie, O gai !  
 J'aime mieux ma mie.'

This would form the most appropriate close to the poem, and it is possible that verses 13 and 14 are out of place, though it is not easy to suggest where they would find their most appropriate setting. They perhaps belong to one of the songs contained in chap. vi.

**13.** This is an appeal of the bridegroom to allow him to share the joy of her companions.

Cause me to hear it.

<sup>a</sup> Make haste, my beloved, 14  
And be thou like to a <sup>b</sup> roe or to a young hart  
Upon the mountains of spices.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. *Flee*.

<sup>b</sup> Or, *gazelle*

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**14.** This verse constitutes the bride's impassioned cry for her lover, and is couched in language already familiar to the reader.

## APPENDIX

## ILLUSTRATIVE ORIENTAL POEMS

IN a Bedouin song given by Dalman, p. 100, we find many similar metaphors to those found in the song, thus: the lover addresses his beloved:—

‘O, her eyebrows are like the lines drawn by the pen.

And the hair on her forehead like the feathers of a bird when it is stained with henna.

Her nose is like the hilt of a sword, an Indian sword that gleams.

It is white as hailstones, and more beautiful still are the rows of her gleaming teeth.

And her cheeks are like the rose-hued apples of Damascus.

And her eyes glow like the eyes of the lynx when they have angered him.

Her breasts are like lovely pomegranates hanging on the tree.

Her neck graceful as the neck of the antelope when he is startled.

Her arms are like bars of pure silver.

And her fingers taper like golden pens.’

The following song, given by Dalman, is sung during the arraying of the bride before she leaves her parents’ house:—

‘O Sabha, Darling, ’tis to thee we sing:

In lyric song our voices rise and fall.

We hear thy Father calling, Sabha, Dear,

We hear thy Father’s gentle loving call.

O Sabha of the trustful sable eyes,

Eyes dark as night, so calm, so deep, so rare:

We hear thy Brother call thee, Sabha, Dear—

We hear thy Brother call thee, Sabha, Fair.

O Sabha of the rippling golden hair;

Gold, living gold, its every curling tress:

Let not our sorrow cloud thy faithful heart,

Let not our sorrow that dear heart distress.

With softest sound of rhythmic melody

The anklets tinkle on thy Mother’s feet.

Sabha, we hear thy Father’s Brother call,

We hear thy Father’s Brother call thee, Sweet.

The anklets tinkle, Sabha, on thy feet,  
Making soft melody within the hall.  
Sabha, we hear thy Mother's Brother call—  
O Love, we hear thy Mother's Brother call.

We clasp the bracelet on thy white round arm,  
Less round and white the silvery moon appears.  
Thine eyes are tenderer than the camel's eyes,  
And hers compare with liquid wells of tears.

Behold the scarlet shoes upon thy feet,  
Each dainty foot lost in a dainty shoe.  
Fair as the moon at full thy face is fair,  
More fair than moon thy form, more pure than dew.

I clasp these priceless gems around thy neck,  
They hide the Breast so far more dear to me ;  
My steed, my camel for thy sake I'd sell,  
My choicest treasure I'd pour out for thee.'



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